Richard Hurdis, volume 1

William Gilmore Simms

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RICHARD HURDIS; OR, THE AVENGER OF BLOOD. A TALE OF ALABAMA.

I will recal
Some facts of ancient date: he must remember
When on Cithæron we together fed
Our several flocks.
— Sophoc.

TO THE READER.

Here, gentle reader, you have a genuine chronicle of our borders. This story is truly named, a story of our own country. The events are real, and within the memory of men, though names have been changed, and, in some respects, localities altered, that living and innocent affections should not be outraged. In the arrangement of my narrative, I have not suffered myself to conduct it, as if the events had been told according as they became known to the narrator; but, for the easier comprehension of the reader, I have stated them, as if after subsequent consideration, putting each in its connection with its fellow for the sake of more coherence. The hero and the author become, under this plan, identical——though I would not have any of my friends suppose the author and narrator to be one. While I am unknown to all, it matters little, indeed, how much they may be confounded; and whetherthe reader shall ever grow wiser to know who I am, is, perhaps, even less important to both of us. Our acquaintance may be continued and increased to the profit and pleasure of both without disturbing the secrets of either. At least I hope so.

April 1, 1838.

CHAPTER I.

Enough of garlands, of the Arcadian crook,
And all that Greece and Italy have sung,
Of swains reposing myrtle graves among!
Ours couch on naked rocks, will cross a brook,
Swollen with chill rains, nor ever cast a look
This way or that, or give it even a thought
More than by smoothest pathway may be brought
Into a vacant mind. Can written book
Teach what they learn?
—— Wordsworth

Of the hardihood of the American character there can be no doubts, however many there may exist on the subject of our good manners. We ourselves seem to be sufficiently conscious of our security on the former head, as we forbear insisting upon it; about the latter, however, we are sore and touchy enough. We never trouble ourselves to prove that we are sufficiently able and willing, when occasionserves, to do battle, tooth and nail, for our liberties and possessions; our very existence, as a people, proves this ability and readiness. But let John Bull prate of our manners, and how we fume and fret; and what fierce action, and wasteful indignation we expend upon him! We are sure to have the last word in all such controversies. Our hardihood comes from our necessities, and prompts our enterprise; and the American is bold in adventure to a proverb. Where the silken shodden and sleek citizen of the European world would pause and deliberate to explore our wilds, we plunge incontinently forward, and the forest falls before our axe, and the desert blooms under the providence of our cultivator, as if the wand of an enchanter had waved over them with the rising of a sudden moonlight. Yankee necessities, and southern and western curiosity will probe to the very core of the dusky woods, and palsy, by the exhibition of superior powers, the very souls of their old possessors.

I was true to the temper and the nature of my countrymen. The place, in which I was born, could not keep me always. With manhood——ay, long before I was a man——came the desire to range. My thoughts craved freedom, my dreams prompted the same desire, and the wandering spirit of our people, perpetually stimulated by the continual opening of new regions and more promising abodes, was working inmy heart with all the volume of a volcano. Manhood came, and I burst my shackles. I resolved upon the enjoyment for which I had dreamed and prayed. I had no fears, for I was stout of limb, bold of heart, prompt in the use of my weapon, a fearless rider, and a fatal shot. Here are the inevitable possessions of the southern and western man, from Virginia to the Gulf, and backward to the Ohio. I had them, with little other heritage, from my Alabama origin, and I was resolved to make the most of them as soon as I could. You may be sure I lost no time in putting my resolves into execution. Our grain crops in Marengo were ripe in August, and my heart bounded with the unfolding of the sheaves. I was out of my minority in the same fortunate season.

I waited for the coming October only. I felt that my parents had now no claims upon me. The customs of our society, the necessities of our modes of life, the excursive and adventurous habits of our people, all justified a desire, which, in a stationary community, would seem so adverse to the nicer designs of humanity. But the life in the city has very few standards in common with that of the wilderness. We acknowledge few, at least. The impulses of the latter, to our minds, are worth, any day, all the mercantile wealth of the former; and that we are sincere in this opinion may be fairly inferred from the preference which the forester will always showfor the one over the other. Gain is no consideration for those who live in every muscle, and who find enjoyment from the exercise of every limb. The man who lives by measuring tape and pins by the sixpence−worth, may make money by his vocation——but, God help him! he is scarce a man. His veins expand not with generous ardour; his muscles wither and vanish, as they are unemployed. And his soul!——it has no emotions which prompt him to noble restlessness, and high and generous execution. Let him keep at his vocation if he will, but he might, morally and physically, do far better if he would.

My resolves were soon known to all around me. They are not yet known to the reader. Well, they are quickly

told. The freed youth at twenty−one, for the first time freed and impatient only for the exercise of his freedom, has but few purposes, and his plans are usually single and unsophisticated enough. Remember, I am speaking for the forester and farmer, not for the city youth who is taught the arts of trade from the cradle up, and learns to scheme and connive while yet he clips the coral in his boneless gums. I was literally going abroad, after the fashion of the poorer youth of our neighbourhood, to seek my fortune. As yet, I had but little of my own. A fine horse, a few hundred dollars in specie, three able−bodied negroes, a good rifle, which carried eighty to the pound, and was the admiration of many who were even better shots than myself—— these made pretty much the sum total of my earthly possessions. But I thought not much of this matter. To ramble awhile, at least until my money was all gone, and then to take service on shares with some planter who had land and needed the help of one like myself, was all my secret. I had heard of the Chickasaw Bluffs, and of the still more recent Choctaw purchase——at that time a land of promise only, as its acquisition had not been effected——and I was desirous of looking upon these regions. The Choctaw territory was reported to be rich as cream, and I mediated to find out the best spots, in order to secure them by entry, as soon as government could effect the treaty which should throw them into the market. In this ulterior object I was upheld by some of our neighbouring capitalists, who had urged, to some extent, the measure upon me. I was not unwilling to do for them, particularly as it did not interfere in my own plans to follow up theirs; but my own desire was simply to stretch my limbs in freedom, to traverse the prairies, to penetrate the swamps, to behold the climbing hills and lovely hollows of the Choctaw lands, and luxuriate in the eternal solitudes of their spacious forests. To feel my freedom was now my hope. I had been fettered long enough.

But do not think me wanting in natural affection to my parents: far from it. I effected no small achievement, when I first resolved to leave my mother. It was no pain to leave my father. He was a man, a strong one too, and could do well enough without me. But, without spoiling me, my mother, of all her children, had made me most a favourite. I was her Richard always. She considered me first, though I had an elder brother, and spoke of me in particular, when speaking of her sons, and referred to me for counsel, in preference to all the rest. This may have been because I was soon found to be the most decisive of all my brothers; and folks did me the farther courtesy to say, the most thoughtful too. My elder brother, John Hurdis, was too fond of eating to be an adventurous man, and too slow and unready to be a performing one. We often quarrelled too, and this, perhaps, was another reason why I should desire to leave a place from which he was quite too lazy ever to depart. Had he been bold enough to go forth, I had not been so ready to do so, for there were motives and ties to keep me at home, which shall have development as I proceed.

My father, though a phlegmatic and proud man, showed much more emotion at the declaration of my resolve to leave him, than I had ever expected. His emotion arose not so much from the love he boreme, as from the loss which he was about to sustain by my departure. I had been his best negro, and he confessed it. Night and day, without complaint, my time had been almost entirely devoted to his service, and his crops had never been half so good as when I had directed the labour of his force, and regulated his resources. My brother John had virtually given up to me the entire management, and my father was too well satisfied with the fruits of the change, to make any objection. My resolution to leave him now, once more threw the business of the plantation upon John, and his incompetence, the result of his inertness and obesity, rather than of any deficiency of mind, was sorely apprehended by the old man. I felt this to be the strongest argument against my departure. But was I always to be the slave I had been? Was I always to watch peas and potatoes, corn and cotton, without even the poor satisfaction of choosing the spot where it would please me best to watch them. This reflection strengthened me in my resolves, and answered my father. In answer to the expostulation of my mother, I made a promise, which in part consoled her.

"I will go but for a few months, mother; for the winter only; you will see me back in spring; and then, if father and myself can come to any thinglike terms, I will stay and superintend for him, as I have done before."

"Terms, Richard!" were the old lady's words in reply. "What terms, would you have, my son, that he will not agree to, so that they be in reason? He will give you one−fifth, I will answer for it, Richard, and that ought to be quite enough to satisfy any one."

"More than enough, mother; more than I ask or expect. But I cannot now agree even to that. I must see the world awhile; travel about; and if, at the end of the winter, I see no better place——no place, I mean, which I could better like to live in—— why then I will come back, as I tell you, and go to work as usual."

There was some little indignation in the old lady's answer.

"Better place! like better to live in! Why, Richard, what has come over you? Are not the place you were born in, and the parents who bred you, and the people whom you have lived with all your life——are they not good enough for you; that you must come to me at this time of day and talk about better places, and all such stuff? Really, my son, you forget yourself to speak in this manner. As if every thing was not good enough for you here!"

"Good enough, mother," I answered gloomily; "good enough; perhaps——I deny it not; and yet notexactly to my liking. I am not pleased to waste my life as I do at present. I am not satisfied that I do myself justice. I feel a want in my mind, and an impatience at my heart; a thirst which I cannot explain to you, and which, while here, I cannot quench. I must go elsewhere——I must fix my eyes on other objects. You forget, too, that I have been repulsed, rejected——though you told me I should not be—— where I had set my heart; and that the boon has been given to another, for which I had struggled long, and for a long season had hoped to attain. Can you wonder that I should seek to go abroad, even were I not moved by a natural desire at my time of life to see some little of the world?"

There were some portions of my reply which were conclusive, and to which my mother did not venture any answer; but my last remark suggested the tenor of a response which she did not pause to make.

"But what can you see of the world, my son, among the wild places to which you think to go? What can you see at the Bluffs, or down by the Yazoo but woods and Indians? Besides, Richard, the Choctaws are said to be troublesome now in the nation. Old Mooshoolatubbé and La Fleur are going to fight, and it will be dangerous travelling."

"The very thing, mother," was my hasty reply. "I will take side with La Fleur, and when we haveto fight Mooshoolatubbé, get enough land for my reward, to commence business for myself. That last speech of yours, mother, is conclusive in my favour. I will be a rich man yet; and then"——in the bitterness of a disappointed spirit I spoke——"and then, mother, we will see whether John Hurdis is a better man with thirty negroes than Richard Hurdis with but three."

"Why, who says he is, my son?" demanded my mother with a tenderness of accent which increased while she spoke, and with eyes that filled with tears in the same instant.

My heart told me I was wrong, but I could not forbear the reply that rose to my lips.

"Mary Easterby," were the two words which made my only answer.

"Richard, Richard!" exclaimed the old lady, "you envy your brother."

"Envy him! No! I envy him nothing, not even his better fortune. Let him wear what he has won, whether he be worthy of it or not. If, knowing me, she prefers him, be it so. She is not the woman for me. I envy not his possessions; neither his wife, nor his servant, his ox, nor his ass. It vexes me that I have been mistaken, mother, both in her, and in him; but, thank Heaven! I envy neither. I am not humble enough for that."

"Dear Richard, you know that I have alwayssought to make you happy. It grieves me that you are not so. What would you have me do for you?"

"Let me go forth in peace. Say nothing to my father to prevent it. Seem to be satisfied with my departure yourself. I will try to please you better when I return."

"You ask too much, my son; but I will try. I will do any thing for you, if you will only think and speak less indifferently of your elder brother."

"And what are my thoughts and words to him, mother? He feels them not——they do not touch him. Is he not my elder brother? Has he not all? The favour of our grandmother gave him wealth, and with his wealth, and from his wealth, comes the favour of Mary Easterby."

"You do her wrong!" said my mother.

"Do I, indeed?" I answered bitterly. "What! she takes him then for his better person, his nobler thoughts, his boldness, his industry, and the thousand other manly qualities, so winning in a woman's eyes, which I have not, but which he possesses in such plenty? Is it this that you would say, my mother? Say it then if you can; but well I know you must be silent. You cannot speak, mother, and speak thus. For what then has Mary Easterby preferred John Hurdis? God forgive me if I do her wrong, and Heaven's mercy to her if she wrongs herself and me. At one time I thought she loved me, and I showedher some like follies. I will not say that she has not made me suffer; but I rejoice that. I can suffer like a man. Let me go from you in quiet, dear mother; urge my departure, and believe, as I think, that it will be for the benefit of all."

My father's entrance interrupted a conversation, which neither of us was disposed readily to resume.

CHAPTER II.

There was but one
In whom my heart took pleasure amongst women;
One in the whole creation; and in her
You dared to be my rival.
—— Second Maiden's Tragedy

The reader has discovered my secret. I had long loved Mary Easterby, and without knowing it. The knowledge came to me at the moment when I ceased to hope. My brother was my rival, and, whatever were the charms he used, my successful rival. This may have given bitterness to the feeling of contempt with which his own feebleness of character had taught me to regard him. It certainly took nothing from the barrier, which circumstances and time had set up as a wall between us. Mary Easterby had grown up beside me. I had known no other companion among her sex. We had played together from infancy, and I had been taught to believe, when I came to know the situation of my own heart, and to inquire into that of hers, that she loved me. If she did not, I deceived myself most wofully; but such self deception, is no uncommonpractice with the young of my age, and sanguine temperament. I would not dwell upon her charms could I avoid it; yet though I speak of, I should fail to describe and do not hope to do them justice. She was younger by three years than myself, and no less beautiful than young. Her person was tall, but not slight; it was too finely proportioned to make her seem tall, and grace was the natural result, not less of her physical symmetry, than of her maiden taste, and sweet considerateness of character. Her eye was large and blue, her cheek not so round as full, and its rich rosy colour almost vied with that which crimsoned the pulpy outline of her lovely mouth. Her hair was of a dark brown, and she wore it gathered up simply in volume behind, a few stray tresses only being suffered to escape from bondage at the sides, to attest, as it were, the bountiful luxuriance with which nature had endowed her. See these tresses on her round white neck, and let your eye trace them in their progress to the swelling bosom on which they sometimes rested; and you may conceive something of those charms, which I shall not seek farther to describe.

Though a dweller in the woods all her life, her mind and taste had not been left without due cultivation. Her father had been taught in one of the elder states, one of the old thirteen, and he carried many of the refinements of city life with him intothe wilderness. Books she had in abundance, and these taught her every thing of those older communities, which she had never yet been permitted to see. Her natural quickness of intellect, her prompt appreciation of what she read, enabled her at an early period duly to estimate those conventional and improved forms of social life to which her books perpetually referred, and which belong only to stationary abodes, where wealth brings leisure, and leisure provokes refinement. With such aid, Mary Easterby soon stood alone among the neighbouring damsels. Her air, manner, conversation, even dress, were not only different from, but more becoming, than those of her associates. She spoke with the ease and freedom of one bred up in the most assured society; and thought with a mind filled with standards which are not often to be met with in an insulated, and unfrequented community. In short she was one of those beings, such as lift the class to which they belong; such as represent rather a future than a present generation; and such as, by superior grasp of judgment or of genius, prepare the way for, and guide the aims of all the rest.

It were folly to dwell upon her excellences, but that my narration may depend upon their development. They were powerful enough with me; and my heart felt, ere my mind could analyze them. A boy's heart, particularly one who is the unsophisticatedoccupant of the forests, having few other teachers, is no sluggish and selfish creation, and mine was soon filled with Mary Easterby, and all its hopes and desires depended upon hers for their fulfilment. It was the thought of all, that hers was not less dependent upon mine; and when the increasing intimacy of the maiden with my brother, and his confident demeanor towards herself and parents, led us all to regard him as the possessor of those affections which every body had supposed to be mine, the matter was no less surprising to all than it was for the season bitter and overwhelming to me. I could have throttled my more fortunate brother ——brother though he was——in the first moment of my rage at this discovery; and all my love for Mary did not save her from sundry unmanly denunciations which I will not now venture to repeat. I did not utter these denunciations in her ears though I uttered them aloud. They reached her ears, however, and the

medium of communication was John Hurdis. This last baseness aroused me to open rage against him. I told him to his teeth he was a scoundrel; and he bore with the imputation, and spoke of our blood connection as the reason for his forbearance to resent an indignity which, agreeably to our modes of thinking, could only be atoned for by blood.

"Brother indeed!" I exclaimed furiously in reply. "No, John Hurdis, you are no brother of mine, though our father and mother be the same. I acknowledge no relationship between us. We are of a different family——of a far and foreign nature. My kindred shall never be found among the base; and from this moment I renounce all kindred with you. Henceforth, we know nothing of each other only so far as it may be necessary to keep from giving pain and offence to our parents. But we shall not be long under that restraint. I will shortly leave you to yourself——to your conquests, and the undisturbed enjoyment of that happiness which you have toiled for so basely at the expense of mine."

He would have explained and expostulated but I refused to hear him. He proffered me his hand, but with a violent blow of my own, I struck it down, and turned my shoulder upon him. It was thus, in such relationship, that we stood, when I announced to my mother my intention to leave the family. We barely spoke to one another when speech was absolutely unavoidable, and it was soon known to Mary Easterby, not less than to the persons of my own household, that our hearts were lifted in enmity against each other. She seized an early opportunity and spoke to me on the subject. Either she mistook the nature of our quarrel, or the character of my affections. Yet how she could have mistaken the latter or misunderstood the former, I cannot imagine. Yet she did so.

"Richard, they say you have quarrelled with your brother."

"Does he say it——does John Hurdis say it, Mary?" was my reply.

She paused and hesitated. I pressed the question with more earnestness as I beheld her hesitation. She strove to speak with calmness, but was not altogether successful. Her voice trembled as she replied.

"He does not, Richard——not in words; but I have inferred it from what he does say, and from the fact, that he has said so little. He seemed unwilling to tell me anything."

"He is wise," I replied bitterly; "he is very wise; but it is late. Better he had been thus taciturn always."

"Why speak you so, Richard?" she continued; "why are you thus violent against your brother? What has he done to vex you to this pass? Let me hear your complaint."

"Complaint! I have none——you mistake me, Mary. I complain not. I complain of nobody. If I cannot right my own wrongs, at least, I will not complain of them."

"Oh, be not so proud, Richard; be not so proud," she replied earnestly; and her long white fingers rested upon my wrist for an instant, and were as instantly withdrawn. But that one touch was enoughto thrill to the bone. It was my turn to tremble. She continued: "There is no wisdom in this pride of yours, Richard; it is unbecoming in such frail beings as we are, and it will be fatal to your happiness."

"Happiness——my happiness! Ah, Mary, if it be my pride only which is to be fatal to my happiness then I am secure. But I fear not that. My pride is my hope now, my strength. It protects me, it shields my heart from my own weakness."

She looked in my face with glances of the most earnest inquiry for a little while, and then spoke as follows:

"Richard, there is something now−a−days about you which I do not exactly understand. You utter yourself in a language which is strange to me, and your manners have become strange? Why is this! what is the matter?"

"Nay, Mary, but that should be my question. The change is in you, not me. I am conscious of no change such as you speak of. But a truce to this. I see you are troubled. Let us talk of other things."

"I am not troubled, Richard, except on your account. But as you desire it, let us talk of other things; and to return——why this hostility between yourself and your brother?"

"Let him tell you. Demand it of him, Mary; he will better tell the story than I, as it will probablysound more to his credit, than to mine, in your ears!"

"I know not that," she replied; "and know not why you should think so, Richard, unless you are conscious of having done wrong, and if thus conscious, the cure is in your own hands."

"What!" I exclaimed impetuously; "You would have me go on my knees to John Hurdis, and humbly ask his pardon, for denouncing him as a scoundrel——"

"You have not done this, Richard?" was her sudden inquiry, silencing me in the middle of my hurried and thoughtless speech. The error was committed, and I had only to avow the truth. Gloomily I did so, and with a sort

of sullen ferocity that must have savoured very much of the expression of a wolf goaded to the verge of his den by the spear of the hunter.

"Ay, but I have, Mary Easterby. I have called John Hurdis a scoundrel, and only wonder that he told you not this along with the rest of my misdoings which he has been careful to relate to you. Perhaps, he might have done so, had the story spoken more favourably for his manhood."

We had been sitting together by the window while the conversation proceeded; but at this stage of it, she arose, crossed the apartment slowly, lingered for a brief space at an opposite window, then quietlyreturned to her seat. But her eyes gave proof of the big tears that had been gathering in them.

"Richard, I fear that you are doing me, and your brother both injustice. You are too quick, too prompt to imagine, wrong, and too ready to act upon your imaginings. You speak to me with the tone of one who has cause of complaint——of anger! Your eyes have an expression of rebuke which is painful to me, and I think unjust. Your words are sharp, and sometimes hostile and unfriendly. You are not what you were——Richard, in truth, you are not."

"Indeed, do you think so, Mary?"

"Ay, I do. Tell me, Richard, in what have I done you wrong? Where is my error? Of what do you complain?"

"Have I not told you, Mary, that I have no cause of complaint——that I hold it unmanly to complain? And wherefore should I complain of you? I have no right. You are mistress of your own words and actions so far as Richard Hurdis is concerned."

The stubborn pride of my spirit was predominant, and the moment of explanation had gone by. A slight sigh escaped her lips as she replied——

"You are not what you used to be, Richard; but I know not what has changed you."

She had spoken soothly——I was not what I was. A dark change had come upon me; a gloomy shadow had passed over my spirit, chilling its natural warmthand clouding its glory. The first freshness of my heart's feelings were rapidly passing from me. I had worshipped fruitlessly, if not unwisely; and if the deity of my adoration was not unworthy of its tribute, it gave back no response of favour to the prayer of the supplicant.

Such were my thoughts——such the conviction which was driving me into banishment. For banishment it was, utter, irrevocable banishment, which I then meditated. The promise given to my mother was meant to soothe her heart, and silence her entreaties. I meant never to return. In deeper forests, in a wilder home, I had resolved to choose me out an abode, which, if it had fewer attractions, had, at the same time, fewer trials for a bosom vexed like mine. I feared not the silence and the loneliness of the Indian habitations, when those to which I had been accustomed, had become, in some respects, so fearful. I dreaded no loneliness so much as that of my own heart, which, having devoted itself exclusively to another, was denied the communion which it sought.

CHAPTER III.

Now go we in content
To liberty, and not to banishment.
—— As You Like It
Brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp?
—— Same

Was I right in such a resolution? Was it proper in me, because one had made me desolate, to make others——and not that one——equally so? I know not. I inquired not thus at the time, and the question is unnecessary now. My resolution was taken at a leap. It was a resolution made by my feelings, in which my thoughts had little part. And yet I reasoned upon it, and gave stubborn arguments in its defence to others. It is strange how earnestly the mind will devote itself to the exactions of the blood, and cog, and connive, and cavil, in compliance with the appetites and impulses of the body. The animal is no small despot when it begins to sway.

In leaving home, however, and going abroad among strangers, I did not purpose to go alone. My arguments, which had not moved myself, had theirinfluence upon another. A young man of the neighbourhood, about my own age, with whom I had been long intimate, consented to go along with me. His situation and motives were alike different from mine. He was not only a wealthy man, in the estimation of the country, but he was fortunate——perhaps because he was wealthy——in the favour and regard of a young damsel to whom he had proffered vows which had proved acceptable. He was an accepted man, fortunate or not; and in this particular of fortune he differed from me as widely as in his monied concerns. His property consisted in negroes and ready money. He had forty of the former, and some three thousand dollars, part in specie, but the greater part in United States Bank notes, then considered quite as good. He wanted lands, and to supply this want was the chief motive for his resolve to set out with me. The damsel to whom he was betrothed was poor, but she wore none of the deportment of poverty. The neighbourhood thought her proud. I cannot say that I thought with them. She was more reserved than young women commonly at her time of life—— more dignified, thoughtful, and perhaps, more prudent. She was rather pensive in her manner; and yet there was a quickness of movement in the flashing of her dark black eye, that bespoke sudden resolve, and a latent character which needed but the stroke of trial and the collision of necessity to give forth unquenchable flame. She said little, but that little, when spoken, was ever to the point and purpose, and seemed unavoidable. Yet, though thus taciturn in language, there was speech in every movement of her eyes——in all the play of her intelligent and remarkable features. She was not beautiful, scarcely pretty, if you examined her face with a design to see its charms. But few ever looked at her with such an object. The character which spoke in her countenance was enough, and you forbore to look for other beauties. Catharine Walker was a thinking and intelligent creature, and her mind pre−occupied yours at a glance, and satisfied you with her, without suffering you to look farther. You felt——not as when gazing on mere beauty——you felt that there was more to be seen than was seen——that she had a resource of wealth beyond wealth, and which, like the gift of the fairy, though worthless in its outward seeming, was yet inexhaustible in its supplies.

Her lover, though a youth of good sense, and very fair education, was not a man of mind. He was a man to memorise and repeat, not to reason and originate. He could follow promptly, but he would not do to lead. He lacked the thinking organs, and admired his betrothed the more, as he discovered that she was possessed of a readiness, the want of which he had deplored in himself. It is no unfrequent thing with us to admire a quality ratherbecause of our own lack of it, than because of its intrinsic value.

William Carrington was not without his virtues of mind, as well as of heart. He was temperate in his deportment, forbearing in his prejudices, modest in correspondence with his want of originality, and earnest in his desire of improvement. His disposition was gentle and playful. He laughed too readily, perhaps; and his confidence was quite as free and unrestrainable as his mirth. While my nature, helped by my experience, perhaps, made me jealous, watchful and suspicious; his, on the other hand, taught him to believe readily, to trust fearlessly,

and to derive but little value even from his own experience of injustice. We were not unfit foils, and, consequently, not unseemly companions for one another.

Carrington was seeking lands, and his intention was to be at the land sale in Chocchuma, and to purchase with the first fitting opportunity. Having bought, he proposed to hurry back to Marengo, marry, and set forth in the spring of the ensuing year for his new home. His plans were all marked out, and his happiness almost at hand. Catharine offered no objection to his arrangements, and showed no womanly weakness at his preparations for departure. She gave my hand a gentle pressure when I bade her farewell, and simply begged us to take care of each other. I did not witness the separationbetween the lovers, but I am convinced that Catharine exhibited far less, yet felt much more than William, and that, after the parting, he laughed out aloud much the soonest of the two. Not that he did not love her. He loved quite as fervently as it was in his nature to love; but his heart was of lighter make and of less earnest temper than hers. He could be won by new colours to a forgetfulness of the cloud which had darkened his spirits; and the moan of his affliction was soon forgotten in gayer and newer sounds. Not so with her. If she did not moan aloud, she could brood, in secret, like the dove upon the blasted bough, over her own heart, and, watching its throbs, forget that the world held it a propriety to weep.

CHAPTER IV.

Oliver.

Know you before whom, sir?

Orlando.

Ay, better than he I am before knows me. I know you are my elder brother; and, in the gentle condition of blood, you should so know me. The courtesy of nations allows you my better, in that you are the first born; but the same tradition takes not away my blood were there twenty brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my father in me as you; albeit, I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence.

Oliver.

What, boy!

Orlando.

Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this.

Oliver.

Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?

Orlando.

I am no villain:——Wert thou not my brother I would not take this hand from thy throat, till this other had pulled out thy tongue for saying so.

—— As You Like It

The time approached which had been appointed for our departure, and the increased beating of my heart warned me of some trial scenes yet to be undergone. I knew that I should have little difficulty at parting with my father, and much less with my more fortunate brother. The parting from my mother was a different matter, as, knowing well the love which she bore me, I was already prepared for her sorrow, if not agony, when bidding me farewell. Besides, resolving in my secret mind never to return, I had a feeling of compunction for my meditated hypocrisy, which added the annoyance of shame to my own sorrow on the occasion. I did not think less of the final separation from Mary Easterby, but my pride schooled my heart in reference to her. I resolved that she should see me go without a change of feature, without the quivering of a single muscle. I resolved to see her. A more prudent man would have gone away in silence and in secrecy. He would have as resolutely avoided as I sought the interview. But I was not a prudent man. My feelings were too impetuous, my pride too ostentatious to suffer me to hide it from exhibition. To depart without seeking and seeing Mary would be a tacit acknowledgment of weakness. It would seem that I feared the interview, that I questioned my own strength, to contend against an influence which all around me suspected, but which it was my pride not to acknowledge even to myself.

The day came preceding that on which I was to depart; and the dinner was scarcely over, when, ordering my horse, I set out to go to Squire Easterby's plantation. The distance was seven miles, a matter of no importance in a country, where, from childhood, the people are used equally to fine horses, and long distances. I rode slowly, however, for I was meditating what I should say, and how I should demean myself during the interview which I sought. While I deliberated I discovered that I had overtasked my strength. I felt that I loved tooearnestly not to be somewhat, if not severely, tried. Could it have been that at that late moment I could have re−resolved, and without a depreciation of my self−esteem, have turned back, I feel that I should have done so. But my pride would not suffer this, and I resolved to leave it to the same pride to sustain and succour me throughout. To lose emotions which I found it impossible to subdue, I increased the speed of my horse; striking the rowel into his flanks, and giving him free rein, I plunged into the solitary yet crowded woods, over a road which I had often trodden, and which was now filled at every step in my progress with staring, obtrusive memories, which chattered as I went in sweet, and bitter yet familiar tongues.

How often had I trodden the same region with her, when I had no fears, and none but pleasant images rose up before my contemplation! What harmonies were my unspoken, my unchallenged hopes on those occasions! What pictures of felicity rose before the mind on every side! Not that I then thought of love——not that I proposed to myself any plan or purpose which regarded our union. No! It was in the death of my hope that I was first taught to know that it had ever lived. It was only in the moment that I was taught that I loved in vain, that my boy−heart

discovered it had ever loved at all. Memories were all that I had rescued from the wreck of hope, and they were such as I had been mostwilling to have lost forever. It was but a sad consolation to know how sweet had been those things which I had once known, but which I was doomed to know no longer.

Bitter were the thoughts which attended me as I rode; yet in their very bitterness my soul gathered its strength. The sweets of life enfeeble us. We struggle among them as a greedy fly in the honey which clogs its wings, and fetters it forever. The grief of the heart is sometimes its best medicine, and though it may not give us back the lost, it arms us against loss, and blunts the sensibility which too frequently finds its fate in its own acuteness. From my bitter thoughts I gathered resolution. I remembered the intimacy which had formerly prevailed between us——how we had mutually confided to each other, how I had entirely confided to her——how joint were our sympathies, how impatient our desires to be together——how clearly she must have seen the feelings which I never spoke——how clearly had like feelings in her been exhibited (so I now thought) to me; and as I dwelt on these memories, I inly resolved that she had trifled with me. She had won me by her arts, till my secret was in her possession, and then, either unmoved herself, or willing to sacrifice her affections to a baser worship——she had given herself to another whom she could not love, butwhose wealth had been too great a temptation to her woman eyes, for her feeble spirit to withstand.

That she was engaged to my brother, I never doubted for an instant. It was as little the subject of doubt among the whole neighbourhood. Indeed it was the conviction of the neighbourhood, and the old women thereof, which produced mine; and then, the evidence seemed utterly conclusive. John Hurdis spoke of Mary Easterby, as if the right were in him to speak for her; and she——she never denied the imputation. It is true I had never questioned her on the subject, nor, indeed, do I know that she had ever been questioned by others; but where was the necessity to inquire when there was seemingly so little occasion for doubt? The neighbourhood believed, and it was no hard matter for one, so jealous and suspicious as myself, to leap with even more readiness to a like conclusion.

And yet, riding along that road, all my memories spoke against so strange a faith. It was impossible that she who had so freely confided to me the fancies and the feelings of her childhood, to whom I had so readily yielded mine, should have given herself up to another, with whom no such communion had existed ——to whom no such sympathy had been ever shown. We had sat or reclined under the same tree——we had sought the same walks together——the same echoes had caught the tones of our kindred voices, and chronicled, by their responses from the hill side and among the groves, the sentiments of our unfettered hearts. And how could she love another? Her hand had rested in mine without a fear——my arm had encircled her waist without a resistance on her part, or a meditated wrong on mine. And had we not kissed each other at meeting and parting, from childhood, and through its pleasant limits, until——ay, almost until the moment, when the right of another first led me to know what dear privileges had been my own? Wonder not at the bitterness of my present memories.

It was at the moment when they were bitterest, that a sudden turn in the road revealed to me the person of John Hurdis. I recoiled in my saddle, and, under the involuntary impulse of my hands, bore back my horse until he almost sank upon his haunches. The movement of both could not have been more prompt if we had beheld a vexed and ready adder in our path. And had he not been the adder in my path? Had he not, by his sly and sneaking practices, infused his venom into the mind of her upon whom my hope, which is the life of life, utterly depended? Had he not struck at my heart with a sting not less fearful, though more concealed, than that of the adder; and if he had failed to destroy, was it not rather because of the feebleness of his fang, than either its purpose or its venom. If he had not, then did I do him grievous wrong. Ithought he had, and my soul recoiled, as I surveyed him, with a hatred, which, had he been other than my mother's son, would have prompted me to slay him.

I had rounded a little swamp that lay upon the side of the road, and gave it the outline of a complete elbow. John Hurdis was some fifty yards in advance of me. I had not seen him at dinner, and there was he now on his way to the dwelling of her to whom I was about to pay my parting visit. The thought that I should meet him with her, that he might behold these emotions which it shamed me to think I might not be altogether able to conceal, at once brought about a change in my resolve. I determined to give him no such chance of triumph; and was about to turn the head of my horse and return to my father, when he stopped short, wheeled round and beckoned me to advance. My resolution underwent a second change. That he should suppose that I shrunk from an encounter with him of any description, was, if possible, even more mortifying than to expose the whole amount of my heart's weakness to Mary Easterby before his eyes. I determined to give him no such cause for exultation, and furiously

spurring forward, another instant brought me beside him.

His face was complaisance itself, and his manner was unpresuming enough; but there was something in the slight smile which played about the corners ofhis mouth, and in the twinkle of his eye, which I did not relish. It may have been that, in the morbid state of my feelings, I saw through a false medium; but I could not help the thought, that there was exultation in his smile, and my jaundiced spirit put on new forms of jealousy with this conviction. The blood boiled within my veins, as I regarded him, and thought thus; and I trembled like a dry leaf in the gusts of November, while I suppressed, or strove to suppress, the rebellious and unruly impulses to which it prompted me. I struggled to be calm. For my mother's sake, I resolved to say and do nothing which should savour of violence at the moment when I was about to part with her forever.

"I will bear it all——all. I will be patient," I said to my soul; "It is not long, it will soon be over. Another day, and I will be free from the chance of contact with the base, dishonest reptile. Let him gain, let him triumph as he may. It may be——the day may come! But no——I will not think of such a thing; revenge is not for me. He is still, though base, a brother. Let the eternal avenger decree his punishment, and choose his fitting executioner."

These thoughts, and this resolution of forbearance were all over in the progress of an instant; and we rode by the side of one another, as two belligerents who had lately been warring to the very knife, butwho, under the security of a temporary truce, look on one another, and move together with a mixed air, half of peace, half of war, and neither altogether assured of the virtue which is assumed to exist in their mutual pledges.

"Did I not see you turn your horse, Richard, as if to go back?"

"You did," was my reply; and my face flushed as he thus compelled me to the acknowledgment.

"And wherefore?"

"Wherefore!" I paused when I had repeated the word. It would have been too galling to have spoken out the truth. I continued thus:

"I saw you proceeding in the same direction, and cared not to be in the way. Your good fortune is too well known, to require that you should have fresh witnesses. Besides, my farewell——for it is only to say farewell, that I go now——is no such important matter."

"You are right, Richard. My good fortune needs no witnesses, though it likes them. But why should you think that you could be in the way? What do you mean by that?"

"Mean! can you ask," I replied, with something of a sneer growing on my lips as I proceeded; "when you know it is proverbial that young lovers, who are apt to be more sentimental than sensible, usually, need no third persons at their interviews? Indeed, for that matter, the third person likes it quite as little as themselves."

"Less, perhaps, Richard, if he himself has been a loser at the game," was the retort.

"Ay," I rejoined bitterly; but if the game be played foully, his dislike is quite as much the result of his scorn, as of his disappointment. He is reconciled to his loss, when he finds its worthlessness, and he envies not the victor, whose treachery, rather than his skill, has been the source of his greater success."

The lips of my brother grew positively livid, as he opened them, as if in the act to speak. He was prudent in forbearing, for he kept silent.

"Look you, John Hurdis," I continued, turning full upon him as I spoke, and putting my hand upon his shoulder. He shrank from under it. His guilty conscience had put a morbid nerve under every inch of flesh in his system. I laughed aloud as I beheld him.

"Why do you shrink?" I demanded, now in turn becoming the questioner.

"Shrink——I shrink——did I shrink?" He answered me confusedly, scarcely conscious what he said.

"Ay——did you," I responded with a glance intended to go through him; "You shrank as if my finger were fire——as if you feared that I meant to harm you."

His pride came to his relief. He plucked upstrength to say, "You mistake, Richard. I did not shrink, and if I did, it was not through fear of you or any other man."

My hand again rested on his shoulder, as I replied——my eye searching through him all the while with a keenness, beneath which, it was a pleasure to me to behold him again shrink and falter.

"You may deceive yourself, John Hurdis, but you cannot deceive me. You did shrink from my touch, even as you shrink now beneath mine eye. More than this, John Hurdis, you do fear me whatever may be your ordinary courage in the presence of other men. I see——I feel that you fear me; and I am not less assured on the subject of your fears. You would not fear were you not guilty——nor tremble now while I speak were you less deserving of

my punishment. But you need not tremble. You are secure, John Hurdis. That which you have in your bosom of my blood is your protection for the greater quantity which you have that is not mine, and with which my soul scorns all communion."

His face grew black as he gazed upon me. The foam flecked his blanched lips even as it gathers upon the bit of the driven and infuriated horse. His frame quivered——his tongue muttered inaudible sounds, and he gazed on me, labouring but in vain to speak. I laughed as I beheld his feeble fury——Ilaughed in the abundance of my scorn, and he then spoke.

"Boy!" he cried——"boy,——but for your mother, I should lay this whip over your shoulders."

He shook it before me as he spoke, and I grappled with him on the second instant. With a sudden grasp, and an effort, to oppose which, he had neither strength of soul nor of body, I dragged him from his horse. Straining feebly and ineffectually to resist his coward tendency, he, at length, after a few struggles, fell heavily upon the ground and almost under the feet of my animal. His own horse passed away, and at the same moment, I leaped down from mine. My blood was in a dreadful tumult——my fingers twitched nervously to grapple with him again, but ere I could do so, a sound——a scream——the sudden and repeated shrieks of a woman's voice, arrested me in my angry purpose, and I stood rooted to the spot. Too well I knew that voice, and the tremor of rage which an instant before had shaken me to the centre was now succeeded by a tremor far more powerful. Unlike the former it was enfeebling, palsying——it took from me the wolfish strength with which the former seemed to have endued me. The voice of a girl had given me the weakness of a girl, and like a culprit I stood, as if fixed and frozen, until my brother had arisen from the ground where I had thrown him, and Mary Easterby stood between us.

CHAPTER V.

I thought to chide thee, but it will not be;
True love can but awhile look bitterly.
—— Heywood——Love's Mistress.
You have led me,
Into a subtle labyrinth, where I never
Shall have fruition of my former freedom.
—— The Lady's Privilege

She stood between us like some judge suddenly descended from heaven, and armed with power to punish, and I stood before her like a criminal conscious of my demerits and waiting for the doom. An instant before she came, and I had a thousand arguments, each, to my mind, sufficient to justify me for any violence which I might execute upon John Hurdis. Now, I had not one. The enormity of the act of which I had been guilty, seemed to expand and swell with every accumulated thought upon it; and my tongue, that had been eloquent with indignation but a little while before, was now frozen with silence, and without even the power of evasion or appeal. I did not venture to look her in the face——I did not venture even to look upon my brother. What were his feelings I know not; but if they partook, at that moment, of any of the intense humility which made up the greater part of mine, then was he almost sufficiently punished for the injuries which he had done me. I certainly felt that he was almost if not quite avenged in my present humility for the unbrotherly anger of which he had been the victim.

"Oh, Richard Hurdis," she exclaimed, "this violence, and upon your brother too."

Why had she not addressed her speech to him? Was I alone guilty? Had he not provoked? Had he not even threatened me? The thought that she was now again showing the partiality in his favour which had been the source of my unhappiness, changed the tenor of my feelings. My sense of humiliation gave way to offended pride, and I answered with sullen defiance.

"And am I only to blame, Mary Easterby? Can you see fault in no other than me? Methinks this is less than justice, and I may safely deny the authority which so openly affronts justice with an avowal of its partialities."

"I have no partialities, Richard——it is you that are unjust. The violence that I witnessed was only yours. I saw not any other."

"There was indignity and insolence——provocation enough, Mary Easterby," I replied hastily, "if not violence, to justify me in what I did. But I knewnot that you beheld us. I would not else have punished John Hurdis. I would have borne with his insolence——I would have spared him his shame——if not on his account on yours. I regret that you have seen us, though I have no regret for what I have done."

I confronted my brother as I spoke these words, as if to satisfy him that I was ready to give him the only form of atonement which I felt his due. He seemed to understand me, and to do him all justice, his port was as manly as I could desire that of my father's son to be at all times. His eye flashed back a family expression of defiance, and his lips were closed with a resoluteness that showed him to be fully roused. But for the presence of Mary Easterby, we had come to the death struggle in that very hour. But we felt ourselves too greatly wrong not to acknowledge her superiority. Vexed and sullen as I was, I was doubly vexed with the consciousness of error; and when she spoke again in answer to my last words my chagrin found due increase in what she said.

"I know nothing of the provocation, Richard, and need nothing to believe that there was provocation, or that you thought so, which moved you to what you did. I could not suppose, for an instant, that you would proceed to such violence without provocation; but that any provocation short of violence itself willjustify violence——and violence too upon a brother——I cannot admit, nor, in your secret heart, Richard, do you admit it yourself. What would your mother say, Richard, were she to hear this story?"

"She might be less angry, and less pained, Mary Easterby, than you imagine, if she knew all the story. If she knew——but no! why should I recount his villanies, Mary Easterby, and least of all why recount them to you? I will not."

"Nor do I wish——nor would I hear them, Richard," she replied promptly, though gently. I saw the eyes of John Hurdis brighten, and my soul felt full of bitterness.

"What! you would not believe me, then, Mary Easterby. Can it be that your prejudices go so far as that?"

The tears gathered in her eyes as they were fixed upon mine and beheld the sarcastic and scornful expression in them, but she replied without hesitation.

"You are unjust, and unkind to me, Richard;" and her voice trembled: she proceeded:

"I would be unwilling to believe, and am quite as unwilling to hear, any thing which could be prejudicial to the good name of any of your family, your brother or yourself. I have loved them all too long, and too truly, Richard, to find pleasure in any thing which spoke against their worth. I should be not less unwilling, Richard, to think that you could sayanything, which did not merit and command belief. I might think you guilty of error, never of falsehood."

"Thank you, Mary; for so much, at least, let me thank you. You do me justice only. When I speak falsely, of man or woman, brother or stranger, friend or foe, let my tongue cleave to my mouth in blisters."

John Hurdis mounted his horse at this moment, and an air of dissatisfaction seemed to hang upon his features. He muttered something to himself, the words of which were unintelligible to us; then speaking hurriedly to Mary, he declared his intention of riding on to her father's farm, then but a short mile off. She begged him to do so, courteously, but, as I thought, coldly; and giving a bitter glance of enmity towards me, he put spurs to his horse and was soon out of sight.

His absence had a visible effect upon her, and I felt that much of the vexation was passing from my own heart. There was something in the previous conversation between us which had softened me, and when the tramp of his horse's heels was no longer in hearing, it seemed as if a monstrous barrier had been broken down from between us. All my old thoughts and fancies returned to me; sweet memories, which I had just before angrily dismissed, now came back confidently to my mind, and taking herhand in one of mine, while leading my horse with the other, we took our course through a narrow path which wound through a pleasant thicket, we had trodden together a thousand times before.

"Mary," I began, as we proceeded——this is our old walk. Do you remember? That pine has lain across the path from the first time we knew it."

"Yes, it looks the same as ever, Richard, with one exception which I have remarked more than once and particularly this morning. The end of it, upon which we used to sit, is scarcely to be got at now, the bushes have grown up so thickly around it."

"It is so long, Mary, since we have used it. It was our visits that kept the brush down. The weeds grow now without interruption from us——from me at least; and the time is far distant when I shall visit it again. Do you know, Mary, I am come to bid you good−bye? I leave Marengo to−morrow."

"To−morrow! so soon?"

"Soon! Do you think it soon, Mary? I have been making preparations for months. Certainly, I have declared my intention for months."

"Indeed! but not to me. I did hear something of such a purpose being in your mind; but I hoped, I mean I believed, that it was not true."

"Did you hope that it was not true?" I demanded with some earnestness. She answered with the ready frankness of childhood.

"Surely I did; and when John Hurdis told me——"

"John Hurdis is no authority for me," I said gloomily, breaking off her speech in the middle. The interruption brought us back to our starting place, from the contemplation of which, since my brother's departure, we had both tacitly seemed to shrink.

"Oh, Richard, this is an evil temper!" she exclaimed. "Why do you encourage it? Why this angry spirit towards your brother? It is an evil mood, and can do no good. Besides, I think you do him injustice. He is gentle and good natured; he wants your promptness, it may be, and he lacks something of your enterprise and industry. Perhaps, too, he has not the same zealous warmth of feeling, but truly I believe that his heart is in the right place."

"It is your policy to believe so, Mary; else where is yours?"

"Mine!" she exclaimed; and her eye was fixed upon me with an expression of mixed curiosity and wonder.

"Ay, yours," I continued, giving a construction to the equivocal form of my previous speech, differing from that which I originally intended——

"Ay, yours, for if it be not, your charity is wasted. But no more of this, Mary, if you please.The subject, for

sundry reasons, is an unpleasant one to me. John Hurdis is fortunate in your eulogy, and for your sake, not less than his, I will not seek, by any word of mine, to disturb your impressions. My words might prejudice your opinion of his worth, without impairing its intrinsic value; and it may be as you think, that I am all wrong about it. He is a fortunate man, that John Hurdis; doubly fortunate, Mary. He has the wealth which men toil for, and fight for, and lie for, and sell themselves to the foul fiend for in a thousand ways; he has the favour of women; a greater temptation, for which they do a thousand times worse. He has those possessions, Mary, some of which I am never to have, but for the rest of which I am even now about to leave the home, and perhaps, all the happiness of my childhood."

"You surely do not envy your brother, Richard, any of his possessions."

"Let me know what they are Mary; let them be enumerated, and then will I answer you. Envy John Hurdis I do not; that is to say, I do not envy him his wealth, or his wisdom, his lands, his negroes or any of his worldly chattels. Are you satisfied now, Mary, that there is nothing base in my envy; though it may be that he has something yet which provokes it!"

"And what is that, Richard?"

Why did I not answer her in plain language? How often have I repented that I did not. How much sorrow might have been spared me else. But I was proud of heart as Lucifer; proud in my own despite, stubborn to my own sorrow.

"Mary, ask me not," I answered. "What matter is it to know, when even were he to lose that which I envy him, it might be that I would not be esteemed worthy to possess it."

"Richard, there is something strange to me in your tones, and mysterious in your language. Why do you not speak to me as formerly? Why are you changed——why should you be changed to me? You scarcely speak now without saying something which I do not thoroughly comprehend. There is a hidden meaning in every thing you say; and it seems to me that you are suspicious and distrustful of the honesty of every body."

"And should I not be, Mary? He is not a wise man who learns no lessons of caution from the deception of others; who, wronged once, suffers himself to be wronged a second time from the same source. I may be distrustful, but I am prudently so, Mary."

"You prudent, Richard! I fear that even now you deceive yourself, as it seems to me you must have deceived yourself before. You have not said, Richard, by whom you have been wronged——by whose dishonesty, you have acquired all these lessons of prudence and circumspection."

How could I answer this? Who could I accuse? I could only answer by replying to another portion of her remarks.

"You think me changed, Mary, and I will not deny it. I am certainly not so happy as I have been; but my change has only corresponded with the changed aspects of the world around me. I know that I have undergone no greater change than others that I know——than you, for example. You are changed, Mary, greatly changed in my sight."

The deepest crimson, and the utmost pallor succeeded to each other in rapid alternations upon her cheek. Her bosom heaved——her hand trembled within my own. I thought at first that she would have fainted, and, dropping the bridle of my horse, I supported her shrinking form with my arm. But she recovered herself almost instantly; and, advancing from the clasp of my arm which had encircled her waist——with a sudden composure which astonished me, she replied:

"I did not think it, Richard——I am not conscious of any change in me, but it may be even as you say. I could have wished you had not seen it, if it be so; for, of a truth, I have not striven forchange, and it gives me pain to think that I do seem so——to my friends at least."

"It is so, Mary. I once thought——but no! wherefore should I speak of such things now——." She interrupted me by a sudden and hurried effort——seemingly an impulsive one.

"Oh, speak it, Richard——speak aloud——speak freely as you used to speak when we were happy children together. Be no longer estranged——think me not so. Speak your thought, and as I hope for kindness from all I love, I will as freely utter mine."

"No!" I exclaimed coldly, and half releasing her fingers from my grasp. "No! Mary, it were but a folly now to say what were my thoughts once—— my feelings——my fancies. I might have done so in a former day; but now I cannot. I acknowledge the change, and so must you. It is a wise one. Ere long, Mary, long before I return to

Marengo, you will undergo another change, perhaps, which I shall not witness, and shall not desire to witness.

"What is it that you mean, Richard?"

"Nothing——no matter what. It will be a happy change to you, Mary, and that should be enough to make me satisfied with it. God knows I wish you happiness——all happiness——as complete as it is in man's power to make it to you. I must leave you now. The sun is gone, and I have to ride over toCarrington's to night. Good bye, Mary, good bye."

"Are you going, Richard?" she said without looking up.

"Yes; I have loitered too long already."

"You will write to us——to father?"

"No! of what use to write? Wherefore tax your sympathies by telling the story of my sufferings?"

"But your successes, Richard."

"You will believe them without the writing."

"So cold, Richard?"

"So prudent, Mary——prudent."

"And you will not go to the house?"

"What! to meet him there! No, no! Good bye——God bless you, Mary, whatever be your changes of fortune or condition." I carried her hand to my lips, flung it from me, and, gathering up the bridle of my steed, was soon upon my way. Was it in truth a sob which I heard behind me? I stole a glance backward——and she sat upon the log with her face buried in her hands.

CHAPTER VI.

Why talk we not together hand in hand
And tell our griefs in more familiar terms?
But thou art gone, and leav'st me here alone,
To dull the air with my discoursive moan."
—— Marlowe and T. Nash

"She sat upon the long with her face buried in her hands." More than once as I rode away that evening did I repeat these words to myself. Wherefore should she exhibit such emotion? Wherefore should she sob at my departure? Did she not love? Was she not betrothed to another? Of this I had no doubt, and what could I think? Was not such emotion natural enough? Had we not been born as it were together? Had we not been together from the earliest dawn of infancy——at that period when children, like clustering buds upon a rose bush in early spring, rejoice to intertwine, as if the rude hands of the world were never to pluck them asunder, and place them in different and foreign bosoms? Was it not natural enough that she should show some sign of sorrow at thus parting with a youthful playmate? I laboured to persuade myself that this was all; yet the more I reflected upon the matter, the more mysterious and contradictory did it seem. If it were that her emotion were natural to her as a long familiar playmate, why had she been so estranged from me, for so many previous and painful months? Why did she look always so grave, in later days, whenever we met? Why so reserved? So different from the confiding girl who had played with me from infancy? Why so slow to meet me as formerly? Why so unwilling to wander with me as before among the secluded paths which our own feet had beaten into confirmed tracks? Why, above all, so much more intimate and free with John Hurdis, who had never been her companion in childhood, and who, it was the most surprising thing in the world to me, should be her companion now? He coarse, listless, unsympathising——in his taste low, in his deportment unattractive, in his conversation, tedious and prosing, in his propensities, if not positively vicious, at least far from virtuous or good!

What had they in common together? How could they mingle? How unite? By what arts had he won her to his wishes? By what baser arts had he estranged her from mine? Of some of these, indeed, I had heard. More than once already had I exposed him. His hints and equivokes had, as I thought, recoiled only upon his own head; and yet the ties grew and increased between them, even, as the walls and barriers continued to rise and thicken between herself and me. I degraded him, but disdained any longer to strive for her. The busy neighbourhoodsoon informed me how idle would be such struggles. They declared her betrothed to John Hurdis, and did not stop at this. They went farther and proclaimed her to have been bought by his money to see in him those qualities and that superior worth, which, but for this, she had been slow to discover. Should I struggle against his good fortune? Should I desire to win one whose market value was so readily understood by all. I turned from the contest in disdain; and wondering at her baseness as a matter no less surprising than humiliating, I strove to fling her from my thoughts as I would the tainted and offensive weed, which had been, at one time, a pure and chosen flower.

I had not been successful. I could not fling her from my thoughts. Night and day she was before me; at all hours, whatever were my pursuits, my desires, my associates. Her image made the picture in the scene; her intelligence, her mind, the grace of her sentiments, the compass and the truth of her thoughts were forced upon me for contemplation, by the obtrusive memory, in disparagement of those to which I listened. How perfect had she ever before seemed to me in her thoughts and sentiments! How strange that one so correct in her standards of opinion, should not have strength enough to be the thing which she approved! This is the most mortifying conviction of humanity. We build the temple, but the god does not inhabit it, though we solicit him with incense, and bring our best offerings to his altars.

I reached the dwelling of William Carrington ere I felt that my journey was begun. The velocity of my thoughts had made me unconscious of that of my motion——nay, had prompted me to increase it beyond my ordinary habit. When I alighted, my horse was covered with foam.

"You have ridden hard," said Carrington.

"No; I think not. I but came from 'Squire Easterby's."

He said no more then, for the family was around; but that night, when we retired, our conversation was long,

upon various subjects, and, in the course of it, I told him all the particulars of my rencontre with John Hurdis, and of my parting interview with Mary Easterby. He listened with much attention and then spoke abruptly.

"You do that girl wrong, Richard. You are quite too harsh to her at times. I have heard and seen you. Your jealousy prompts you to language which is ungenerous to say the least; and which you have no right to use. You never told her that you loved her——never asked her to love you——what reason can you have to complain, either that she is beloved by, or that she loves another?"

"None!——I do not complain."

"You do. Your actions, your looks, your language, are all full of complaint. The show of dissatisfaction——of discontent——is complaint, and that too of the least manly description. It savours too much of the sullenness of a whipt school boy or onedenied his holiday, to be manly. Let us have no more of it, Richard."

"You speak plainly enough."

"I do, and you should thank me for it. I were no friend if I did not. Do not be angry, Richard, that I do so. I have your good at heart, and I think you have been fighting seriously against it. You think too bitterly of your brother to do him justice."

"Speak nothing of him, William."

"I will not say much, for you know I like him quite as little as yourself. Still I do not hate him as you do, and cannot agree with you, therefore, as to the propriety of your course towards him. You cannot fight him as you would a stranger, and have done with it."

"I could——you mistake——I feel that I could fight him with even less reluctance than I would a stranger."

"I grant you that your hostility is bitter enough for it, but you have too much sense of propriety left to indulge it. You cannot, and should not, were I by, even if you were yourself willing. Have done with him then; and as you have already separated, let your thoughts maintain as rigid a distance from him as your person."

"And leave him the field to himself?"

"Have you not already done so? Have you not pronounced the field unworthy fighting for! Pshaw! man, this is but wasting valour."

I listened gloomily, and in utter silence, as he went on thus:

"But," he continued, "I am not so sure either, that the field is in his possession, or that it is so unworthy. I tell you, you do Mary Easterby injustice. I do not think that she loves your brother. I doubt that she even likes him. I see no proof of it."

"Aye, but there is proof enough. You see not because your eyes are elsewhere. But say no more, William; let us drop this hateful subject."

"I am afraid your jealous spirit makes it hateful, Richard. That girl, Mary, is a treasure too valuable to be given up so lightly. By my soul, were I not otherwise bound, I should struggle for her myself."

"You!"

"Yea! Even I——William Carrington. Nay, look not so grim and gluttonous. You forget that you renounce the spoil, and that I am sworn elsewhere. I would that all others were as little in your path as I am."

"And I care not how many crowd the path when I am out of it," was my sullen answer.

"Ah, Richard, you were born to muddy the spring you drink from. You will pay for this perversity in your nature. Be more hopeful——more confiding, man. Think better of your own nature, and of the nature of those around you. It is the best policy. To look for rascals, is to find rascals,and to believe in wrong, is not only to suffer, but to do wrong. For my part, I would rather be deceived than doubt; rather lose, than perpetually fear loss; rather be robbed than suspect every one I meet of roguery."

"I answer you through my experience, William, when I tell you that you will pay dearly for your philanthropy. Your faith will be rewarded by faithlessness."

"Stay!" he cried; "no more. You would not impute insincerity to Catharine Walker."

"No; surely not."

"Then let the world be false, and play double with me as it pleases. She cannot——I know her, Dick——I know her. She will perish for me as freely, I am sure, as I would for her. And shall I doubt, when she is true. Would to heaven, Richard, you would believe but half so confidently in Mary."

"And what use in that?"

"Why, then, my life on it, she will believe in you. I somehow suspect that you are all wrong in that girl. I

doubt that these old women, who have no business but their neighbours' to attend to, and for whose benefit a charitable society should be formed for knocking them all in the head, have been coining and contriving as usual to the injury of the poor girl, not to speak of your injury. What the devil can she see in that two hundred pounder, John Hurdis, to fall in love with."

"His money."

"No, by G——d, Richard, I'll not believe it. The girl is too humble in her wants, and too content in her poverty, and too gentle in her disposition, and too sincere in her nature, to be a thing of barter. If she is engaged to John Hurdis, it is a d——d bad taste to be sure, of which I should not have suspected her; but it is not money."

"There is no disputing tastes," I rejoined bitterly; "let us sleep now."

"Ah, Richard, you have an ugly sore on your wrist, which you too much love to chafe. You toil for your own torture, man. You labour for your own defeat. I would you could rid yourself of this self−troubling nature. It will madden you, yet."

"If it is my nature, William," I responded gloomily; "I must even make the most of the evil, and do as well with it as I can."

"Do nothing with it——have done with it. Believe better of yourself and others. Think better of Mary Easterby and your brother."

"I cannot. You ask me to think better of them, yet name them together. To have been successful in your wish, you should have put them as far asunder as the poles. But say no more to me now, William. I am already fevered, and can hear nothing, or heed nothing that I hear. I must sleep now."

"Well, as you will. But, look out and tell mewhat sort of night we have. I would be sure of a pleasant day to−morrow."

He was already in his bed, and I looked out as he desired. The stars were few and gave a faint light. The winds were rising, and a murmur, almost a moan, came from the black forests in the distance. It seemed like the voice of a spirit, and it came to me as if in warning. I turned to my companion, but he was already asleep. I could not then sleep, desire it as I might. I envied him——not his happiness, but what I then misdeemed his insensibility. I confounded the quiet mind, at peace with all the world and in itself secure, with the callous and unfeeling nature. Sleep is only the boon of the mind conscious of its own rectitude, and having no jealous doubts of that of its fellows. I had no such consciousness and could not sleep. I resumed my seat beside the window, and long that night did I watch the scene——lovely beyond comparison——before, in utter exhaustion, I laid my head upon the pillow. The night in the forests of Alabama was never more beautiful than then. There was no speck in the heavens; not even the illuminated shadow of a cloud; and the murmur of the wind swelling in gusts from the close containing woods, was a music, rather than a mere murmur. In the vexed condition of my mood, the hurricane had been more soothing to my rest, and more grateful to my senses.

CHAPTER VII.

My father blessed me fervently
But did not much complain,
Yet sorely will my mother sigh,
Till I come home again.
—— Byron

At the dawn of day I rose, and without waiting breakfast, hurried off to the habitation of my father. I should have slept at home the last night, but that I could not, under my excited state of feeling, have trusted myself to meet John Hurdis. For that matter, however, I might have safely ventured; for he, probably with a like caution, had also slept from home. It was arranged between William Carrington and myself that we were to meet at mid−day, at a spot upon the road equidistant from both plantations, and then proceed together. The time between was devoted to our respective partings; he with Catharine Walker, and I with my father and mother. Could it have been avoided with propriety, I should have preferred to leave this duty undone. I wished to spare my old mother any unnecessary pain. Besides, to look her in the face, and behold hergrief at the time when I meditated to make our separation a final one, would, I well knew, be a trial of my own strength, to which I was by no means willing to subject it. My sense of duty forbade its evasion, however, and I prepared for it, with as much manful resolve as I could muster.

My mother's reproaches were less painful to me than the cold and sullen forbearance of my father. Since I had resolved to work for him no longer, he did not seem to care very greatly where I slept. No that he was indifferent; but his annoyance at my resolution to leave him, made him less heedful of my other and minor movements; so he said nothing to me on my return. Not so my mother.

"The last night, Richard, and to sleep from home! Ah, my son, you do not think but it may be indeed the very last night. You know not what may happen, while you are absent. I may be in my grave before you return."

I was affected; her tears always affected me; and her reproaches were always softened by her tears. From childhood she had given me to see that she sorrowed even when she punished me; that she shared in the pain she felt it her duty to inflict. How many thousand better sons would there be in the world, if their parents punished and rewarded from principle, and never from passion or caprice. I am sure, with a temperament, reckless and impatientlike mine, I should have grown up to be a demon, had not my mother been to me a saint. I sought to mollify her.

"I did wish to come, mother——I feel the truth of all you say——but there was a circumstance——I had a reason for staying away last night."

"Ay, to be sure," said my father sullenly; "it would not be Richard Hurdis if he had not a reason for doing what he pleased. And pray what was this good and sufficient reason, Richard?"

"Excuse me, sir, I would rather not mention it."

"Indeed!" was the response. "You are too modest by half, Richard. It is something strange that you should at any time distrust the force of your own arguments."

I replied to the sarcasm calmly.

"I do not now, sir——I only do not care to give unnecessary particulars; and I'm sure that my mother will excuse them. I trust that she will believe what I have already said, and not require me to declare what I would be glad to withhold."

"Surely, my son," said the old lady, and my father remained silent. A painful interval ensued, in which no one spoke, though all were busily engaged in thought. My father broke the silence by asking a question which my mother had not dared to ask.

"And at what hour do you go, Richard?"

"By twelve, sir; my horse is at feed now, and,I having nothing but my saddle bags to see to. You have the biscuit ready, mother, and the venison?"

"Yes, my son——I have put up some cheese also, which you will not find in the way. Your shirts are all done up and on the bed."

It required some effort on my mother's part to tell me this. I thanked her, and my father proceeded.

"You will want your money, Richard, and I will get it for you at once. If you desire more than I owe you, say so. I can let you have it."

"I thank you, sir, but I shall not need it; my own money will be quite enough."

He had made the proffer coldly——I replied proudly; and he moved away with a due increase of sullenness. The quick instinct of my mother, when my father had gone, informed her of the matter which I had been desirous to withhold.

"You have seen your brother, Richard?"

"How know you?"

"Ask not a mother how she knows the secret of a son's nature, and how she can read those passions which she has been unable to control. You have seen your brother, Richard——you have quarrelled with him."

I looked down, and my cheeks burned as with fire. She came nigh to me and took my hand.

"Richard, you are about to leave us; why can you not forgive him? Forget your wrongs, if indeed you have had any at his hands, and let me no longer have the sorrow of knowing that the children, who have been suckled at the same breasts, part, and perhaps for ever, as enemies."

"Better, mother, that they should part as enemies, than live together as such. Your maternal instinct divines not all, mother——it falls short of the truth. Hear me speak, and have your answer. I not only quarrelled with John Hurdis, yesterday; but I laid violent hands upon him."

"You did not, you could not."

"I must speak the truth, mother——I did."

"And struck him?"

"No! but would have done so, had we not been interrupted."

"Thank God, for that. It is well for you——Richard. I should have cursed you with bitterness, had you struck your brother with clenched hands."

"I came nigh it, mother. He shook his whip over my head, and I dragged him from his horse. I would at that moment have trampled him under my feet, but that the voice of Mary Easterby arrested me. She came between us. She alone——I confess it, mother——she alone kept me from greater violence."

"Heaven bless her! Heaven bless the chance that brought her there. Oh, Richard Hurdis! My son, my son. Why will you not bear more patientlywith John? Why will you not labour for my sake, Richard; if not for his and your own?"

She trembled, as if palsied, while I related to her the adventure of the preceding day; and though schooled, as women in the new countries of the south and west are very apt to be, against those emotions which overcome the keener sensibilities of the sex in very refined communities, yet I had never seen her exhibit so much mental suffering before. She tottered to a chair, at the conclusion of her speech, refusing my offer to assist her, and burying her face in her hands, wept without restraint, until suddenly aroused to consciousness by the approaching foot−steps of my father. He was a stern man and gave little heed, and no sympathy to such emotions for any cause. He would have been more ready to rebuke than to relieve them; and that feeling of shame which forbids us to show our sorrows to the unsympathising, made her hasten to clear up her countenance, and remove the traces of her suffering, as he re−entered the apartment.

"Well, Richard," he said, throwing down a handkerchief of silver dollars, a more profuse collection than is readily to be met with, in the same region now, "here is your money; half in specie, half in paper. It is all your own; count it for yourself, and tell me if it's right."

"I'm satisfied if you have counted it, sir; there's no use in counting it again."

"That's as you think proper, my son; yet I shall be better satisfied if you will count it."

I did so to please him, declared myself content and put the money aside. This done, I proceeded to put up my clothes, and get myself in readiness. Such matters took but little time, however; the last words form the chief and most serious business in every departure. The fewer of them the better.

So my father thought. His farewell and benedic− tion were equally and almost mortifyingly brief.

"Well, Richard, since it must be so——if you will be obstinate——if you will go from where your bread has been so long buttered, why God send you to a land where you won't feel the want of those you leave. I trust, however, to see you return before long, and go back to the old business."

"Return I may, father, but not to the old busi− ness," was my prompt reply; "I have had enough of that. If I am able to be nothing better than an overseer, and to look after the slaves of others, the sooner I am nothing, the better."

"You speak bravely now, boy," said my father now,

"but the best bird that ever crowed in the morning has had his tail feathers plucked before evening. Look to yourself, my son; be prudentkeep a bright eye about you as you travel, and learnfrom me what your own fortunes have not taught you yet, but what they may soon enough teach you unless you take counsel from experience, that there is no chicken so scant of flesh, for which there is not some half starved hawk to whom his lean legs yield good picking. You have not much money, but enough to lose, and quite enough for a sharper to win. Take care of it. Should you find it easily lost, come back, I say, and you can always find employment on the old terms."

"I doubt it not, father——I doubt not to find the same terms any where on my route from Marengo to Yalo−busha. There is no lack of employment when the pay is moderate, and the work plenty."

"I can get hundreds who will take your place, Richard, for the same price," said my father hastily, and with no little disquiet.

"And do what I have done, sir?"

He did not answer the question, but walked to and fro for several moments in silence, while I spoke with my mother.

"And what about your own negroes, Richard?" he again abruptly addressed me.

"Why, sir, you must work them as usual if you have no objections. I shall have no need of them for the present."

"Yes, but you may want them when the next year's crop is to be put into the ground."

"Hardly, sir——but if I should, I will then charge you nothing for their time. It shall be my loss."

"No, that it shall not be, Richard; you shall have what is right since you leave it altogether to me. And now, good bye. I'll leave you with your mother and go into the woods; you can always talk more freely with her, than you are willing to talk with me; I don't know why, unless it is that I have some d——d surly ways about me. Tell her if you want any thing from me, or if I can do any thing for you, don't spare your speech——let her know it, and if it's to be done at all, I'll do it. I won't palaver with you about my love and all that soft stuff, but I do love you, Richard, as a man and no sneak. Good bye, boy——good bye and take care of yourself."

Thus, after his own rough fashion, my father spoke his parting. A fountain of good feeling was warm and playing at heart, though it seemed stolid and impenetrable as the rocky surface that shut it in. He was cold, and phlegmatic in his manner only. One hurried embrace was taken, and seizing his staff, he disappeared in another instant from my sight. The soul of my mother seemed to expand at his departure. His presence restrained her; and with more than woman's strength, she kept down, while under the inspection of his stern andpiercing eye, all of the warmth and tenderness of woman——of a mother.

"My son, my son, you leave me, you leave me doubly unhappy——unhappy as you leave me and perhaps forever——unhappy as you leave me with a deadly enmity raging in your breast against your brother. Could you forget this enmity——could you forgive him before you go, I should be half reconciled to your departure. I could bear to look for you daily and to find you not——to call for you hourly, and to have no answer——to dream of your coming, and wake only to desire to dream again. Can you not forgive him, Richard? Tell me that you will. I pray you, my son, to grant me this, as a gift and a blessing to myself. I will pray heaven for all gifts upon you in return. Think, my son, should death come among us——should one of us be taken during the time you think to be gone——how dreadful to think of the final separation without peace being made between us. Let there be peace, my son. Dismiss your enmity to John. You know not that he has wronged you——you know not that he has used any improper arts with Mary——but if he has, my son——admitting that he has, still I pray you to forgive him. Wherefore should you not forgive him? Of what use to cherish anger? You cannot contend with him in violence; you must not, you dare not, as you value a mother's blessing, as youdread a mother's curse. Such violence would not avail to do you justice; it could not give you what you have lost. To maintain wrath is to maintain a curse that will devour all your substance and lastly devour yourself. Bless your poor mother, Richard, and take her blessing in return. Grant her prayer, and all her prayers will go along with you for ever."

"Mother, bless me, for I do forgive him."

Such were my spontaneous words. They came from my uninstructed, untutored impulse, and at the moment

when I uttered them, I believed fervently that they came from the bottom of my heart. I fear that I deceived myself. I felt afterwards, as if I had not forgiven, and could not forgive him. But when I spoke, I thought I had, and could not have spoken otherwise. Her own voluminous and passionate appeal, had overcome me, and her impulse bore mine along with it. I may have deceived her, but I, as certainly, deceived myself. Be it so. The error was a pious one, and made her happy; as happy, at least, as, at that moment, she could well be.

I need not dwell upon our parting. It was one of mixed pain and pleasure. It grieved me to see how much she suffered, yet it gratified my pride to find how greatly I was beloved. Once taught how delicious was the one feeling of pleasure which such a trial brought with it, I feel——I fear——that I couldfreely have inflicted the pain a second time, if sure to enjoy the pleasure. Such is our selfishness. Our vanity still subdues our sufferings, and our pride derives its most grateful aliment from that which is, or should be, our grief.

In an hour I was on the road with my companion, and far out of hearing of my mother's voice. And yet——I heard it.

CHAPTER VIII.

But with the word, the time will bring on summer,
When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns,
And be as sweet as sharp. We must away;
Our wagon is prepared, and time revives us.
—— Shakspeare

I heard it then——in long days after, when she was speechless, I heard it——I still hear it——I shall never lose its lingering memories. They cling to me with a mother's love; the purest, the least selfish of all human affections. The love of woman is a wondrous thing, but the love of a mother is yet more wonderful. What is there like it in nature? What tie is there so close, so warm, so uncalculating in its compliances, so unmeasured in its sacrifices, so enduring in its tenacious tenderness? It may accompany the feeble intellect, the coarse form, the equivocal virtue; but, in itself, it is neither feeble, nor coarse, nor equivocal. It refines vulgarity, it softens violence, it qualifies and chastens, even when it may not redeem, all other vices. I am convinced that, of all human affections, it is endowed with the greatest longevity; it is the most hardy, if not themost acute in its vitality. Talk of the love of young people for one another; it is not to be spoken of in the same breath; nothing can be more inferior. Such love is of the earth, earthy——a passion born of tumults, wild and fearful as the storm, and yet more capricious. An idol of clay——a miserable pottery, the work, which in a fit of phrensied devotion we make with our own hands, and in another, and not more mad fit of brutality, we trample to pieces with our feet. Appetite is the fiend that degrades every passion, and the flame, of which it is a part, must always end in smoke and ashes.

Thus I mused when I encountered my friend and companion. He was in fine spirits; overjoyed with the novelty of the situation in which he found himself. For the first time in his life, he was a traveller, and his nature was one of those that correspond with the generous season, and keep happy in spite of the cloudy. His soul began to expand with the momently increasing consciousness of its freedom; and when he described to me the sweet hour which had just terminated, and which he had employed for his parting with Catharine Walker, he absolutely shouted. His separation from his former home, his relatives, and the woman whom he loved, was very different from mine; and his detail of his own feelings, and his joys and hopes, only added bitterness to mine. Going and coming, the worldsmiled upon him. Backwards and forwards, an inviting prospect met his eyes. He saw no sun go down in night. He was conscious of no evening not hallowed by a moon. Happy world, where the blessed and blessing heart moves the otherwise disobedient and froward elements as it pleases, banishes the clouds, suspends the storm, and lighting up the sky without, from the heaven within, casts forever more upon it, the smile of a satisfied and indulgent Deity. The disappointed demon in my soul actually chafed to hear the self gratulations of the delighted God in his.

And yet what had been my reflections but a moment before? To what conclusion had I come? In what——supposing me to have been right in that conclusion——in what respect was his fortune better than mine? In what respect was it half so good? The love of the sexes I had proclaimed worthless and vulnerable; that of a mother beyond all price. I had a mother, a fond, unselfish mother, and Carrington was an orphan. He had only that love, which I professed to think so valueless. But did I seriously think so? What an absurdity. The love of the young for each other is a property of the coming time, and it is the coming time for which the young must live. That of a mother is a love of the past, or, at the best, of the present only. It cannot, in the ordinary term of human allotment, last us while we live. It is notmeant that it should, and the Providence that beneficently cares for us always, even when we are least careful of ourself, has wisely prompted us to seek and desire that love which may. It was an instinct that made me envy my companion, in spite of my own philosophy. I would have given up the love of a thousand mothers, to be secure of that of Mary Easterby.

I strove to banish thought, by referring to the most ordinary matters of conversation;matters,indeed, about which I did not care a straw. In this way, I strove, not only to dispel my own topics of grief, but to silence those of triumph in my companion. What did I care to hear of Catharine Walker, and how she loved him, and how she cheered him, with a manly spirit, on a journey from which other and perhaps finer damsels would have sought to discourage their lovers; and how she bade him return as soon as he had bought the lands on which they were to

settle all their future lives? This was talk no less provoking than unnecessary; and it was not without some difficulty that I could divert him from it. And even then my success was only partial. He was forever getting back to it again.

"And what route are we to take, William?" I demanded, when we had reached a point of fork in the road. "You spoke yesterday of going up by way of Tuscaloosa. But if you can do without taking that route, it will be the better; it is forty miles out of your road to Columbus, and unless you have some business there, I see no reason to go that way. The town is new, and has nothing worth seeing in it."

"It is not that I go for, Richard. I have some money owing me in that neighbourhood. There is one Matthew Webber, who lives a few miles on the road from Tuscaloosa to Columbus, who owes me a hundred and thirty dollars for a mule I sold him last spring was a year. I have his note. The money was due five months ago, and it needs looking after. I don't know much of Webber, and think very little of him. The sooner I get the money out of his hands, the better, and the better chance then of his paying me. I'm afraid if he stands off much longer, he'll stand off for ever, and I may then whistle for my money."

"You are wise, and forty miles is no great difference to those who have good horses. So speed on to the right. It's a rascally road let me tell you. I have ridden it before."

"I know nothing about it; but thank the stars, I care as little. When a man's heart is in the right place, sound and satisfied, it matters not much what is the condition of the road he travels. One bright smile, one press of the hand from Kate, makes all smooth, however rough before."

I struck the spurs into my horse's flanks impatiently. He saw the movement, and, possibly, the expression of my countenance, and laughed aloud.

"Ah, Dick, you take things to heart too seriously. What if you are unfortunate, man? You are not the first. You will not be the last. You are in a good and goodly company. Console yourself, man, by taking it for granted that Mary has been less wise than you thought her, and that you have made a more fortunate escape than you can well appreciate at present."

"Pshaw, I think not of it," was my peevish reply. "Let us talk of other matters."

"Agreed! But what other matters to talk of that shall please you, Richard, is beyond my knowledge now. My happiness, at this moment, will be sure to enter into every thing I say; as I certainly can think of no more agreeable subject. I shall speak of Kate, and that will remind you of Mary, however different may be their respective treatment of us. If I talk of the land I am looking for, and resolve to settle on, you will begin to brood over the solitary life in store for you, unless, as I think very likely, it will not be long before you console yourself with some Mississippi maiden, who will save you the trouble of looking for lands, and the cost of paying for them, by bringing you a comfortable portion."

"I am not mercenary, William," was my answer,somewhat more temperately spoken than usual. I had discovered the weakness of which I had been guilty, and at once resolved that though I was not successful, I would not be surly. Indeed a playful commentary which Carrington uttered about my savage demeanor, brought me back to my senses. It was in reply to some uncivil sarcasm of mine.

"Hush, man, hush! Because you have been buffeted, you need not be a bear. Let the blows profit you as they do a beefsteak, and though I would not have your tenderness increased by the process, heaven keep you from any increase of toughness. Forgive me, my dear fellow, for being so happy. I know well enough that to the miserable, the good humour of one's neighbours is sheer impertinence. But I am more than a neighbour to you, Dick Hurdis. I am a friend; and you must forgive mine."

"Ay, that I do, William," I answered frankly, and taking his hand while I spoke. "I will not only forgive, but tolerate your happiness. You shall see that I will; and to prove it to you, I beg that you will talk on, and only talk of that. What were Kate's last words!"

"Come back soon."

"And she smiled when she said them?"

"Ay; that was the strangest thing of all, Richard. She did smile when we parted, and neither then norat any time since I have known her, have I ever seen her shed a tear. I almost bleated like a calf."

"She is a strong woman, high−spirited, firm and full of character. She does not feel the less for not showing her feelings. Still water runs deep."

"A suspicious proverb, Richard. One that has too many meanings to be complimentary. Nevertheless, you are

quite right. Kate is a still girl—— thinks more than she says, feels more than she will acknowledge; and loves the more earnestly that she does not proclaim it from the pine tops. Your professing women, like your professing men, are all puff and plaster. They know their own deficiencies, and in the inventory which they make of their virtues, take good care to set them down as the very chattels in possession. Like church builders and church goers, they seek to make up, for the substantials which they have not, by the shows and symbols which belong to them; and, truth to say, such is the universality of this habit, that, now−a−days, no one looks farther than the surplice, and the colour of the cloth. Forms are virtues, and names things. You remember the German story, where the devil bought the man's shadow in preference to his soul. Heaven help mankind were the devil disposed to pursue his trade. What universal bankruptcy among men would follow the loss of their shadows. Howthe church would groan; the pillars crumble and fall, the surplice and the black coat shrivel and stink. What a loss would there be of demure looks and saintly faces——of groaning and psalm singing tradesmen——men who seek to make a brotherhood and sisterhood in order to carry their calicoes to a good market. Well, thank heaven, the country to which we are now bending our steps, Richard, is not yet overrun by these saintly hypocrites. Time will come, I doubt not, when we shall have them where the Choctaws now hunt and pow−wow, making long prayers, and longer sermons, and concluding as usual, with a collection."

"It may be that the country is quite as full of rascals, William, though it may lack hypocrites. We have bold villains in place of cunning ones, and whether we fare better or worse than the city in having them, is a question not easily decided. We shall have need of all our caution in our travelling. I have no fear of the Indians while they are sober; and it will not be hard to avoid them when they are drunk; but we have heard too many stories of outlaws and robbery on the borders of the nation and within it, where the villains were not savages, to render necessary any particular counsel to either of us now."

"I don't believe the half of what I hear of these squatters. No doubt, they are a rough enough setof people; but what of that; let them but give us fair play, and man to man, I think, we need not fear them. I know that you can fling a stout fellow with a single flirt, and I have a bit of muscle here that has not often met its match. I fear not your bold boys; let them come. It is your city sneaks, Richard, that I don't like; your saintly demure, sly rogues, that pray for you at the suppertable, and pick your pocket when you sleep."

Carrington extended his brawny and well shaped arm as he spoke, giving it a glance of unconcealed admiration. He did not overrate his own powers; but, in speaking of rogues, and referring to their practices, it was no part of my notion that they would ever give us fair play. I told him that, and by a natural transition, passed to another topic of no little importance on the subject.

"I don't fear any thing from open violence, William," was my reply. "You know enough of me for that; but men who aim to rob, will always prefer to prosecute their schemes by art rather than boldness. Valour does not often enter into the composition of a rogue. Now I have enough money about me to tempt a rascal, and more than I am willing to surrender to one. You have probably brought a large sum with you also."

"All I have, three thousand dollars, more or less in United States Bank bills, some few Alabama,and Georgia, all passable at the land office," was his reply.

"The greater need of caution. There are land pirates on the Black Warrior, and Alabama, who are said to be worse by far than the pirates of the Gulf. Look to it, William, and keep your money out of sight. The more poor your pretensions, the more certain your safety. Show no more money than you wish to spend."

"I will not, Richard; and yet I should have no objection to put my money down upon the butt end of a log, and take a hug with any pirate of them all who should have it."

"More brave than wise," was my reply. "But let us have no more of this; there are travellers before and behind us. Let our circumspection begin from this moment. We have both need of it, being at greater risk, as we bring, like a terrapin, our homes and all that is in them, on our backs. You have too much money about you. In that, William, you were any thing but wise. I wish I had counselled you. You could have entered the lands with one fourth of it. But it is too late now to repent. You must be watchful only. I am not at so great a risk as you, but I have quite enough to tempt a Red river gambler to his own ruin and mine."

"I shall heed you," replied my companion, buttoninghis coat, and turning the butt of a pistol in his bosom, making it more convenient to his grasp. "But who are these travellers? Settlers from North Carolina, I reckon. Poor devils from Tar river as usual, going they know not where, to get, they know not what."

"They cannot go to a poorer region, nor fare much worse than they have done, if your guess be right."

"I'll lay a picayune upon it. They look sleepy and poor enough to have lived at Tar river a thousand years. But, we shall see."

CHAPTER IX.

An aged man whose head some seventy years
Had snow'd on freely, led the caravan;——
His sons and sons' sons, and their families,
Tall youths and sunny maidens——a glad groupe
That glow'd in generous blood, and had no care,
And little thought of the future, follow'd him:——
Some perch'd on gallant steeds——others, more slow,
The infants and the matrons of the flock,
In coach and jersey——but all moving on
To the new land of promise, full of dreams
Of western riches, Mississippi mad!
—— Southern Literary Journal

By this time we had overtaken the cavalcade, and sure enough, it turned out as my companion had conjectured. The wanderers were from one of the poorest parts of North Carolina, bent to better their condition in the western valleys, "full of dreams," and as one of our southern poets, whom I quote above, energetically expresses it, "Mississippi mad." They consisted of several families, three or four in number, all from the same neighbourhood, who were thus making a colonising expedition of it; and as they had all along formed a little world to themselves before, now resolving with a spirit not lesswise than amiable, to preserve the same social and domestic relations in the new regions to which they bent their steps. They thus carry with them the morals and the manners to which they have been accustomed, and find a natural home accordingly wherever they go. But even this arrangement does not supply their loss, and the social moralist may well apprehend the deterioration of the graces of society in every desertion by a people of their ancient homes. Though men may lose nothing of their fecundity by wandering, and in emigration to the west from a sterile region like North Carolina, must, most commonly, gain in their worldly goods, their losses are yet incomputable. The delicacies of society are most usually thrust from the sight of the pioneers; the nicer harmonies of the moral world become impaired; the sweeter cords of affection are undone or rudely snapped asunder, and a rude indifference to the claims of one's fellow, must follow every breaking up of the old and stationary abodes. The wandering habits of our people are the great obstacles to their perfect civilisation. These habits are encouraged by the cheapness of our public lands, and their constant exposure for sale. The morals not less than the manners of our people are diseased by the license of the wilderness; and the remoteness of the white settler from his former associates approximate him to the savage feebleness of the Indian, who has been subjugated and expelled simply because of his inferior morality.

We joined the wayfarers, and accommodating our pace to the slow and weary movement of their cavalcade, kept with them long enough to answer and to ask an hundred questions. They were a simple and hardy people, looking poor, but proud; and though evidently neither enterprising nor adventurous, yet, once abroad and in the tempest, sufficiently strong and bold to endure and to defy its buffetings. There was a venerable grandfather of the flock, one of the finest heads I ever looked upon, who mingled the smiling elasticity of youth, with the garrulity of age. He spoke as sanguinely of his future prospects in Mississippi, as if he were only now about to commence the world; and while he spoke, his eyes danced and twinkled with delight, and his laugh rang through the forests, with such fervour and life, that an irrepressible sympathy made me laugh with him, and forget, for a moment, my own dull misgivings, and heavy thoughts. His mirth was infectious, and old and young shared in it, as most probably they had done from childhood. We rode off leaving them in a perfect gale of delighted merriment, having their best wishes, and giving them ours in return.

To one ignorant of the great West; to the dweller in the Eastern cities——accustomed only to the dullunbroken routine of a life of trade, which is at best only disturbed by some splendid forgery, or a methodical and fortunate bankruptcy, which makes the bankrupt rich at the expense of a cloud of confiding creditors——the variety, and the vicissitudes of forest life, form a series of interesting romances. The very love of change, which is

the marked characteristic of our people in reference to their habitations, is productive of constant adventures, to hear which, the ears tingle, and the pulses bound. The mere movement of the self−expatriated wanderer, with his motley caravan, large or small, as it winds its way through the circuitous forests, or along the buffalo tracks, in the level prairies, is picturesque in the last degree. And this picturesqueness is not a whit diminished by the something of melancholy, which a knowledge of the facts provokes necessarily in the mind of the observer. Not that they who compose the cavalcade, whether masters or men, women or children, are troubled with any of this feeling. On the contrary, they are usually joyful and light spirited enough. It is in the thoughts and fancies of the spectator only that gloom hangs over the path, and clouds the fortune of the wayfarer. He thinks of the deserted country which they have left——of the cottage overgrown with weeds——of the young children carried into wildernesses, where no Sabbath bell invites them to a decorous service——where the schoolmaster is never seen, or is of little value——and where, if fortune deigns to smile upon the desires of the cultivator, the wealth which he gains, descends to a race, uninformed in any of its duties, and, therefore, wholly ignorant of its proper uses. Wealth, under such circumstances, becomes a curse, and the miserable possessor a victim to the saddest error that ever tempted the weak mind, and derided it in its overthrow.

These thoughts force themselves upon you as you behold the patient industry of the travellers while they slowly make their way through the tedious forests. Their equipage, their arrangements, the evidence of the wear and tear inevitable in a long journey, and conspicuous in shattered vehicle and bandaged harness, the string of wagons of all shapes, sorts and sizes, the mud−bespattered carriages, once finely varnished, in which the lady and the children ride, the fiery horse of the son in his teens, the chunky poney of the no less daring boy, the wriggling Jersey——the go−cart with the little negro children; and the noisy whoop of blacks of both sexes, mounted and afoot, and taking it by turns to ride or walk——however cheering all these may seem at a first sight, as a novelty, removing the sense of loneliness which you may have felt before, cannot but impress upon you a sentiment of gloom, which will not be lessened as you watch their progress. Their very lightheartedness——so full of hope and confidence as it denotes them to be, is a subject of doubtful reflection. Will their hopes be confirmed? Will the dreams so seducing to them now, be realized? Will they find the fortune which tempted them to new homes and new dangers? Will they even be secure of health, without which wealth is a woful mockery. These are doubts which may well make the thoughtful sad, and the doubtful despondent.

And yet the wayfarers themselves feel but little of this. Their daily progress, and the new objects of interest that now and then present themselves, divert them from troublous thoughts. The lands, the woods, the waters, that attract the eye of the planter on every side, serve to fix his attention and keep it in constant exercise and play. They travel slowly, but twelve or fifteen miles a day, and by night they encamp upon the road side, hew down a tree, clear the brush, and build up fires that illuminate the woods for miles round. Strange, fantastic forms dance in the mazes which the light makes among the receding trees; and the boisterous song of the woodman, and the unmeasured laugh of the negro, as he rends the bacon with his teeth and fingers, and hearkens to the ready joke of his companion the while, convey no faint idea of those German stories of the wild men, or demons of the Hartz Mountains or the Black Forests, which we cannotbut admire, however uncouth, grotesque and disproportioned, for their felicitous and playful ingenuity. The watch−dog takes his place under the wagon by night; sometimes he sleeps within it, and upon the baggage. The men crouch by the fire, while rude and temporary couches of bush and blanket are made for the women and the children of the party. These arrangements necessarily undergo change according to circumstances. The summer tempests compel a more compact disposition of their force; the sudden storm by night drives the more weak and timid to the deserted house, or if there be none in the neighbourhood, to the bottom of the wagon where they are sheltered by skins or blankets, with both of which the accustomed traveller is usually well provided. Before the dawn of day they are prepared to renew their journey, with such thoughts as their dreams or their slumbers of the night have rendered most active in their imaginations. The old are usually thoughtful when they rise, the young hopeful. Some few of both are sad, as an obtrusive memory haunts them with threatening or imploring shadows. Others again, and not the smaller number, cheerily set forth singing, the first day being safely passed——singing some country ditty; and when they meet with travellers like themselves—— an event, which, in our western woods, may be likened to a "sail" at sea——cracking with them somehearty joke upon their prospects, trim and caparison, with a glee that would startle the nerves and astound the measured sensibilities of the quiet occupant of more civilised abodes. The negroes are particularly famous for the lightheartedness of their habit while journeying in this manner. You will

sometimes see ten or twenty of them surrounding a Jersey wagon, listening to the rude harmony of some cracked violin in the hands of the driver, and dancing and singing as they keep time with his instrument, and pace with his horse. The grin of their mouths, the white teeth shining through the glossy black of their faces, is absolutely irresistible; while he, perched, as I have often seen him, upon the foreseat, the reins loosely flung over his left arm, in the hand of which is grasped the soiled and shattered instrument, the seams and cracks of which are carefully stopped with tar or pine gum; while the bow in his right hand, scrapes away unmercifully until it extorts from the reluctant strings the quantity of melody necessary to satisfy the amateur who performs, or the self taught connoisseurs that hearken to and depend upon him. Sometimes the whites hover nigh, not less delighted than their slaves, and partaking, though with a less ostentatious show of interest, in the pleasure and excitement which such an exhibition, under such circumstances, is so well calculated to inspire. Sometimes the grinningMomus of the group is something more than a mere mechanician, and adds the interest of improvvisation to the doubtful music of his violin. I have heard one of these performers sing as he went, verses suited to the scene around him, in very tolerable rhythm, which were evidently flung off as he went. The verses were full of a rough humour which is a characteristic of all inferior people. In these he satirized his companions without mercy, ridiculed the country which he left, no less than that to which he was going, and did not spare his own master, whom he compared to a squirrel that had lived upon good corn so long, that he now hungered for bad, in his desire of change. This was a native figure, by which his fruitless and unprofitable discontent with what was good in his previous condition, was clearly bodied forth. The worthy owner heard the satire, with which he was not less pleased than the other hearers, who were so much less interested in it. Enough of episode. We will now resume our progress.

CHAPTER X.

Ulysses.
Had she no lover there
That wails her absence?'
Troilus.
O, sir, to such as boasting, show their scars,
A mock is due. Will you walk on, my lord?
She was beloved——she loved——she is, and both——
But still, sweet love is food for fortune's tooth.
—— Troilus and Cressida

That night we slept at a miserable hovel, consisting of but one apartment into which the whole family, husband, wife, three children and ourselves, were oddly clustered together. The house was of logs, and the rain which fell in torrents before we sought shelter in so foul a stye, came through upon the trundle bed in which we strove to sleep. Still we had no occasion for discontent. The poor wretches who kept the hovel, gave us the best they had. A supper of bacon, eggs, and hoe−cake, somewhat consoled us for the doubtful prospect in our eyes; and our consolation was complete, when, at rising in the morning, we found that the storm had passed over, and we were in safety to depart. We had not been so sure that such would be the case at retiring for the night. Our host had quite a cut−throat and hang−dog expression, and we lay with dirk and pistol at hand, ready for the last emergencies. Fortunately, we had no need to use them; and bestowing a couple of dollars upon the children, for their parents refused all pay, we sallied forth upon our journey. That night we arrived at Tuscaloosa, a town now of considerable size, of increasing prosperity and population, but at the time of our visit, but little more than opened in the woods. Here we took lodgings at the only hotel in the place, and were assigned a room in common with two other persons. To this arrangement we objected in vain. The chambers were too few and the crowd too great to permit a tavernkeeper to tolerate any unnecessary fastidiousness on the part of his guests.

Here let me pause in the narrative of my own progress, and retrace for a brief period my steps. Let me unfold the doings of others, necessarily connected with my own, which are proper to be made known to the reader in this place, though only known to me long after their occurrence. The parting with my brother will be remembered. It will be recollected, that, when Mary Easterby came between us after I had dragged him from his horse, and prevented strife, and possibly bloodshed, that he left us together, and proceeded to the habitation of her parents. There, with a heart full of bitterness towards me, and a mind crowded with conflicting and angryemotions, he yet contrived effectually to conceal from observation, both the struggle and the bitterness. His words were free, easy, well arranged and good−natured as usual, to all around, and when Mary Easterby returned to the cottage after I had left her, she started with surprise to see how effectually he could hide the traces of that fierce and unnatural strife in which, but a little while before, he had been so earnestly engaged. The unlookedfor ease with which this was done, effectually startled and pained her. By what mastery of his emotions had this been done, and what was the nature of that spirit which could so hermetically seal its anger, its hate, its human and perhaps holiest passions. She saw him in a new light. Heretofore she had regarded him but in one aspect; as a man more solicitous of his ease than of his reputation, good natured in the extreme, too slothful to be irritable, too fond of repose and good living to harbour secret hostilities. If her opinion on this subject did not suffer change, it, at least, called for prompt revision and re−examination under the new light in which it appeared, and which now served only to dazzle and confound her. The wonder increased as the evening advanced. He was even humorous and witty in his easy volubility; and but for the annoyance which she naturally felt at what seemed to her his unnatural flow of spirits, she would have been constrained to confess that never before had he seemed so positively agreeable. All his resources of reading and observation were brought into requisition, and he placed them before the company with so much order, clearness and facility that she was disposed to give him credit for much more capacity of nature and acquisition, than she had ever esteemed him to possess before. He was acting a part, and had she not been troubled with misgivings to this effect, he might have acted it successfully. But he overshot his mark. He had not the art, the result only of frequent practice, to conceal the art which he employed. His purpose was to seem

amiable——to be above the passions which governed me; and to possess the forbearance which could forgive them, even where he himself had been, in a measure, their victim. He erred in seeming, not only above their control, but free from their annoyance. Had he been slightly grave during the evening, had he seemed to strive at cheerfulness, and at a forgetfulness of that which could not but be unpleasant to any brother, he had been far more successful with Mary Easterby. Her natural good sense revolted at the perfect mastery which he possessed over his emotions. Such a man might well become an Iago, having a power, such as he certainly exhibited, "to smile and smile, and be," if not a villain, one at least, wholly insensible to those proper sentimentsand sorrows which belonged to his situation under existing circumstances. Little did my brother conjecture the thoughts passing through her mind as he thus played his part. What would I have given to know them? How many pangs, doubts and sorrows would have been spared me? What time had I not saved, what affections had I not spared and sheltered! But this is idle.

John Hurdis lingered late that night for an opportunity which was at length given him. Mary and himself were left alone together, and he proceeded to do that which, with the precipitate apprehensions of a jealous lover, I had long before supposed to have been over. Either emboldened by the belief that my rash conduct had sufficiently offended the maiden, and that he had properly prepared the way for his declaration, or, possibly, somewhat anxious lest, in my parting interview, I had poured out desperately those emotions which I had, with undue timidity, hopelessly and long locked up, and anxious to know the result, he resolved to close a pursuit, which he had hitherto conducted with no less art than perseverance. John Hurdis was a vain man and confident of his position; and yet he did not approach that calm, and high minded girl without some trepidation. His first overture began with a reference to the conflict which she had so happily interrupted.

"Mary, you have this day witnessed that which I should willingly have kept forever from your knowledge. You have seen the strife of brother with brother——you have beheld a violence, shocking to humanity, and, if not ending like that of the first murderer, one which, but for your timely coming, might have had, for one or both of us, a no less fatal termination. I hope, Mary, you do me the justice to believe that I was not to blame in this quarrel."

He drew his chair nigher to hers, as he thus spoke, and waited for her answer with no little solicitude. She hesitated. How could she else than hesitate when an assenting answer sanctioned the address, the sincerity of which she seriously questioned?

"I know not what to say, Mr. Hurdis;" was her reply. "I saw not enough of the strife of which you speak to pass judgment upon it. I will not pretend to say who began it; I would rather not speak on the subject at all."

"Yet he——Richard Hurdis——he spoke of it to you?" he replied suspiciously.

"No, I spoke of it to him, rather," was the fearless answer. "In the first moment of my surprise and terror, Mr. Hurdis, I spoke to Richard——to your brother——about his rashness; and yet, though I spoke, I know not truly what I said. I was anxious. I was alarmed."

"Yet you know that it was his rashness, Mary, that provoked the affair," he said quickly.

"I know that Richard is rash, constitutionally rash, John," she replied gravely. "Yet I will not pretend to say, nor am I willing to think, that the provocation came entirely from him."

"But you saw his violence, only, Mary."

"Yes; that is true; but did his violence come of itself, John? Said you nothing? Did you nothing to provoke him to that violence? Was there no vexing word? Was there no cause of strife, well known before, between you? I am sure that there must have been, John, and I leave it to your candour to say if there were not. I have known Richard long——we were children together——and I cannot think, that in sheer wantonness, and without provocation, he could do what I this day beheld."

A faint yet bitter smile passed over his lips as he replied.

"And do you think, Mary——is it possible that you, a lady, one brought up to regard violence with terror, and brutality with disgust——is it possible that you can justify a resort to blows for a provocation given in words?"

The cheek of the maiden crimsoned beneath the tacit reproach; but she replied without shame.

"God forbid! I do not; blows are brutal, and violencedegrading to humanity in my eyes. But though I find no sanction for the error of Richard, I am not so sure that you have your justification in his violence for every provocation of which you may have been guilty. Your brother is full of impulse, quick and irritable. You knew his nature well. Did you scruple to offend it? Did you not offend it? I ask you in honour, John Hurdis, since you have

invited me to speak, was there not some previous cause of strife between you, which provoked, if it did not justify, your brother in his violence?"

"It may be; nay, there was, Mary. I confess it. And would you know the cause, Mary? Nay, you must; it is of that I would speak. Will you hear me?"

"Freely, John," was the ready and more indulgent reply. "If the cause be known, the remedy cannot be far off, John, if we have the will to apply it."

He smiled at what he considered the aptness of the reply. He drew his chair still nigher to her own; and his voice fell and trembled as he spoke.

"You are the cause, Mary!"

"I——I, the cause!" she paused and looked at him with unreserved astonishment.

"Yes; you, and you only, Mary. Richard Hurdis hates me simply because I love you. Not that he loves you himself, Mary," he spoke quickly;"no, he would control you for his own pride; he would rule you and me, and every thing alike. But that he shall not. No, Mary; hear me——I have been slow to speak, as I was fearful to offend. I would not be precipitate. I sought to win your regard before I ventured to proffer mine. The affair this day prompts me to speak sooner than I might have done. Hear me then, Mary; I love you, I proffer you my heart, my life. I will live for you. I implore you then——be mine."

The head of Mary Easterby sank as she heard this language. Her cheek assumed a deeper flush; there was a sorrowful expression in her eye which did not encourage the pleader, and when she spoke, which, after a little pause she did, it annoyed him to perceive that she was composed and dignified in her manner, and that all trace of emotion had departed from her voice.

"I thank you, John——I thank you for your favourable opinion; but I am not satisfied that I should be the occasion of strife between you and your brother. You tell me that I am——that he is unwilling that you should love me, or that I should love you in return."

"It is——it is that, Mary," he exclaimed, hastily interrupting her speech, which was uttered composedly, and even slow.

"I am sorry that it is——sorry that you think so, John, for I am sure you must be mistaken."

"Mistaken!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, John, mistaken. You are——you must be mistaken. It cannot be as you imagine. Supposing that Richard was unwilling that you should regard me with favour, and that I should respond favourably to your regard——for which I see no reason——"

He Interrupted her again, and with some show of impatience.

"There is reason, reason enough, though you may not see it. I tell you that he would rule us both; his nature is despotical. A younger brother, he has yet the management of every thing at home, and, having been been brought up as your companion from childhood, he claims to have some right to manage your concerns also. He would rule in all things, and over every body, and would not have me love you, Mary, or you me, for that very reason. Not that he loves you himself, Mary; no, no——that might alter the case were it so——but I am sure, I know, that he loves another. It is a sort of dog in the manger spirit that possesses him, and which brought about our quarrel."

Here was a batch of lies, and yet there was truth in much that he said. Without doubt I had much of that despotic nature, which he ascribed to me, and which, more or less, affected my deportment inall my associations; but the whole tissue of his speech was woven in falsehood, and one difficulty in which he had involved himself by a previous remark, led even to a greater number yet. He had ascribed to her the occasion of our quarrel, without reflecting that he had already persuaded her that my regards were given to another. It was difficult now for him to account for my hostility to his success with Mary, unless by supposing in me a nature unnaturally froward and contradictory. And such a nature, whatever were my other faults, could not fairly be laid to my charge. To have suffered Mary to suppose that I really loved her, was no part of his subtle policy. For months, it had been his grateful labour to impress upon her mind a different belief.

After hearing him patiently through his hurried tirade, Mary resumed.

"I think you do your brother much injustice, John, when you ascribe to him a temper so unreasonable. I have known him for many years, and while I have often found him jealous and passionate, I must defend him from any charge of mere wilful and cold perversity. He is too irritable, too quick and impetuous for such a temper. He does not sufficiently deliberate to be perverse; and as for the base malignity of desiring to keep one, and that one a

brother, from the possession of that which he did not himself desire to possess, I cannot think it. No,John, that cannot be the true reason. I have no doubt that you think so, but as little is my doubt that you think unjustly."

"I know no other reason, Mary," was the somewhat cold answer.

"Nay, John, I speak not so much of the general cause of the difference between you, as of the particular provocation of the strife to day. Let it be as you say, that Richard is thus perverse with little or no reason, yet it could not be that without immediate and rude cause of anger he should rush upon you in the high road and assault you with blows. Such violence is that of the robber who seeks for money, or the blood−thirsty assassin who would revenge, by sudden blow, the wrong for which he dared not crave open and manly atonement. Now, I know that Richard is no robber, and we both know him too well to think that he would assassinate, without warning, the enemy whom he had not the courage to fight. Cowardice is not his character any more than dishonesty; and yet it were base cowardice if he assaulted you this day without provocation and without due warning."

The cool, deliberate survey which Mary Easterby took of the subject, utterly confounded her companion. He was unprepared for this form of the discussion. To dwell longer upon it was not his policy, yet to turn from it in anger and impatience wasto prejudice his own cause and temper, in the estimation of one so considerate and acute as Mary had shown herself to be. Passing his hand over his face, he rose from his seat, paced the room slowly twice or thrice, and then returned to his place with a countenance once more calm and unruffled, and with a smile upon his lips as gently winning as if they had never worn any other expression. The readiness of this transition was again unfavourable to his object. Mary Easterby was a woman of earnest character, not liable to sudden changes of mood herself, and still less capable of those sudden turns of look and manner which denote strong transitions of it. She looked distrustfully upon them accordingly, when they were visible in others.

"You are right, Mary," said the tempter approaching her, and speaking in tones in which an amiable and self−accusing spirit seemed to mingle with one of wooing solicitation. "You are right, Mary; there was an immediate provocation of which I had not spoken, and which I remember occasioned Richard's violence. He spoke to me in a manner which I thought insolently free, and I replied to him in sarcastic language. He retorted in terms which led me to utter a threat which it did not become me to utter, and which, I doubt not, was quite too provoking for him to bear with composure. Thence came his violence. You were right, I think, in supposinghis violence without design. I do not think it myself; and though, as I have said, I regard Richard's conduct towards me as ungracious, and inexcusable, I am yet but too conscious of unkind feelings towards him to desire to prolong this conversation. There is another topic, Mary, which is far more grateful to me——will you suffer me to speak on that? You have heard my declaration. I love you, Mary. I have long loved you. I feel that I cannot cease to love, and cannot be happy without you. Turn not from me, Mary; hear me, I pray you; be indulgent, and hear me."

"I should not do justice to your good regards, John, nor to our long intimacy, if I desired to hear you father on this subject. Forgive me——leave me now——let me retire."

She arose as if to depart. He caught her hand and led her back to the seat from which she had arisen. It was now that he trembled; trembled more than ever, as he beheld her so little moved.

"You are cold, Mary; you dislike, you hate me," he stammered forth almost convulsively.

"No, John, you are wrong. I neither hate nor dislike you; and you know it. On the contrary, I have much respect for you, as well on your own account as on that of your family."

"Family——respect! Oh, Mary, choose some other words. Cannot you not hear me speak of warmerfeelings, closer ties? Will you not heed me when I say that I love?——When I pray you to accept——to love me in return?"

"It must not be, John!——to love you as a husband should be loved——as a wife should love——wholly, singly, exclusively; so that one should leave father, mother, and all other ties only for that one——I cannot! I should speak a base untruth, John, were I to say so. It gives me pain to tell you this, sir; it gives me pain——but better that both of us should suffer the present and momentary anguish which comes from defrauded expectations, than risk the permanent sorrow of a long life, passed in the exercise of falsehood. I am grateful for your love, John; for the favour with which you distinguish me; but I cannot give you mine. I cannot reply as you would wish me."

"Mary——you love another!"

"I know not, John; I would not know——I pray that you would not strive to force the reflection upon me."

"You mistake Richard Hurdis, if you think that he loves you, Mary; he does not; you can have no hope of

him."

The coarse, cold speech of the selfish man, was well answered by the calm and quiet tone of the maiden.

"And if I had hopes of him, or of any man, John Hurdis, they should be entombed in the bosom, where they had their birth, before my lips, or looks should declare them to other bosoms than my own. I have no hopes, such as you speak of; and so truly as I stand before you, I tell you that I know not that I have in my heart a solitary sentiment with reference to your brother, which, according to my present thought, I would not you should hear. That I have always regarded him with favour, is true; that I deem him to be possessed of some very noble qualities, is no less true. More, I tell you——it is with pain, anxious and deep pain, that I have beheld his coldness, when we have met of late; and his estrangement from me, for so long a period. I would give much to know why it is. I would do much that it should be otherwise."

"And yet you know not, Mary, that you love him?"

"I know not, John; and if the knowledge may be now obtained, I would infinitely prefer not to know. It would avail me nothing, and might——might become known to him."

There is no need to dwell longer upon this interview, though the vexing spirit of my brother, clothing what he spoke still in the language of dissimulation, protracted it for some time longer, in vain assaults upon her firmness, and, failing in that, in mean sarcasms, which were doubly mean as they were disguised alternately in the language of humiliation and of love. When he left her, she hurried to her chamber, utterly exhausted with a struggle in which all the strength of her mind had been employed in the double duty of contending with his, and of keeping her own feelings, upon which it was his purpose to play, in quiet and subjection. Her tears came to her relief, when she found herself alone, but they could not banish from her mind a new consciousness, which, from the moment when she parted with my brother, kept forcing itself upon her. "Did she in truth, love Richard Hurdis?" was her question to herself. How gladly, that moment, would I have listened to her answer.

CHAPTER XI.

Macbeth. ——know
That it was he, in the times past, which held you
So under fortune; which you thought, had been
Our innocent self: this I made good to you
In our last conference; pass'd in probution with you,
How you were borne in hand; how cross'd.
——Now, if you have a station in the file,
And not in the worst rank of manhood, say it;
And I will put that business in your bosoms,
Whose execution takes your enemy off;
Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
Which in his death were perfect.
Murderers. I am one, my Liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed, that I am reckless what
I do, to spite the world.
—— Shakspeare

The interview had barely terminated when my brother left the habitation of the maiden. He had preserved his composure, at least he had concealed the passion which his disappointment had aroused within him, until fairly out of sight. It was then that he gave vent to feelings which I had not supposed him to possess. Base I thought him, envious it may be; but of malignity and viperous hate, I hadnever once suspected him. He had always seemed to me, as he seemed to others, too fat for bitterness, too fond of ease and quiet to suffer any disappointment to disturb him greatly. We were all mistaken. When he reached the cover of the woods he raved like a mad man. The fit of fury did not last very long, it is true; but while it lasted, it was terrible, and in the end exhausting. He threw himself from his horse, and, casting the bridle over a shrub, flung himself indifferently upon the grass, and gave way to the bitterest meditations. He had toiled long, without cessation, and his toils had all been taken in vain. It did not offer any qualification to his mortified feelings to reflect that he had also toiled dishonourably.

But on a sudden he rose, and resumed his seat in the saddle. His meditations had taken a new course. His hopes had revived; and he now planned projects, the character of which, even worse than those already known to the reader, will soon be developed. He put spurs to his steed, and rode furiously through the wood. It was deep, dark and tangled; but he knew the country, with which, it was fortunate for him, his horse was also familiar. Through by−paths which were made by the cattle, or by scouting negroes, he hurried through the forest, and in a couple of hours' space, emerged from it into a more beaten path. A ride of an hour more carried him beyond the plantation of my father, which the circuit through the forest had enabled him to avoid, and in the immediate neighbourhood of a miserable cabin that stood in a secluded and wild spot, and was seen with difficulty through the crowding darkness. A faint light shone through the irregular logs of which it was built, and served, while indicating the dwelling, to convey to the observer an increased idea of its cheerlessness.

It was before this habitation, if such it might be called, that John Hurdis drew up his horse. He alighted, and, having first led the animal into shadow behind the house, he returned to the door in front, and tapping, obtained immediate entrance. The room into which he was admitted was a small one, and so filled with smoke that objects were scarce discernible. Some light wood thrown into the fire on his entrance served to illumine, if not to disperse it, and John spoke to the inmates with a degree of familiarity which showed him to have been an old acquaintance. They were old acquaintance, not only of him but of myself. The man was a villain whom I had caught stealing corn from our fields, and whom, but for John, I should have punished accordingly. I little knew what was the true motive which prompted his interference, and gave him credit for a greater degree of humanity

than was consistent either with justice or his true character.He was a burly ruffian, a black−bearded, black−faced fellow, rarely clean, seldom visible by day, a sullen, sour, bad−minded wretch, who had no mode of livelihood of which the neighbours knew, except by inveigling the negroes into thefts of property which, in his wanderings, he disposed of. He was a constant wanderer to the towns around, and it was said, sometimes extended his rambles to others out of the state. His rifle and a mangy cur that slept in the fire place, and like his master was never visible by day, were his sole companions when abroad. At home he had a wife and one child. The wife like himself seemed sour and dissatisfied. Her looks when not vacant, were dark and threatening. She spoke little but rarely idly, and however much her outward deportment might resemble that of her husband, it must be said in her favour, that her nature was decidedly gentler, and her character as far superior as it well could be, living in such contact, and having no sympathies save those which she found in her child and husband. Perhaps, too, her mind was something stronger, as it was more direct and less flexible, than his. She was a woman of deliberate and composed manner, rarely passionate, and careful to accommodate her conduct and appearance to the well known humility of condition in which she lived. In this lay her wisdom. The people around commiserated her as she was neither presumptuousnor offensive, and tolerated many offences in him, in consideration of herself and child, which would have brought any other person to the whipping post. The child, an unhappy creature, a girl of fifteen, was an idiot−born. She was pretty, very pretty, and sometimes, when a sudden spark of intelligence lighted up her eye, she seemed really beautiful. But the mind was utterly lacking. The temple was graceful, erect, and inviting, but the God had never taken possession of his shrine.

Enough! It was to this unpromising family and mean abode that John Hurdis came late at night. The inmates were watchful and the man ready to answer to the summons. The woman too was a watcher, probably after an accustomed habit, but the idiot girl slept on a pallet in one corner of the apartment. When John Hurdis entered, she raised her head, and regarded him with a show of interest which he did not appear to see. He looked with some curiosity at her couch, however; but for an instant only. His regards that night were for her father only.

"Ah, Pickett," said he with an air of jocularity on entering, "how goes it? How does the world use you now a−days? How d'ye do, Mrs. Pickett? And Jane——how is Jane?"

"I'm well, sir, I'm quite well, Mr. John," was the quick response of the poor innocent in the corner, whom every body thought asleep. The answers of Pickett and his wife were not so prompt. That of the former was somewhat surly, that of the wife slow. A brief formal dialogue passed between the party in which John Hurdis spoke with infinite good humour. He did not seem to heed the coldness of his host and hostess; and all traces of his late anger had passed effectually from his voice and visage. His only concern seemed now to conciliate those whom he sought, and it does not take long for the rich man to make the poor and the inferior unbend. In a little time John Hurdis had the satisfaction to see the hostess smile, and to hear a broken and surly chuckle of returning good nature from the lips of Pickett. The preliminary difficulty was over; and making a sign to Pickett, while his wife's back was turned, the guest led the way to the door bidding the latter good night. The idiot girl half raised herself in the bed and answered for the mother.

"Good night, Mr. John, good night, Mr. John."

Pickett followed Hurdis to the door, and the two went forth together.

They soon buried themselves in the thick cover of the neighbouring wood, when John Hurdis, who had led the way, turned and confronted his companion.

"Well, 'Squire," said Pickett with abrupt familiarity, "I see you have work for me. What's the mischief to night?"

"You are right. I have work for you, and mischief. Will you do it?"

"If it suits me. You know I'm not very nice. Let's hear the kind of work, and then the pay that I'm to get for doing it, 'fore I answer."

"Richard Hurdis goes for the 'Nation' to−morrow," said John in a lower tone of voice.

"Well, you're glad to get rid of him, I suppose. He's out of your way now. I wish I could be certain that he was out of mine."

"You can make it certain."

"How?"

"'Tis that I came about. He goes to the 'Nation,' on some wild goose chase; not that he wishes to go, but because he thinks that Mary Easterby is fond of me."

"So, the thing works, does it?"

"Ay, but does not work for me, though it may work against him. I have succeeded in making them misunderstand each other, but I have not yet been successful in convincing her that I am the only proper person for her. You know my feeling on that subject, it is enough that she declines my offer."

"Well, what then are you to do?"

"That troubles me. She declines me simply because she prefers him."

"But you say she has no hope of him. She thinks he loves another."

"Yes! But that does not altogether make her hopeless. Hope is a thing not killed so easily; and when women love, they cling to their object even when they behold it in the arms of another. The love lives, in spite of them, though, in most cases, they have the cunning to conceal it. Mary Easterby would not give up the hope of having Richard Hurdis, so long as she could lay eyes on him, and they were both single."

"Perhaps you're right; and yet, if Richard drives for the 'Nation' she'll lose sight of him, and then ——"

"Will he not return?" replied the other sternly and gloomily. "Who shall keep him away? The discontent that drives him now will bring him back. He goes because he believes that she is engaged to me. He will come back because he doubts it. He will not sleep until he finds out our deception. They will have an explanation——had he not been blinded by his own passions he would have found it out before——and then all my labors will have been in vain. It will be my turn to go among the Choctaws."

"Well, but 'Squire, while he's off and out of sightcan't you get her to marry you and have done with it?" said Pickett.

"Not easily; and if I could, what would it avail? Loving him as she does, I should but marry her for him. His hand would be in my dish, and I should but fence in a crop for his benefit. No! no! that would not do either. I tell you, where these women once love a man, to see him, to have opportunity with him, is fatal, though they be lawfully bound to another. I should not sleep secure in her arms, as I should not be able to think that I alone was their occupant."

"Now that's what I call being of a mighty jealous sort of disposition, 'Squire. I'm sure that you're wrong in your notion of Miss Mary. I don't think she'd be the woman to do wrong in that way. She's a mighty nice girl, is so modest and well behaved, and so much of a lady; I'm always afraid to look at her when I speak to her, and she carries herself so high, that I'm sure if a man had any thing wrong to say to her, he could not say it if he looked at her and saw her look."

"Ay, that is her look to you, Pickett, and to me, perhaps, whom she does not love," said John bitterly; "but let her look on Richard Hurdis, and meet his eye, and the matter changes fast enough. She has no dignified look for him; no cold, composed, commanding voice. Oh, no! It is then herturn to tremble, and to speak brokenly and with downcast eyes; it is then her turn to feel the power of another, and to forget her own; to be awed, rather than to awe; to fear herself rather than to inspire that fear in him which she may in both of us."

"I reckon he feels it too, 'Squire, quite as much if not more than you; for, say what you please, there's no saying Richard Hurdis don't love her. I've watched him often when he's been with her, and when he has not thought that any body was looking at him, and that was at a time, too, when I had no reason to like any bone in his skin, and I saw enough to feel certain that he felt a real earnest love for her."

"Let us say no more of that now," said John Hurdis coldly, as if not altogether pleased with the tone of his companion's speech. "Do you like him any better now, Ben Pickett? Is he not the same man to you now that he has ever been? Would he not drive you out of the country if he could? Has he not tried to do it? And who was it stood between you and the whipping post, when at the head of the county regulators he would have dragged you to it, for robbing the corn house and buying cotton from the negroes? Have you forgotten all this, Ben Pickett? And do you like Richard Hurdis any better when you remember that, to this moment, he has not relaxed against you, and, to my knowledge, only a month ago threatened you with the horse−whip, if he found you prowling about the plantation."

"Ay, I hear you," said the man, while the thick sweat actually stood upon his forehead, as he listened to an enumeration of events from which his peril had been great: "I hear you, John Hurdis; all is true that you say, but you say not all the truth. Did you hear what I said to Richard Hurdis when he threatened me with the horse−whip? Do you know what I said to myself and swore in my own heart, when he would have hauled me to the whipping−post from which you saved me?"

"No; what said you? what did you swear?"

"To put my bullet through his head, if he laid the weight of his finger upon me; and but that you saved him, in saving me, so surely would I have shot him, had the regulators tied me to the tree and used one hickory upon me."

"I was a fool for saving you then, Pickett; that's all. Had I known that you could so well have fought your own battles, I had let him go on. I am not sorry, Ben, that I saved you from the whip, but by God, I am sorry to the soul that I saved him from the shot."

"I'm not sorry!" said the other. "Let Richard Hurdis live; I wish him no harm. I could even like him; for, blast me, but he has something about himthat I'm always glad to see in a man, and if he would only let me alone——"

"He will not let you alone, Ben Pickett. He cannot let you alone, if you would look at the matter. He comes back from the 'Nation,' and Mary Easterby is still unmarried. What then?——an explanation takes place between them. They find out the truth. They find, perhaps, that you put the letter in the way of Mary that told her about Richard's doings at Coosauda; that you have been my agent in breeding the difference between them. More than this, they marry, and Richard brings his wife home to live with him at the old man's, where, if he does that, he will have full authority. Do you suppose when that time comes, I will stay in the neighbourhood? Impossible. It will be as impossible for me to stay here as it will be for you. The moment I go, who will protect you? Richard will route you out of the neighbourhood; he has sworn to do it; and we both know him too well not to know that if he once gets the power to do what he swears, he will not hesitate to use it. He will drive you to Red River as sure as you're a living man."

"Let the time come," said the other gloomily, "let the time come. Why do you tell me of this matter now, 'Squire?"

"You are cold and dull, Ben Pickett. You are getting old," said John Hurdis with something like asperity. "Do I not tell you other things? Do you not hear that Richard Hurdis sets off to−morrow for the 'Nation?' I have shown you that his absence is of benefit to both of us, that his return is to our mutual injury. Why should he return? The gamblers may cut his throat, and the fighting Choctaws may shoot him down among their forests, and nobody will be the wiser, and both of us the better for it."

"Why, let them, it will be a happy riddance," said Pickett.

"To be sure, let them," said the other impatiently; "but suppose they do not, Ben? Should we not send them a message telling them that they will serve and please us much by doing so? that they will rid us of a very troublesome enemy, and that they have full permission to put him to death as soon as they please?"

"Well, to say the truth, 'Squire John," said Pickett, "I don't see what you're driving at."

"You mean that you won't see, Ben," responded the other quickly; "listen awhile. You are agreed that it will do us no small service if the gamblers, or the Choctaws put a bullet through the ribs of Richard Hurdis; it will be a benefit rather than a harm to us."

"Well."

"But suppose, they think it will not benefit them, are we to forego our benefits because they showthemselves selfish? Shall Richard Hurdis survive the Choctaws, and come home to trouble us? Think of it, Ben Pickett; what folly it would be to suffer it. Why not speed some one after the traveller, who will apprise the gamblers, or the Choctaws, of our enemy——who will show them how troublesome he is——how he carries a good sum of money in his saddle−bags? How easy it will be for them to stop a troublesome traveller who has money in his saddle−bags? It may be, that such a messenger might do the business himself in consideration of the benefit and the money; but how should we or any body know that it was done by him? The Choctaws, Ben——the Choctaws will get the blame, we the benefit, and our messenger, if he pleases, the money."

"I understand you now, 'Squire," said Pickett.

"I knew you would," replied John Hurdis, "and only wonder that you did not readily comprehend before. Hear me, Ben; I have a couple of hundred dollars to spare——they are at your service. Take horse to−morrow, and track Richard Hurdis into the 'Nation;' he is your enemy and mine. He is gone there to look for land. Give him as much as he needs. Six feet will answer all his purposes, if your rifle carries as truly now, as it did a year ago."

The man looked about him with apprehension ere he replied. When he did so, his voice had sunk into a hoarse breathing, the syllables of which were scarce distinguishable.

"I will do it," he said, grasping the hand of his cold and cowardly tempter. "I will do it; it shall be done; but by God, 'Squire, I would much rather do it with his whip warm upon my back, and his angry curses loud in my ears."

"Do it as you will, Ben; but let it be done. The Choctaws are cruel and treacherous people, and these gamblers of the Mississippi are quite as bad. Their murders are very common. It was very imprudent for Richard to travel at this season; but if he dies, he has no body but himself to blame."

They separated. The infernal compact was made and chronicled in their mutual memories, and witnessed only by the fiends that prompted the hellish purpose.

CHAPTER XII.

Thou trust'st a villain, he will take thy hand
And use it for his own; yet when the brand
Hows the dishonor'd member——not his loss——
Thou art the victim!
—— The Flight

When Pickett returned to his hovel on leaving John Hurdis, his wife abruptly addressed him thus:

"Look you, Ben, John Hurdis comes after no good to night. I see it in that smile he has. I know there's mischief in his eye. He laughs but he does not look on you while he laughs——it isn't an honest laugh as if the heart was in it, and as if he wasn't afraid to have every thing known in his heart. He's a bad man, Ben, whatever other people may think; and though he has helped you once or twice, I don't think him any more certain your friend for all that. He only wants to make use of you, and if you let him go too far, Ben, mark my words, he'll leave you one day in a worse hobble than ever he helped you out of."

"Pshaw, Betsy, how you talk——you've a spiteagainst John Hurdis, and that's against reason too. You forget how he saved me from his brother."

"No, I do not forget it, Ben. He did no more than any man should have done, who saw a dozen about to trample upon one. He saved you, it is true, but he has made you pay him for it. He has made you work for him long enough for it, high and low, playing a dirty sort of a game, carrying letters to throw in people's paths, there's no knowing for what; and telling you what to say in people's ears, when you havn't always been certain that you've been speaking truth when you did so. I don't forget that he served you, Ben, but I also know that you are serving him day and night in return. Besides, Ben, what he did for you was what one gentleman might readily do for another——I'm not sure that what he makes you do for him isn't rascal work."

"Hush!" said Pickett, in a whisper, "you talk too loud. Is Jane asleep?"

The watchful idiot, with the cunning of imbecility which still has its object, closed her eyes, and put on the appearance of one lost to all consciousness.

"Yes, she's asleep; but what if she does hear us? She's our own child, though not a wise one, and it will be hard if we can't trust ourselves to speak before her," said the mother.

"But there's something, Betsy, that we shouldn't speak at all before any body."

"I hope the business of John Hurdis aint of that character, Ben Pickett," she retorted quickly.

"And what if it is?" he replied.

"Why then, Ben, you should have nothing to do with it, if you'll mind what I'm telling you. John Hurdis will get you into trouble. He's a bad man."

"What, for helping me out of trouble?"

"No, but for hating his own brother as he does, his own flesh and blood as I may say, the child that has suckled at the same nipple with himself; and what's worse, for fearing the man he hates. Now, I say that the hate is bad enough and must lead to harm; but when he's a coward that hates, then nothing's too bad for him to do, provided he can keep from danger when he does it. That's the man to light the match, and run away from the explosion. He'll make you the match, and he'll take your fingers to light it, and then take to his own heels and leave you all the danger."

"Pshaw, Betsy, you talk like a woman and a child," said Pickett with an air of composure and indifference which he was far from feeling.

"And so I do, Ben; and if you'll listen to a woman's talk, it will be wise. It would have saved you many times before, and it may do much to save you now. Why should you do any business that you're afraid to lay out to me. There must be something wrong in it, I'm sure; and it can't be nosmall wrong neither, Ben; that you're afraid to tell me. What should the rich 'Squire Hurdis want of Ben Pickett the squatter? Why should he come palavering you, and me, and that poor child with fine words; and what can we, poor and mean and hated as we are by every body, what can we do for so great a man as him. I tell you, Ben Pickett, he wants you to do dirty work, that he's ashamed and afraid to do himself. That's it, Ben; and there's no denying it. Now, why should you do his dirty

work? He's better able to do it himself, he's rich enough to do almost what he pleases; and you, Ben, you're too poor to do even what is proper. These rich men ask what right a poor man has to be good and honest; they expect him to be a rascal."

"Well," said the other sulkily, "we ought to be so then, if it's only to oblige them."

"No, Ben Pickett, we ought hardly to oblige them in any thing; but, whether we would oblige them or not, my notion is, we ought to keep different tracks from them altogether. If we are too mean and poor, to be seen by them without turning up their noses, let us take care not to see them at any time, or if we do see them, let us make use of our eyes to take different tracks from them. There's always two paths in the world, the one's a big path for big people; let them have it to themselves, and let us keep off it; the other's a little path for thelittle, let them stick to it and no jostling. It's the misfortune of poor people that they're always poking into the wrong path, trying to swell up to the size of the big, and making themselves mean by doing so. No wonder the rich despise such people. I despise them myself, though God knows I'm one of the poorest."

"I'm not one to poke in big paths," said Pickett.

"No! But why do big folks come out of their road into yours, Ben Pickett? I'll tell you. Because they think they can buy you to go into any path, whether big or little, high or low, clean or dirty. John Hurdis says in his heart, I'm rich; Pickett's poor;——my riches can buy his poverty to clean the road for me where it's dirty. Isn't that it, Ben Pickett?"

The keen gray eyes of the woman were fixed on him with a glance of penetration, as she spoke these words, that seemed to search his very soul. The eyes of Pickett shrank from beneath their stare.

"Betsy, you're half a witch," he exclaimed with an effort at jocularity which was not successful.

"I knew it was something like that, Ben Pickett. John Hurdis would never seek you, except when he had dirty work on hand. Now, what's the work, Ben Pickett?"

"That's his secret, Betsy; and you know I can't tell you what concerns only another and not us."

"It concerns you; it is your secret too; Ben Pickett——it is my secret——it is the secret of that poor child."

The speaker little knew that the idiot was keenly listening. She continued:

"If it's to do his work, and if it's work done in his name, work that you won't be ashamed of, and he won't be ashamed of when it's done, Ben Pickett, then it's all right enough. You may keep his secret and welcome; I would not turn on my heel to know it. But if it's dirty work that you'll both be ashamed of, such as carrying stories to Mary Easterby, who is a good girl, and deserves the best; then it's but too much of that sort of work you've done already."

"It's nothing like that," said Pickett quickly. "But don't bother me any more about it, Betsy; for if you were to guess a hundred times, and guess right, I shouldn't tell you. So have done and go to bed."

"Ben Pickett, I warn you, take care what you do. This man, John Hurdis, is too strong for you. He's winning you fast, he'll wrong you soon. You're working for him too cheaply; he'll laugh at you when you come for pay; and may be, put to your own account the work you do on his. Beware, look what you're about, keep your eyes open; for I see clear as day light, that you're in a bad way. The work must be worse than dirty you're goingupon now, when you are so afraid to speak of it to me."

"I tell you, Betsy, shut up. It's his business not mine, and I'm not free to talk of it even to you. Enough that I don't work for nothing. The worst that you shall know of it will be the money it will bring."

"The devil's money blisters the fingers. And what's money to me, Ben Pickett, or what is money to you? What can money do for us? Can it make men love us and seek us? Can it bring us pride and character? Can it make me forget the scorn that I've been fed on from the time I was a simpler child, than that poor idiot in the corner? Can it bring sense into her mind, and make us proud of her? Can it make you forget or others forget, Ben Pickett, that you have been hauled to the whipping post, and saved from it only to be the slave of a base coward, such as John Hurdis has ever been, and ever will be?"

"No more of that, Betsy, if you please. You are quite too fond of bringing up that whipping post."

"And if I do, it has its uses. I wish you would think of it half as frequently, Ben Pickett; you would less frequently stand in danger of it. But I speak of it, because it is one of the black spots in my memory——like the lack of that child——like the scorn of those around us——like every thing that belongs to us, as we are living now. Why will you not go as I wish you, away from this neighbourhood? Let us go to the Red River where we know no body; where no body knows us. Let us go among the savages, if you please, Ben Pickett, where I may

see none of the faces that remind me of our shame."

"Why, so we will. Just as you say, Betsy. I will but do some business that I'm bound for, that will give us money to go upon and then——"

"No, don't wait for that. Let the money stay; we have enough to carry us to the Red River, and we shall want but little of it there. When you talk to me of money you vex me. We have no use for it. We want hominy only, and homespun. These are enough to keep from cold and hunger. To use more money, Ben Pickett, we must be good and conscious of good. We must not stand in fear and shame, to meet other than our own eyes. I have that fear and shame, Ben Pickett; and this dirty business of John Hurdis——it must be dirty since it must be a secret——makes me feel new fear of what is to come; and I feel shame even to sickness as I think upon it. Hear me, Ben; hear me while it is in time for me to speak. There may not be time to−morrow, and if you do not listen to me now, you might listen another day in vain. Drop this business of John Hurdis——"

"I've promised him."

"Break your promise."

"No! d——d if I do that!"

"And why not? There's no shame in breaking a bad promise. There's shame and cowardice in keeping it."

"I'm no coward, Betsy."

"You are! You're afraid to speak the truth to me, to your wife and child. I dare you to wake up that poor idiot and say to her, weak and foolish as she is, the business you're going on for John Hurdis. You'd fear that, in her very ignorance, she would tell you that your intention was crime!"

"Crime!"

"Ay, crime——lies perhaps in a poor girl's ear——theft perhaps——the robbery of some traveller on the highway; perhaps——perhaps——Oh, Ben Pickett, my husband, I pray to God, it be not murder!"

"Damnation, woman! will you talk all night?" cried the pale and quivering felon in a voice of thunder. "To bed, I say, and shut up. Let us have no more of this."

The idiot girl started in terror from her mattress.

"Lie down, child; what do you rise for?"

The stern manner of her father frightened her into obedience, and she resumed her couch, wrapping the coverlet over her head, and thus, hiding her face and hushing her sobs at the same moment. Thewife concluded the dialogue by a repetition of her exhortation in brief.

"Once more, Ben, I warn you. You are in danger. You will tell me nothing; but you have told me all. I know you well enough to know that you have sold yourself to do wrong——that John Hurdis has bought you to do that which he has not the courage to do himself——"

"Yet you say I am a coward."

"I say so still. I wish you were brave enough to want no more money than you can honestly get; and when a richer man than yourself comes to buy you to do that which he is too base to do himself, to take him by the shoulder and tumble him from the door. Unfortunately you have courage enough to do wrong——there's a greater courage than that, Ben Pickett, that strengthens even a starving man to do right."

Pickett felt that he had not this courage, and his wife had before this discovered that the power was not in her to endow him with it. Both parties were compelled, when they discovered the idiot girl to be awake and watchful, to forego their discussion of the subject for the night; and when the woman did resume it, which she did with a tenacity of purpose, worthy of a more ostentatious virtue; she was only successful in arousing that sort of anger in her companion, which is but too much the resort of the wilful when the argument goes against them. It was more easy for Pickett, with the sort of courage which he possessed, to do wrong than right, and having once resolved to sin, the exhortations of virtue were only so many suggestions to obstinacy. With a warmth and propriety infinitely beyond her situation did the wife plead; but her earnestness, though great, was not equal to the doggedness of his resolve. She was compelled to give up the cause in despair.

CHAPTER XIII.

His was the fault; be his the punishment.
'Tis not their own crimes only, men commit;
They harrow them into another's breast,
And they shall reap the bitter growth with pain.
—— Landor

The messenger of blood departed the next day upon his fearful mission. His calculation was to keep due pace with his victim; to watch his progress; command his person at all times, and to avail himself of the first fitting opportunity, to execute the cruel trust which he had undertaken. Such a purpose required the utmost precaution and some little time. To do the deed might be often easy; to do it secretly and successfully, but seldom. He was to watch the single moment in a thousand, and be ready to use it before it was gone forever.

"You will not be gone long, Ben?" said the wife, as he busied himself in preparation.

"I know not——a day, a week, a month!——I know not. It matters little; you can do without me."

"Yes, your wife can do without you——I wish that John Hurdis could do without you also. I do notlike this business, Ben, upon which he sends you now."

"What business? what know you of it?" he demanded hastily. "Why should you dislike the business which you know nothing about?"

"That's the very reason that makes me dislike it. Why should I know nothing about it? Why should a man keep his business from his wife's knowledge?"

"Good reason enough, to keep it from the knowledge of every body else. You might as well print it in the Montgomery paper, as tell it to a woman. There won't be a Methodist preacher that don't hear of it the first week, and not a meeting in the country that won't talk of it the second. They have quite enough of other folks's affairs to blab, Betsy; we needn't give them any of mine."

"You well enough know, Ben Pickett, that this sort of talk means nothing. You know I am not the woman to make her own or her husband's concerns the business of the country. I go not often to the church. I do not often see the preachers, and there is very little to say between us. It might be much better if there were more; and you know well enough, that I see few women and have no neighbours. We are not the people to have neighbours—— what would tempt them? It is enough for me, Ben, to stay at home, and keep as much out of sight as I can,as well on your account as on account of that poor ignorant creature."

"Pshaw! you talk too much of Jane, and think too much of her folly. She is no more a fool than most other girls of her age, and talks far less nonsense. She's quite as good as any of them, and a devilish sight handsomer than most of them. There's hardly one that wouldn't be glad to have her face."

"You mean me, father Ben, don't you?" said the witless one, perking up her face with a smile and raising it under the chin of Pickett.

"Go, Jane, go and put the things to rights on the table, and don't mind what we're a saying."

The girl obeyed reluctantly, and the father, tapping her on the head kindly, the only parting which he gave her, left the house, and proceeded to his horse which was fastened to the fence. There he arranged the saddle, and while thus employed his wife came to him.

"Ben Pickett," she said, resuming the subject of her apprehensions, "I heard that Richard Hurdis is going to the 'Nation' to day."

"Well! what of that!" said Pickett gruffly.

"Nothing but this, Ben; I'm afraid that his going to the 'Nation' has something to do with your journey. Now, I don't know what it is that troubles me, but I am troubled, and have been so ever since I heard that Richard was going to day."

"And how did you hear it?"

"From Jane."

"Jane, the fool! how did she hear it?"

"She is a fool, but there's no need for you to call her so always, Ben. It's not right; it's not like a father. As for

where she heard it, I can't say; I didn't ask her; perhaps from some of the negroes. old Billy, from 'Squire Easterby's was over here, last night."

"Last night! old Billy! at what hour was he here?"

"Nay, I don't know exactly. He went away just before John Hurdis came."

Pickett appeared annoyed by the intelligence, but was silent and concealed his annoyance, whatever may have occasioned it, by strapping his saddle and busying himself with the bridle of his horse.

"You say nothing, Ben; but tell me, I beg you, and ease my mind, only tell me that the business you're going upon don't concern Richard Hurdis. Say, only say, you don't go the same road with Richard Hurdis, that you didn't know that he was going, that you won't follow him."

"And how should I say such a thing, Betsy," replied the now obdurate ruffian, "when I don't know which road he's going? How can I follow him, if I don't know the track he takes?"

"That's not it——not it. Tell me that you won'ttry to find it, that you don't mean to follow him, that——Oh! my God, that I should ask such a thing of my husband——that you are not going after Richard Hurdis to kill him?"

"Betsy, you're a worse fool than Jane;" was the reply of Pickett. "What the devil put such nonsense into your head? What makes you think I would do such a thing? It's true, I hate Dick Hurdis, but I don't hate him bad enough to kill him, unless in fair fight. If he'll give me fair fight at long shot, by God, I'd like nothing better than to crack at him; but I'm not thinking of him. If I had wanted to kill him, don't you think I'd a done it long before, when he was kicking me about like a foot−ball. You may be sure I won't try to do it now, when he's let me alone, and, when, as you say yourself, he's going out of the country. Damn him, let him go in peace, say I."

"Amen," exclaimed the woman, "amen; yet, look you, Ben Pickett. What you mightn't feel wicked enough to do for yourself, you may be weak enough to do for one who is more wicked than you are. That's the misfortune of a great many people; and the devil gets them to do a great deal of work, which they wouldn't be willing to do on their own account. Oh, Ben, take care of that John Hurdis If you didn't hate Richard Hurdis bad enough to kill him on your own score, don't let that cowardlyJohn tempt you to do it for him. I know he hates his brother and wants to get him out of the way; for he wants to marry Mary Easterby; but don't let him make use of you in any of his wickedness. He stands no chance of Mary with all his trying, for I know she won't have him; and so, if you work for him, you will work against the wind, as you have done long enough both for yourself and him. But whether you work for him or not, hear me, Ben Pickett; do nothing that you'll be ashamed or afraid to hear of again. My mind misgives me about Dick Hurdis. I wish you were not a−going——I wish you were not a−going the same day with him."

"Don't I tell you, Betsy, I'm not on his trail? I shan't look after him, and don't care to see him."

"Yes, but should you meet?"

"Well, what then? Would you have me cut and run like a nigger's dog?"

"No, but I would not have you go to day. I would rather you shouldn't meet."

"We won't, be sure of that. I promise you, we won't meet; and if we do, be sure we shan't quarrel."

"You'll promise that, Ben? you'll swear it?" said the woman eagerly.

"Ay, to be sure, I will; I swear Betsy, I won't meet him, and we shan't quarrel, if I can help it."

"That's enough Ben, and now go in peace, andcome back soon. It's off my mind now, Ben, since you promise me; but it's been a trouble and a fear to me, this going of yours to day, ever since I heard that Richard Hurdis was to be on the road."

"Pshaw! you're a fool all over about Dick Hurdis," said Pickett with a burly air of good humour. "I believe now, Betsy, that you like him better than me."

"Like him!" exclaimed the woman relapsing into the phlegmatic and chilling sternness of expression and countenance which were her wonted characteristics in ordinary moods. "Like him! I neither like nor dislike, Ben Pickett, out of this paling. These old logs, and this worm fence, contain all that I can expend feeling upon, and when you talk to me of likes and dislikes, you only mock at your own condition and mine."

The man said no more, and they separated. She returned to the house, and in a few moments he leaped upon his horse, which was a light−made and fast−going though small animal, and was soon out of sight even of the idiot girl, who laughed and beckoned to him, without being heeded, until his person was no longer visible in the dull gray of the forests which enveloped him.

"Fool!" he exclaimed as he rode out of hearing, "fool to think to make me swear what she pleases, and then to take the oath just as I think proper. Iwill not meet him, and still less will I quarrel with him if I can help it; but I will try and put a bullet through him for all that. It's an old score, and may as well be wiped out now as never. This year is just as good for settlement, as the next. Indeed, for that matter, it's best now. It's much the safest. He breaks off from one neighbourhood, and they know nothing of him in any other. Well, as John Hurdis said, the Choctaws have done it, or the gamblers. Ben Pickett has been too long quiet, and lives too far off from the nation, to lay it to his door. And yet, by God, it's true what Betsy says, that John Hurdis is a poor coward after all."

It was in thoughts and musings, such as these—— sometimes muttered audibly, but most frequently entertained in secret——that Ben Pickett commenced his pursuit of me, a few hours only after I had begun my journey. Circumstances, however, and probably an error in the directions given him by my brother, misled him from the path, into which he did not fall until late the ensuing day. This gave me a start of him which he would not have made up, had I not come to a full stop at Tuscaloosa. But of this afterwards.

CHAPTER XIV.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways,
Beside the springs of Dove,
A maid, whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.
A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye,
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.
—— Wordsworth
And yet lack!
—— Shakspeare,

The afternoon of the day following that of Pickett's departure was one of the loveliest among the lovely days so frequent in the Alabama November. The glances of the oblique sun rested with a benignant smile, like that of some venerable and single hearted sire, upon the groves of the forest, which, by this time, had put on all the colours of the rainbow. The cold airs of coming winter had been just severe enough to put a flush−like glow into the cheeks of the leaf, and to envelope the green, here and there, with a coating of purple and yellow, which served it as some rich and becoming border, and made the brief remains of the gaudy garb ofsummer seem doubly rich, and far more valuable in such decorations. Dark brown and blooded berries hung wantonly from bending branches, and trailing vines, that were smitten and torn asunder by premature storms of cold, lay upon the path and depended from over head, with life enough in them still, even when severed from the parent stem, to nourish and maintain the warm and grape like clusters which they bore. Thousands of flowers, of all varieties of shape and colour came out upon the side of the path, and, as it were, threw themselves along the thoroughfare only to be trodden upon; while, hidden in the deeper recesses of the woodland, millions beside appeared to keep themselves in store only to supply the places of those which were momently doomed to suffer the consequences of exposure and to perish beneath the sudden gusts or the equally unheeding footsteps of the wayfarer. Hidden from sight only by the winter bloom, that absorbed all space, and seemed resolute to exclude from all sight, thousands of trees, of more delicate nature, already stripped of their foliage, stood like mourning ghosts or withered relics of the past——the melancholy spider, the only living decoration of their gaunt and stretching arms——her web now completely exposed in the absence of the leaves, under whose sheltering volume, it had been begun in secret. At moments the breeze would gather itself up from the dead leaves that strewed the paths of the forest, andruffle lightly, in rising, the pleasant bed where it had lain. A kindred ruffler of leaves and branches, was the nimble squirrel, who skipped along the forests, making all objects subservient to his forward motion; and now and then the rabbit timidly stealing out from the long yellow grass beside the bay, would bound and crouch alternately; the sounds that shake the lighter leaves and broken branches, stirring her heart with more keen and lasting sensations, and compelling her to pause in her progress, in constant dread of the pursuer.

A fitting dweller in a scene of such innocence and simplicity was the thoughtless and unendowed creature that now enters it; her hand filled with bush and berry and leaf, sought with care, pursued with avidity, gathered with fatigue and thrown away without regard. A thousand half formed plans in her mind——if the idiot child of Ben Pickett may be said to possess one——a thousand crowding, yet incomplete conceits, hurrying her forward in a pursuit only begun to be discarded for others more bright, yet not more enduring; and from her lips a heartfelt laugh or cry of triumph poured forth in the merriest tones of childhood, while the tears gather in her eyes, and she sits upon the grass, murmuring and laughing and weeping; all by turns and nothing long. From the roadside she has gathered the pale blue and yellow flowers, and these adorn her head,and peep out from her bosom. Now she bounds away to hidden bushes after flaunting berries, and now she throws herself upon a bank and tears to pieces the flowers and shrubs which have cost her so much pains to gather. She sings and weeps by turns as she thus employs herself, and prating in idiot soliloquy at fits, she speaks to the flowers that she rends, and has some idle history of each.

"There's more of blue than of the others, and sure there should be, for the skies are blue, and they take their colour from the skies. But I don't want so much of the blue; I won't have so much; I must have more yellow; and there's a little pink flower that Mister John showed me long time ago, if I could get only one of them; one would do me to put in the middle. There's a meaning in that little flower, and Mister John read it like a printed book. It has drops of yellow in the bottom, and it looks like a little cup for the birds to drink from. I must look for that. If I can only get one now, I would keep it for Mister John to read, and I would remember what he tells me of it. But Mister John don't love flowers, he does not wear them in his button hole as I see Mr. Richard; and Miss Mary loves flowers too; I always see her with a bunch of them in her hand, and she gathers great bunches for the fire−place at home. She reads them too like a book; but I will not get her to read my little pink flower for me. I will get Mister John; for he laughs when he reads it, and Miss Mary looks almost like she would cry, and she looks at me, and she does not look at the flower, and she carries me home with her; but Mister John takes me a long walk with him in the woods, and we gather more flowers together, and we sit down upon the log, and pull them to pieces. I wish he would come now. If he were with me, I could go deeper into the woods; but they look too black when I am by myself, and I will not go alone. There's more than twenty bears in those black woods, so mother tells me, and yet, when I go there with Mr. John, I don't see any, and I don't even hear them growl; they must be afraid of him, and run when they know he's coming. I wish he were coming to read my flower. I have one——I have two——if he would but come. Oh me, mother! what's that."

The girl started from the bank in fear, dashing down the flowers in the same instant, and preparing herself for flight. The voice of the intruder reassured her.

"Ah, Jane, my pretty, is it you?"

"Dear me, Mr. John, I'm so glad you're come. I thought it was the black bears. Mother says there's more than twenty in these woods, and tells me that I musn't go into them; that they'll eat me up, and won't even leave my bones. But whenyou're with me, Mister John, I'm not afraid of the bears."

"Humph!" was the unuttered thought of the new comer. "Not the less danger perhaps, but of this no matter."

"So you're afraid of the bears, my pretty Jane?" he said aloud.

"Ah no, not when you're with me, Mister John; they're afraid of you. But when I'm by myself, the woods look so black, I'm afraid to go into them."

"Pretty idiot!" exclaimed John Hurdis, for it was he; "but you're not afraid now, Jane; let us take a walk and laugh at these bears. They will not not stop to look at us, and if they do, all we have to do is to laugh at them aloud, and they'll be sure to run. There's no danger in looking at them when they run, you know."

"No, to be sure; but Mr. John——stop. I don't know whether I ought to go with you any longer; for do you know——" Here she lowered her voice to a whisper, and looked cautiously around her as she spoke; "do you know mother's been talking to dad about you, and she says——but I won't tell you."

And, with a playful manner she turned from him as she finished the sentence, and proceeded to gather up the flowers, which, in her first alarm, she had scattered all around her. He stooped to assist her, and putting his arm about her waist, theywalked forward into the wood, the silly creature all the while refusing to go, yet seeming perfectly unconscious that she was even then complying with his demand. When they were somewhat concealed within its recesses, he stopped, and with some little anxiety, demanded to know what it was that her mother had said.

"I won't tell you, Mr. John, I won't."

He knew very well how to effect his purpose, and replied calmly,

"Well if you won't tell me, Jane, I will call the bears——"

"No, don't," she screamed aloud; "don't, Mister John, I'll tell you every thing; did you think I would'nt tell you, Mister John; I was only in play. Wait now till I pick up this little pink flower, Mister John, that's got the yellow drops in the bottom, and I'll tell you all. This is the flower that you read to me, Mister John; do now, that's a good dear, do read it to me now."

"Not now, Jane——after you tell me about your mother."

"Yes; but Mister John, would you set the bears on me for true?"

"To be sure, if you wouldn't tell me. Come Jane, be quick, or I'll call them."

"No, don't——don't, I beg you. I'm sure it's nothing so great to tell you, but I tell you, MisterJohn, you see, because mother didn't want you to know. Dad and she talked out, but when they thought I was awake, oh, then

there was no more talk for awhile; but I heard them all."

"All what, Jane?"

"Oh, don't you know? All about you and Dad, and Mister Richard, and how you hate Mister Richard, and how Dad is to shoot him——"

"The d——l! You didn't hear that, Jane!" was the exclamation of the thunderstruck criminal; his voice thick with apprehension, his limbs trembling, his flesh shrinking and shivering, and his eyes, full of wonder and affright, absolutely starting from the sockets. So sudden had been the revelation, it might well have startled or stunned a much bolder spirit than was his. He led, almost dragged her, still deeper into the woods, as if he dreaded the heedful ears of any passing traveller.

"What have you heard, Jane? what more did your mother say? She surely said not what you tell me; how could she know——how could she say it? She did not say it, Jane, she could not."

"Oh, yes, but she did; she said a great deal more, but it's no use telling you."

"How no use! Tell me all, Jane. Come my pretty, tell me all that your mother said, and how she came to say it. Did your father say it to her first."

"Who, Dad! Lord bless you, Mister John, no. Dad never tells mother nothing, and what she knows she knows by herself, without him."

"Indeed! But this about Richard and your father; you don't mean that your mother knew any such thing. Your father told her; you heard him talking to her about it."

"No, I tell you. Father wouldn't talk at all. It was mother that talked the whole. She asked Dad, and Dad wouldn't tell her, and so she told him."

"Told him what! did she hear?"

"Yes, she told him as how you loved Miss Mary; but Mister John, it isn't true that you love Miss Mary, is it?"

"Pshaw! Jane, what nonsense. Go on; tell me about your mother."

"Well, I knew it couldn't be that you loved Miss Mary. I don't want you to love her; she's a fine lady, and a sweet, good lady, but I don't like you to love her; it don't seem right; and——"

The impatient, anxious spirit of John Hurdis could no longer brook the trifling of the idiot, which, at another period, and with a mind less excited and apprehensive, he would rather have encouraged than rebuked. But now, chafing with excited feelings and roused fears, he did not scruple to interrupt her.

"Nonsense, Jane——nonsense. Say no more ofMary, but tell me of your mother. Tell me how she began to speak to your father. What she said? What she knows? And we'll talk of Miss Mary, and other matters afterwards. What did she say of Richard? What of me? And this shooting of your father."

"Oh, she didn't say about shooting Dad; no, no, it was Mr. Richard that he was to shoot."

"Well——well, tell me that——that!"

"Oh, dear me, Mr. John——what a flurry you're in. I'm sure I can't tell you any thing when you look so. You frighten me too much; don't look so, Mr. John, if you please."

The trembling criminal tried to subdue the appearance of anxiety and terror, which the girl's countenance and manner sufficiently assured him must be evident in his own. He turned from her for an instant, moved twice or thrice around a tree——she meanwhile watching his proceedings with a degree of curiosity that made her forget her fears——then, returning, with a brow somewhat smoothed, and a half smile upon his lips, he succeeded in persuading her to resume a narrative, which her natural imbecility of mind, at no period, would have enabled her to give consecutively. By questions carefully put, and at the proper moment, he at length got from her the whole amount of her knowledge, and learned enough to conclude, as was the truth, that what hadbeen said by the mother of the girl had been said conjecturally. His fear had been that she had stolen forth on the previous night, and secreting herself near the place of conference between Pickett and himself, had witnessed the interview and comprehended all its terms. However relieved from his fear by the revelation of the idiot, he was still not a little annoyed by the close guessing of the woman. A mind so acute, so penetrating, so able to search into the bosom, and watch its secret desires without the help of words, was able to effect yet more; and he dreaded its increased activity in the present business. Vague apprehensions still floated in his soul though he strove to dissipate them, and he felt a degree of insecurity which made him half forgetful of his simple and scarcely conscious companion. She, meanwhile, dwelt upon the affair which she had narrated, with a tenacity as strange as had been her former reluctance or indifference; until, at length, as she repeated her mother's unfavourable opinion of himself, his

disquiet got the better of his courtesy, for he exclaimed aloud:

"No more of this nonsense, Jane. Your mother's a fool, and the best thing she can do hereafter, is to keep her tongue."

"No, no! Mr. John," replied the girl earnestly, "mother's no fool, Mr. John; it's Jane that's a fool.Every body calls Jane a fool, but nobody calls mother so."

"I don't call you so, Jane," said Hurdis kindly sitting beside her as he spoke, and putting his arm about her waist.

"No, Mr. John, I know you don't, and" in a whisper, "I'd like you to tell me, Mr. John, why other people call me so? I'm a big girl, and I can run and walk, and ride like other people. I can spin and I can sew. I help mother plant potatoes, I can break the corn, hull it and measure it, and can do a hundred things beside. I talk like other people, and did you ever see a body pick flowers, and such pretty ones faster than me, Mr. John?"

"No, Jane, I never did."

"And such pretty ones too, Mr. John. Look at this little pink one, with the yellow drops; come, read it to me, now, Mr. John, and show me how to read it like you?"

"Not now, Jane! some other time. Give me a kiss now, a sweet kiss?

"Well there, no body asks me to kiss but you and Miss Mary sometimes, Mr. John——sometimes I kiss mother, but she don't seem to like it. I wonder why, Mr. John——it must be because I'm a fool."

"No, no, Jane, you're not a fool."

"I wish I wasn't, Mr. John, I don't think I am. For you know, I told you, how many things I can do just like other people."

"Yes, Jane, and you have a sweeter little mouth than any body. You kiss like a little angel, and your cheeks are as rosy——"

"Oh, don't Mr. John, that's enough. Lord, if mother was only to see us now, what would she say? Tell me, Mr. John, why don't I want mother to see me, when you're so good to me? And when you kiss me so, what makes me afraid and tremble? It is strange, Mr. John."

"It's because your mother's cross to you, and cold, and gets vexed with you so often, Jane."

"Do you think so, Mr. John? But, it can't be; mother isn't cross to me, Mr. John, and she hasn't whipped me I don't know the day when. She don't know that you walk with me into the woods, Mr. John——why don't I want to tell her——it's so very strange? She would be mighty vexed if she was to see me now.

Hurdis answered her with a kiss, and in the next instant the tread of a sudden footstep behind them, and the utterance of a single word by the intruder caused the simple girl to scream out, and to leap like an affrighted deer from the arms that embraced her.

CHAPTER XV.

Medea.
I thought as much when first from thickest leaves,
I saw you trudging in such posting pace.
But to the purpose; what may be the cause
Of this most strange and sudden banishment?
Fausta.
The cause, ask you? a simple cause, God wot;
Twas neither treason, nor yet felony,
But for because I blamed his foolishness.
Medea.
I hear you say so, but I greatly fear,
Ere that your tale be brought unto an end,
You'll prove yourself the author of the same.
But pray, be brief; what folly did your spouse,
And how will you revenge your wrong on him?
—— Robert Greene.

Her fear seemed to possess the power of a spell to produce the very person whose presence she most dreaded. As if in compliance with its summons, her mother stood before her. Her tall majestic form, raised to its fullest height by the fever of indignation in her mind, stood between her idiot daughter and the astounded John Hurdis. He had sprung to his feet on the instant when Jane, in terror, had started from his embrace, and without daring to face the woman, he stood fixed to the spot where she first confronted him. Her meagre, usually pale and severefeatures, were now crimsoned with indignation——her eyes flashed a fire of feeling and of character which lifted her, however poor and lowly had been her birth and was her station, immeasurably above the base creature whose superior wealth had furnished the facilities, and, too frequently in the minds of men, provide a sanction, for the vilest abuses of the dependence and inferiority of the poor. The consciousness of wrong in his mind totally deprived him at that instant, of those resources of audacity with which he who meditates villany should always be well supplied; and, woman as she was——poor, old, and without character and command as was the wife of the worthless Pickett——the sound of her voice went through the frame of Hurdis with a keenness that made him quiver. And yet the tones were gentle; they were studiously subdued, and from this cause, indeed, their influence was most probably increased upon both Hurdis and the daughter.

"Jane, my child, go home——go home!"

These were words not to be disobeyed by the trembling and weeping idiot. Yet she looked and lingered——she fain would have disobeyed them for the first time——but the bony and long finger of the mother was uplifted, and simply pointed in the direction of their cottage, which was not visible from the point on which they stood. Slowly at first, then,after she had advanced a few paces, bounding off with the rapidity of fear, the girl hurried away, and was soon lost to the sight of the two remaining persons.

When satisfied that she was no longer within sound of their voices, for her keen eye had followed all the while the retreating footsteps of the maiden, she turned the entire force of its now voluminous expression upon the man before her. Her gray eyebrows, which were thick, were brought down by the muscular compression of the skin of the forehead, into a complete pent house above her eyes, and served to concentrate their rays, which shot forth like summer lightning from the sable cloud. The lips were compressed with a smiling scorn, her whole face partaking of the same contemptuous and withering expression. John Hurdis stole but a single glance at the features which were also full of accusation, and, without looking a second time, turned uneasily away. But the woman did not suffer him to escape. She drew nigher——she called him by name; and, though she spoke in low and quiet tones, they were yet such that he did not venture to persist in his movement, which seemed to threaten as prompt and rapid a departure as that of the idiot. Her words began, abruptly enough, with one of the subjects nearest to her heart. She was not a woman to trifle. The woods in which she had lived, and their obscurity, had

taught lessons of taciturnity, and it was, therefore, in the fulness of her heart only, that she suffered her lips to speak.

"And wherefore is it" she demanded, "that Mr. Hurdis takes such pains to bring the idiot daughter of Ben Pickett into these secret places? Why do these woods, which are so wild——so little beautiful, and attractive——so far inferior to his own——why do they tempt him to these long walks? And this poor child, is it that he so pities her infirmity——which every body should pity——that he seeks her for a constant companion in these woods, where no eye may watch over his steps, and no ear hear the language which is uttered in her own? Explain to me this, I pray you, Mr. Hurdis. Why is it that these woods are so much more agreeable to you than your father's or 'Squire Easterby's, and why a gentleman, who makes bold to love Mary Easterby, and who values her sense and smartness, can be content with the idle talk of an unhappy child like mine? Tell me what it means, I intreat you, Mr. Hurdis; for in truth——supposing that you mean rightly——it is all a mystery to me."

The very meekness of the woman's manner helped to increase the annoyance of Hurdis. It was too little offensive to find fault with; and yet the measured tones of her voice had in them so much that was bitter that he could not entirely conceal fromher that he felt it. His reply was such as might have been expected.

"Why, Mrs. Pickett, I meant no harm, to be sure. As for the woods, they are quiet and pretty enough for me; and though, it is true, that my own or Mr. Easterby's are quite as pretty, yet that's no reason, one should be confined only to them. I like to ramble elsewhere by way of change, and to day, you see, happening to see your daughter as I rambled, I only jointed her and we walked together; that's all."

"And do you mean to say, Mr. Hurdis, that you have never before joined Jane Pickett in these walks?"

"To be sure not——no——"

"Ha!"

"Yes, that's to say, I don't make a practice of it. I may have walked with her here once, or it may be. twice before, Mrs. Pickett——"

"Ay, sir, twice, thrice, and a half dozen times, if the truth is to be told," exclaimed the woman vehemently. "I have seen you, sir, thrice myself and watched your footsteps, and heard your words—— words cunningly devised, sir, to work upon the simple feelings of that poor ignorant, whose very feebleness should commend her to the protection, not the abuse, of a noble minded man. Deny it, sir, if you dare. I tell you, here, in the presence of theeternal God, that I have heard and seen you walk secretly in this wood with Jane Pickett more than three several times——nay more, sir, you have enticed her into it by various arts; and have abused her ignorance by speaking to her in language unbecoming in a gentleman to speak, and still more unbecoming in a female to hear. I have seen you, and heard you, sir, with my own eyes and ears; and that you have not done worse, sir, is perhaps only owing to her ignorance of your meaning."

"You, at least, would have known better, Mrs. Pickett," replied Hurdis with a sneer——the discovery of the woman being too obviously complete to leave him any hope from evasion.

"Your sneer falls harmlessly upon my mind, Mr. Hurdis——I am too poor, and too much of a mother, sir, to be provoked by that. It only shows you to me in a somewhat bolder point of view than I had been accustomed to regard you. I knew well enough your character, when I watched you in your walks with my child, and heard the language which you used in her ears——"

"Certainly a very commendable and honourable employment, Mrs. Pickett. I give you credit for it."

"Ay, sir, both proper and commendable when employed as a precaution against those whose designs are known to be improper, and whose character is without honour. I well enough understand yourmeaning. It was scarcely honourable, you would say, that I should place myself as a spy upon your conduct, and become an eavesdropper to possess myself of your counsels. These are fashions of opinion, sir, which have no effect upon me. I am a mother, and I was watching over the safety of a frail and feeble child, who, God help her that made her so! was too little able to take care of herself not to render it needful that I should do so. It was a mother's eye that watched——not you, sir, but her child——it was a mother's ear that sought to know——not the words which were spoken by John Hurdis, but all words, no matter of whom, which were poured into the ears of her child. I watched not you but her; and learn from me now, sir, that you never whistled her from our cabin that my cars caught not the signal as readily as hers——she never stole forth at your summons, but my feet as promptly followed hers. Do you wonder now that I should know you as I do? Ah, Mr. Hurdis, does it not shame you to the heart to think that you have schemed so long with all the arts of a cunning man for the ruin of a feeble idiot

scarcely sixteen years of age?"

"It's false!" exclaimed John Hurdis, hoarse with passion; "I tell you, woman, 'tis false, what you say. I had no such design."

"'Tis true, before Heaven that hears us, Mr. Hurdis; I say it is true," replied the woman in moderatetones. "You may deny it as you please, sir, but you can neither deceive Heaven nor me, and to us your denial must be unavailing. I could not mistake nor misunderstand your arts and language. You have striven to teach Jane Hurdis an idea of sin, and, perhaps, you have not succeeded in doing so, only because nobody yet has been able to teach her any idea——even one of virtue. But it was not only her mind that you strove to inform. You have appealed to the blood and to the passions of the child, and but for the mother that watched over her, you might have succeeded, at last, in your bad purposes. Oh, John Hurdis, if Ben Pickett could only know, what, for the sake of peace and to avoid bloodshed I have kept to myself, he would have thrust his knife into your throat long before this. I could have stopped you in your pursuit of my child, by a word to her father; for, low and poor as he is, and base as you may think you have made him, he has pride enough yet to avenge our dishonour. I have kept back what I had to say to this moment, and now I tell you and you, only, what I do know——it will be for yourself to say whether Ben Pickett shall ever know it."

"Pshaw, woman, you talk nonsense: and but that you are a woman, I could be very angry with you. As for doing any thing improper with Jane Pickett, I swear——"

"No, do not swear; for if you do, John Hurdis, if you dare swear that you had no such design, I will swear that you belie yourself——that your oath is false before Heaven, and that you are as black hearted and perjured, as I hold you base and cowardly. And if you did swear, of what use would be your oath. Could you hope to make me believe you after my own oath? Could you hope to deceive Heaven! Who else is here to listen? Keep your false oath for other witnesses, John Hurdis, who are more blind and deaf than I am, and more easily, deceived than the God who alone sees us now."

"Mrs. Pickett, you are a very singular woman. I don't know what to make of you."

The manner of the woman had absolutely quelled the base spirit of the man. When he spoke thus, he literally knew not what he said.

"You shall know more of me, Mr. Hurdis, before I have done," was her reply. "My feelings on the subject of my child, have almost made me forget some other matters upon which I have sought to speak with you. You questioned my child upon the subject of a conversation between her father and myself. She told you that we spoke of you."

"Yes; I think I remember," he said breathlessly, and with feeble utterance.

"You do remember; you must," said the woman. "You were very anxious to get the truth from mychild; you shall hear it all from me. You have sent Ben Pickett upon your business."

"He will not tell you that," said Hurdis.

"Perhaps not; but I know it."

"Well, what is it?"

"Dare you tell? No! And he dare not. The husband may not show to his own wife, the business upon which he goes. There is something wrong in it, and it is your business."

"It is not; he goes, if he goes at all, upon his own, not mine. I do not employ him."

"You do. Beware, John Hurdis; you are not half so secure as you pretend, and perhaps, think yourself. The eyes that watch the footsteps of a weak and idiot child, will not be the less heedful of those of a weak and erring husband. If Ben Pickett goes to do wrong, he goes upon your business. If wrong is done, and is traced to him, believe me—— for I swear it——I will perish in the attempt, but I will trace it home to its projector and proprietor. You are not, and you shall not be safe. I have my suspicions."

"What suspicions? I defy you to say I have any thing to do with your husband."

The boldness of John Hurdis was all assumed, and the veil was readily seen through by the keen sighted woman.

"I will confirm to your own ears the intelligencewhich you procured from my child. It was base in me to follow and to watch over her safety——it was not base in you to pick from her thoughtless lips the secrets of her parents, and the private conversation of her household. I will not ask you to define the distinction between the two. She told you the truth. I suspected that you were using Ben Pickett to do the villany which you had the soul

to conceive, but not to execute. I know some villanies on which you have before employed him."

"What villanies mean you?" he demanded anxiously.

"No matter now——I may find them of more use to me some future day than now. I will tell you now what were my fears——my suspicions——when you came to our cabin the last night and carried Ben Pickett with you into the woods——"

"You followed us? You heard——you listened to what was said between us?" was the hurried speech of Hurdis, his apprehensions denoted in his tremulous and broken utterance——in the startling glare of his eyes, and the universal pallor of his whole countenance. A smile of scorn played upon the lips of the woman——she felt her superiority. She spoke, after a moment's pause, during which the scorn of her face changed into sorrow.

"Your cheek betrays you, John Hurdis, and confirms my worst fears. I would that you had been more bold. I would have given much to have seen you more indifferent to my answer. Could you defy me now, as you did but a little while ago, I should sleep much easier to night. But now I tremble quite as much as you. I feel that all my doubts are true. I would have forgiven you your meditated wrong to my child could you have looked and spoken differently."

"God of Heaven, woman," exclaimed John Hurdis, with a feeling of desperation in his voice and manner——"what is it that you mean? Speak out and tell me all——say the worst——what is it that you know ——what is it you believe? Did you or did you not follow us last night? Did you hear my conference with your husband?"

"I did not!"

Hurdis was relieved by the answer. He breathed freely once more, as he replied——

"Ha! say no more then——I do not care to hear you now. I have had wind and fury enough."

"You must hear me. I will tell you now what I believe."

"I will not hear you. Let me go. I have heard enough. What is your belief to me?"

He would have passed her, but she caught his arm.

"You shall——but for one moment."

He paused, and like an impatient steed beneatha curb which chafes him, and from which he cannot break away, John Hurdis turned in her grasp, revolving upon the same ground while she spoke, and striving not to hear the language which yet forced itself upon his senses.

"I believe, John Hurdis, that you have sent my husband to do some violence. He denies it, and I have striven to believe him, but I cannot. Since he has left me, I find my suspicions return; and they take a certain shape to my mind, the more I think of them. I believe that you have sent him against your own brother whom you both hate and fear——"

"Woman——you lie!"

He broke away from her grasp, but lingered.

"I will not call you man, John Hurdis——but I will not think unkindly of you, if it be as you say, that I lie. God grant that my fears be false. But believing what I say——that you have despatched my husband to do a crime which you dare not do yourself, I tell you that if it be done——"

"He will be the criminal!" said Hurdis, in low but emphatic tones as he turned from her. "He will be the criminal, and if detected——if, as you think, he has gone to commit crime, and such a crime——the gallows, woman, will be the penalty, and it may be that your hand will guide him to it."

The woman shrank back and shivered; but only for an instant. Recovering she advanced——

"Not my hand, John Hurdis, but yours, if any. But let that day come, no matter whose hand shall guide Ben Pickett to such a doom, I tell you John Hurdis, he shall have company. You are rich, John Hurdis, and I am poor; but know from me that there is energy and resolution enough, in this withered bosom, to follow you in all your secret machinations, to trace your steps in any forests, and to bring you to the same punishment, or a worse, than that which you bring on him. I am poor and old——men scorn me, and my own sex turns away, and, sickening at my poverty, forget for a while that they are human, in ceasing to believe me so. But the very scorn of mankind will strengthen me; and when I am alone——when the weak man whom you entice with your money to do the deed from which you shrink, becomes your victim——beware of me; for so surely as there is a God in heaven, he will help me to find the evidence which shall bring you to punishment on earth."

"The woman is a fiend——a very devil!" cried Hurdis as he rushed from the strong and resolute spirit before

him. Her tall form was lifted beyond her ordinary height as she spoke, and he shrank from the intense fire that shot through her long gray eye−brows. "I would sooner face the devil," hemuttered as he fled. "There's something speaks in her that I fear! Curse the chance, but it is terrible to have such an enemy, and to feel that one is doing wrong."

He looked back but once ere he left the forest, and her eyes were still fixed upon him. He ventured no second glance; but, annoyed with a thousand apprehensions, to which the interview had given existence, he hurried homeward like one pursued, starting at every sound in the woods, though it were only the falling of a leaf in the sudden gust of November.

CHAPTER XVI.

You must eat men. Yet thanks, I must you con
That you are thieves professed; that you work not
In holier shapes; for there is boundless theft
In limited professions. Rascal thieves,
Here's gold.
——— Timon of Athens
So I leave you
To the protection of the prosperous gods,
As thieves to keepers.
——— I bid

In the meanwhile, Ben Pickett, moved with no such considerations as those which touched his wife, set forth in pursuit of his destined victim. His footsteps I may not pursue at present. It will be enough that I detail my own progress. The reader has already seen that I arrived safely at Tuscaloosa. How I came to escape him so far, I cannot say; since, allowing that he pursued me with even moderate avidity, he must have overtaken me if he had so purposed it. But, it is believed, that he mistook my route. He believed that I had struck directly for the river, on my nearest path to Chochuma. He had no knowledge of my companion's business in Tuscaloosa, and John Hurdis, being equally ignoranton that subject, could not counsel him. Whatever may have been the cause of my escape so far, from a foe whose aim was certain, and who had overcome all scruples of policy or conscience——if, indeed, he ever held them——I had reason for congratulating myself upon my own good fortune, which had availed for my protection against his murderous purpose. But, conscious of no evil then, and wholly ignorant of the danger I had thus escaped, I gave myself no concern against the future; and with all the buoyant recklessness of youth, pleased with novelty, and with faces turned for a new world, my companion and myself entered our strange lodgings in Tuscaloosa, with feelings of satisfaction amounting to enthusiasm. The town was little more than hewn out of the woods. Piles of brick and timber crowded the main, indeed, the only street of the place, and denoted the rawness and poverty of the region in all things which could please the eye, and minister to the taste of the traveller. But it had other resources in my sight. The very incompleteness and rude want of finish, indicated the fermenting character of life. The stagnation of the forests was disturbed. The green and sluggish waters of its inactivity were drained off into new channels of enterprise and effort. Life had opened upon it; its veins were filling fast with the life blood of human greatness; active and sleepless endeavours——and awarm sun seemed pouring down its rays for the first time upon the cold and covered bosom of its swamps and caverns. To the young, it matters not the roughness and the storm. Enthusiasm loves the encounter with biting winds, and active opposition; but there is death in inaction——death in the sluggish torpor of the old community, where ancient drones, like the old man of the sea on the shoulders of Sinbad, keep down the choice spirit of a country, and chill and palsy all its energies. There was more meaning in the vote of the countryman who ostracised Aristides, because he hated to hear him continually called "the Just," than is altogether visible to the understanding. The customary names of a country are very apt to become its tyrants.

Our lodging house was poor enough, but by no means wanting in pretension. You would vainly look for it now in Tuscaloosa. It has given way to more spacious and better conducted establishments. When we arrived, it was filled to overflowing, and, much against our will, we were assigned a chamber in common with two other persons, who were strangers to us. To this arrangement we vainly opposed all manner of objections. We were compelled to submit. Our landlord was a turbulent sort of savage, who bore down all opposition, and held to his laws, which were not often consistent with one another, with as hardy a tenacity as did the Medesand Persians. The long and short of it was that we must share our chamber with two other men, or seek lodgings elsewhere. This, in a strange town where no other tavern was yet dreamed of, was little else than a downright declaration that we might "go to the d——l and shake ourselves," and with whatever grace given, we were compelled to take the accommodations as they were accorded to us. We insisted on separate beds, however, and here we gained our point.

"Aye, you may have two a−piece," was the cold and ready answer; "one for each leg."

Our objections to a chamber in connection with strangers, did us no service in that wild community; and the rough adventurers about, seemed to hold us in no fair esteem on the strength of them. But they saw that we were able to hold our own, and that, in our controversy with the landlord, though we had been compelled to yield our point, we had yet given him quite as good as he sent; and so, they suffered their contempt to escape in winks to each other, and muttered sentences, which, as we only saw and heard them indistinctly, we were wise enough to take no heed of. Not that we did not feel in the humour to do so. My comrade fidgetted more than once with his heavy headed whip handle, and my own hand felt monstrous disposed to tap the landlord on his crown; but it was too obviously our policy to forbear, and we took ourselves off to our chamber as soon as we could beat a retreat gracefully.

Well might our landlord have given us two or four beds each. There were no less than twelve in the one apartment which had been assigned us. We chose our two, getting them as nigh each other as possible, and having put our saddle bags in a corner behind them, and got our dirks and pistols in readiness, some on the table and some under our pillows, we prepared to get to bed as fast as possible. Before we had entirely undressed, however, our two other occupants of the chamber appeared, one of whom we remembered to have seen in the bar−room below, at the time of our discussion with the landlord. They were, neither of them, calculated to impress me favourably. They were evidently too fond of their personal appearance to please one who was rather apt to be studiless of his. They were dandies——a sort of New York dandies: men with long coats and steeple crowned hats, great breast−pins, thick gold chains, and a big bunch of seals hanging at at their hips. "What the deuce!" thought I to myself, "brings such people into this country. Such gewgaws are not only in bad taste any where, but nowhere in such bad taste as in a wild and poor country such as ours. Of course, they cannot be gentlemen; that sort of ostentation is totally incompatible with gentility." Their first overtures did notimpress me more favourably towards them. They were disposed to be familiar at the start. There was an assumed composure, a laborious ease about them, which showed them to be practising a part. There is no difficulty in discovering whether a man has been bred a gentleman or not. There is no acquiring gentility at a late day, and but few, not habituated to it from the first, can ever, by any art, study, or endeavour, acquire, in a subsequent day, those nice details of manners, that exquisite consideration of the claims and peculiarities of those in their neighbourhood, which early education alone can certainly give. Our chamber companions evidently strove at self complacency. There was a desperate ostentation of sang froid, a most lavish freedom of air about them, which made their familiarity obtrusiveness, and their ease, swagger. A glance told me what they were, so far as manners went; and, I never believed in the sympathy between bad manners and proper morals. They may exist together. There's some such possibility; yet I never saw them united. A man with bad manners may not steal, nor lie, but he cannot be amiable; he cannot often be just; he will be tyrannical if you suffer him, and the cloven hoof of the beast must appear, though it makes its exhibition on a Brussels carpeting.

These fellows had a good many questions to ask us, and a good many remarks to make, before wegot to sleep that night. Nor was this very much amiss. The custom of the country is to ask questions, and to ask them with directness. There the southwest differs from the eastern country. The Yankee obtains his knowledge by circumlocution; and his modes of getting it, are as ingeniously indirect, as the cow−paths of Boston. He proceeds as if he thought it impertinent to gratify his desire, or ——and perhaps this is the better reason——as if he were conscious of motives for his curiosity, other than those which he acknowledges. The southwestern man, living remotely from the great cities, and anxious for intelligence of regions of which he has little personal acquaintance, taxes, in plain terms, the resources of every stranger whom he meets. He is quite as willing to answer, as to ask, and this readiness acquits him, or should acquit him, of any charge of rudeness. We found no fault with the curiosity of our companions, but I so little relished their manners, as to forbear questioning them in return. Carrington was less scrupulous, however——he made sundry inquiries to which he received unsatisfactory replies, and towards midnight, I was pleased to find that the chattering was fairly over.

We slept without interruption, and awakened before the strangers. It was broad day light, and, hastening our toilets, we descended to the breakfast room. There we were soon followed by the two,and my observation by day, rather confirmed my impressions of the preceding night. They were quite too nice in their deportment to be wise——they found fault with the arrangements of the table, their breakfast did not suit them——the eggs were too much or too little done, and they turned up their noses at the coffee with exquisite distaste. The landlord

reddened, but bore it with tolerable patience for a republican; and the matter passed off without a squall, though I momently looked for one. Little things are apt to annoy little people; and I have usually found those persons most apt to be dissatisfied with the world, whose beginnings in it have been most mean and contemptible. The whole conduct of the strangers increased my reserve towards them.

To us, however, they were civil enough. Their policy was in it. They spoke to us as if we were not merely friends but bed−fellows; and, in a style of gentility exceedingly new to us, one of them put his arm about the neck of my friend. I almost expected to see him knocked down; for, with all his gentleness of mood, Carrington was a very devil when his blood was up, and hated every sort of impertinence——but whether he thought it wiser to forbear in a strange place, or was curious to see how far the fellow would go, he said nothing, but smiled patiently till the speech which accompanied the embrace was fairly over, and then quietly withdrew from its affectionate control.

The day was rainy and squally——to such a degree that we could not go out. How to amuse ourselves was a question not so easily answered in a strange country tavern where we had no books, and no society. After breakfast we returned to our apartment, and threw ourselves upon the beds. To talk of home, and the two maidens, whom we had left under such differing circumstances, was our only alternative; and thus employed, our two stranger companions came in. Their excuse for the intrusion was the weather, and as their rights to the chamber were equal to ours, we had nothing to say against it. Still I was disquieted and almost angry. I spoke very distantly and coldly in reply to their speeches, and they quickly saw that I was disposed to keep them at arm's length. But my desire, with such persons, was not of so easy attainment. The reserve of a gentleman is not apt to be respected, even if seen, by those who have never yet learned the first lessons of gentility: and do what I would, I still found that they were uttering propositions in my ears which I was necessarily obliged to answer, or acknowledge. In this, they were tacitly assisted by my friend. Carrington, whose disposition was far more accessible than mine, chatted with them freely, and what was worse, told them very nearlyall of his purposes and projects. They too were seeking land——they were speculators from New York——agents for great Land Companies——such as spring up daily in that city, and flood the country with a nominal capital, that changes like magic gold, into worthless paper every five years or less. They talked of thousands, and hundreds of thousands, with the glibness of men who had handled nothing else from infancy; and never was imagination more thoroughly taken prisoner than was that of Carrington. He fairly gasped while listening to them. Their marvellous resources confounded him. With three thousand dollars and thirty negroes, he had considered himself no small capitalist; but now, he began to feel really humble, and I laughed aloud as I beheld the effects of his consternation upon him. Conversation lagged at length; even those wondrous details of the agents of the great New York company tired the hearers and, it would seem, the speakers too; for they came to a pause. The mind cannot bear too much glitter any more than the eye. They now talked together, and one of them at length produced cards from his trunk.

"Will you play, gentlemen?" they asked civilly.

"I'm obliged to you," was my reply in freezing tones, "but I would rather not."

I was answered, greatly to my mortification, by Carrington.

"And why not, Dick? You play well, and I know you like it."

This was forcing upon me an avowal of my dislike to our would−be acquaintance which I would have preferred to avoid. But as it was, I resolved upon my course.

"You know I never like to play among strangers, William!"

"Pshaw, my dear fellow——what of that? come, take a hand——we're here in a place we know nothing about, and where nobody knows us. It's monstrous dull, and if we don't play, we may as well drown."

"Excuse me, William."

"Can't, Dick——can't think of it," was his reply.

"You must take a hand or we can't play. Whist is my only game, you know, and there's but three of us without you."

"Take Dummy!" was my answer.

"What, without knowing how to value him——Oh, no! Besides, I can't play that game well."

You may fight or eat, or speak, or travel with a man, without making yourself his companion——but you can't play with him without incurring his intimacy. Now, I was somewhat prejudiced against these strangers, and had so far studiously avoided their familiarity. To play with them was to make my former labour in vain, as well as to

invite the consequenceswhich I had been so desirous to avert. But to utter these reasons aloud was to challenge them to the bull ring, and there was no wisdom in that. My thoughtless friend urged the matter with a zeal no less imprudent in his place than it was irksome in mine. He would hear no excuses, and appealed to my courtesy against my principle, alleging the utter impossibility of their being able to find the desired amusement without my help. Not to seem churlish I at length gave way. Bitterly do I reproach myself that I did so. But how was I then——in my boyhood as it were——to anticipate such consequences from so seemingly small a source. But in morals, no departure from principles is small. All principles are significant——are essential——in the formation of truth; and the neglect or omission of the smallest among them is not one evil merely, or one error——but a thousand——it is the parent of a thousand, each, in its turn, endowed with a frightful fecundity more productive than the plagues of Egypt——more enduring, and not less hideous and frightful. Take care of small principles, if you would preserve great truths sacred.

As I have said, I suffered myself——it matters not with what motives or feeling——to be persuaded by my friend to play with him and the strangers. I took my seat opposite to Carrington. The strangers played together. Whist was the game——a game we both delighted in, and which we both played with tolerable skill. The cards were thrown upon the table, and we drew for the deal.

"What do you bet?" said one of the strangers addressing me. At the same moment his companion addressed a like inquiry to my partner.

"Nothing——I never bet," was my reply.

"A Mexican," said Carrington throwing the coin upon the table. My opponent expressed his disappointment at my refusal.

"There's no fun in playing unless you bet."

"You mistake," was my reply. "I find an interest in the game which no risk of money could stimulate. I do not bet; it is a resolution."

My manner was such as to forbid any farther prosecution of his object. He was compelled to content himself as he might; and drawing for the deal, it fell to him. He took the cards, and to my surprise, proceeded to shuffle them after a fashion which I had been always taught to regard as dishonourable. He would draw single cards alternately from top and bottom and bring them together; and, in this way, as I well knew, would throw all the trump cards into the hands of himself and partner. I did not scruple to oppose this mode of shuffling.

"The effect will be," I told him, "to bring the trumps into your own and partner's hands. I have seen the trick before. It is a trick, and that isenough to make it objectionable. I have no pleasure in playing a game with all the cards against me."

He denied the certainty of the result which I predicted, and persisted in finishing as he had begun. I would have risen from the table but my friend's eyes appealed to me to stay. He was anxious to play, and quite too fond of the game, and perhaps too dull where he was, to heed or insist upon any little improprieties. The result was as I predicted. There was but a single trump between myself and partner.

"You see," I exclaimed as the hand was finished, "such dealing is unfair."

"No——I see not——It so happens, it is true, but it is not unfair," was the reply of the dealer.

"Fair or not," I answered, "it matters not. If this mode of shuffling has the effect of throwing the good cards invariably into one hand, it produces such a disparity between the parties as takes entirely from the pleasure in the game. There is no game, indeed, when the force is purely on the one side."

"But such is not invariably the result."

Words were wasted upon them. I saw then what they were. Gentlemen disdain the advantage, even when fairly obtained, which renders intelligence, skill, memory and reflection——indeed, all qualities of mind——entirely useless. As players, ouropponents had no skill——like gamblers usually they relied on trick for success; and strove to obtain, by miserable stratagem, what other men seek from thought and honest endeavour. I would have risen from the table as these thoughts passed through my mind. We had lost the game, and I had had enough of them and it——But miend entreated me.

"What matters one game?" he said. "It is our turn now. We shall do better."

The stake was removed by his opponent, and, while I shuffled the cards, he was required to renew his bet. In doing so, by a singular lapse of thought, he drew from a side pocket in his bosom, the large roll of money with which he travelled, forgetting the small purse which he had prepared for his travelling expenses. He was

conscious, when too late, of his error. He hurried it back to its place of concealment, and drew forth the purse; but in the one moment which he employed in doing so, I could see that the eyes of our companions had caught sight of the treasure. It may have been fancy in me, the result of my suspicious disposition, but I thought that their eyes sparkled as they beheld it, and there was an instant interchange of glances between them. Hurriedly I shuffled through, and with an agitation which I could not well conceal, I dealt out the cards. There was a general and somewhat unwonted silencearound the table. We all seemed to be conscious of thoughts, and feelings, which needed to be concealed. The cheeks of my companion were red; but he laughed and played. His first play was an error. I fixed my eye upon one of the strangers and his glance fell bencath it. There was a guilty thought busy in his bosom. Scarcely a word was spoken ——none unnecessarily——while that hand lasted. But when it came to the turn of one of our opponents to deal, and when I found him shuffling as before, I grew indignant. I protested. He insisted upon his right to shuffle as he pleased——a right which I denied. He would not yield the point, and I left the table. The fellow would have put on airs, and actually thought to bully me. He used some big words, and rising at the same time approached me.

"Sir, your conduct——"

I stopped him half way, and in his speech——

"Is insulting you would say."

"I do, sir; very insulting, sir, very."

"Be it so. I cannot help it. I will play with no man who employs a mode of shuffling which puts all the trump cards into his own and partner's hands. I do not wish to play with you, any how, sir; and very much regret that the persuasions of my friend made me yield against my better judgment. My rule is never to play with strangers, and your game has confirmed me in my opinion of itspropriety. I shall take care never to depart from it in future."

"Sir, you don't mean to impute any thing to my honour. If you do, sir——"

My reply to this swagger was anticipated by William, who had not before spoken, but now stood between us.

"And what if he did, eh?"

"Why, sir——but I was not speaking to you, sir," said the fellow.

"Ay, I know that, but I'm speaking to you. What if he did doubt your honour, and what if I doubt it, eh?"

"Why then, sir, if you did——" The fellow paused. He was a mere bully, and looked round to his companion who still kept a quiet seat at the table.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed William, in the most contemptuous manner.

"You are mistaken in your men, my good fellow. Take up your Mexican, and thank your stars you have got it so easily. Shut up now and be quiet. It lies upon the table." The fellow obeyed.

"You won't play any longer?" he demanded.

"No," was my reply. "To play with you, is to make you, and declare you, our friends. We will fight with you, if you please, but not play with you!"

To this proposition the answer was slow. We were, at least, possessors of the ground. But our triumph was a monstrous small one, and we paid for it. The annoyance of the whole scene was excessive to me. Carrington did not so much feel it. He was a careless, buoyant, good sort of creature, having none of my suspicion, and little of that morbid pride which boiled in me. He laughed at the fellows and the whole affair, when I was most disposed to groan over it, and to curse them. I could only bring his countenance to a grave expression, when I reminded him of his imprudence in taking out his roll of money.

"Ay, that was cursed careless," he replied; "but there's no helping it now——I must only keep my wits about me next time; and if harm comes from it keep a stiff lip, and a stout heart, and be ready to meet it."

William Carrington was too brave a fellow to think long of danger, and he went to bed that night with as light a heart as if he had not a sixpence in the world.

CHAPTER XVII.

I heard myself proclaim'd;
And, by the happy hollow of a tree,
Escap'd the hunt. No port is free; no place,
That guard and most unusual vigilance
Does not attend my taking. While I may 'scape,
I will preserve myself.
—— King Lear

"The next day opened bright and beautiful, and we prepared to resume our journey. Our fellow chamberers had not shown themselves to us since our rupture; they had not slept that night at the tavern. Their absence gave us but little concern at the time, though we discovered afterwards that it had no little influence upon our movements. I have already said that my companion held a claim upon a man in the neighbourhood of Tuscaloosa, for some hundred and thirty dollars, the price of a mule which he had sold to him during the previous season. To collect this debt had been the only motive for carrying us so far from our direct route, which had been to Chochuma. The man's name was Matthew Webber; of his character and condition we knew nothing, save that he was a small farmersupposed to be doing well. That he had not paid the money before, when due, was rather an unfavourable symptom; but of the ultimate payment of it William had not the slightest doubt. He was secured by the indorsed promise of a Col. Grafton, a gentleman of some wealth, who planted about fourteen miles from Tuscaloosa, in the direction of Columbus, but fully eleven miles from the road. There was a short cut to his house, and we proposed to ride thither and obtain directions for finding the debtor. He had once been Grafton's overseer and the latter knew all about him. Our landlord, who had grown civil enough to us, and who was really a very good sort of body when taken in the grain, freely gave us proper instructions for finding our road by the short cut. Of Grafton he spoke with kindness and respect, but I could not help observing, when we inquired after Webber, that he evaded inquiry, and when repeated, shook his head and turned away to other customers. He evidently knew enough to think unfavourably, and his glance when he spoke of the man was uneasy and suspicious. Finding other questions unproductive, we had our horses brought forth, paid our charges, and prepared to mount. Our feet were already in the stirrups, when the landlord followed us, saying abruptly, but in a low tone, as he reached the spot where we stood——

"Gentlemen, I don't know much of the people whom you seek, but I know but little that is very favourable of the country into which you're going. Take a hint before starting. If you have any thing to lose, it's easy losing it on the road to Chochuma, and the less company you keep as you travel, the better for your saddle−bags. Perhaps, too, it wouldn't be amiss, if you looked at your pistols before you start."

He did not wait for our answer, but returned to his bar−room and other avocations as if his duty was ended. We were both surprised, but I did not care to reject his warnings. William laughed at the gravity of the advice given us, but I saw it with other eyes. If I was too suspicious of evil, I well knew that my companion was apt to err in the opposite extreme——he was imprudent and thoughtless; and, in recklessness of courage only, prevented a thousand evil consequences which had otherwise occurred from his too confiding nature.

"Say nothing now," I observed to him——"but let us ride till we get into the woods, then see to your pistols."

"Pshaw, Dick," was his reply, "what do you suspect now? The pistols have been scarcely out of sight since we left home."

"They have been out of sight. We left them always in the chamber when we went to meals."

"True, but for a few moments only, and then all about the house were at meals also."

"No; at breakfast yesterday those gamblers came in after us, and I think then they came from our chamber. Besides, though they did not sleep with us last night, I am persuaded that one or both of them were in the room. I heard a light step at midnight, or fancied it; and found my overcoat turned this morning upon the chair."

"The chambermaid, or Cuffy for the boots. You are the most suspicious fellow, Dick, and, somehow, you hated these two poor devils from the very first moment you laid eyes on them. Now, d——n 'em, for my part, I never gave 'em a second thought. I could have licked either, or both, and when that chap with the hook−nose

began to swagger about, I felt monstrous like doing it. But he was a poor shote, and the less said and thought of him the better. I should not care much to meet him if he had carried the pistols quite off, and presented them to me, muzzle−stuffed, at the next turning."

"He may yet do so," was my calm reply. "At least it will do us no harm to prepare for all events. Let us clear the town, and when we once get well hidden in the woods, we'll take counsel of our landlord, and see to our priming."

"Why not do it now?"

"For the best of reasons——there are eyes on us,and some of them may be unfriendly. Better that they should suppose us ignorant and unprepared, if they meditate evil."

"As you please, but I would not be as jealous and suspicious as you are, Dick, not for all I'm worth."

"It may be worth that to you to become so:——but ride on; the ferryman halloos and beckons us to hasten; there are other travellers to cross. I'm sorry for it. We want no more company."

"Ay, but we do, Dick. The more the merrier, say I. If there's a dozen, no harm, so they be not in our way in entering land. I like good company. A hearty joke, or a good story, sets me laughing all the day. None of your travellers that need to be bawled at to ride up, and open their ovens. None of your sobersided, drawling, croaking methodists, for me——your fellows that preach against good living, yet eat of the fat of the land whenever they can get it, and never refuse a collection, however small the amount. If I hate any two legged creature that calls himself human, it is your canting fellow, that preaches pennyworths of morality and practises pounds of sin——that says a long grace at supper till the meat grows cold, and that same night inveigles your chambermaid into the blankets beside him. I wouldn't think so much of the sin if it wasn't for the hypocrisy. It's bad enough to love the meal; but to preach over it, before eating, is a shame aswell as a sin. None but your sneaks do it; fellows whom you might safer trust with your soul than with your purse. They could do little to harm the one, but they'd make off with the other. None of those chaps for me, Dick; yet give me as many travellers as you please. Here seem to be several going to cross; all wagoners but one, and he seems just one of the scamps I've been talking of; a short, chunky, black−coated little body; ten to one his nose turns up like a pug−puppy's, and he talks through it."

It was in such careless mood and with such loose speech that my companion beguiled the time between our leaving the hotel and reaching the flat which was to convey us across the river. William was in the very best of spirits, and these prompted him to a freedom of speech which might be supposed to denote some laxity of morals; and yet his morals were unquestionable. Indeed, it is not unfrequently the case that a looseness of speech is associated with a rigid practice of propriety. A consciousness of purity is very apt to prompt a license of speech in him who possesses it, while he, on the other hand, who is most apt to indulge in vice, will most usually prove himself most circumspect in speech. Vice, to be successful, calls for continual circumspection; and in no respect does it exhibit this quality more strikingly than in the utterance of its sentiments. The familyof Joe Surface is a singularly numerous one. My companion was no Joe Surface. He carried his character in his looks, in his speech, and in his actions. When you saw the looks, heard the speech, and witnessed the actions, you had him before you, without possibility or prospect of change, for good and for evil; and, to elevate still more highly the character which I admired, and the man I could not but love, I will add, that he was only too apt to extenuate the motives of others by a reference to his own. He had no doubts of the integrity of his fellow——no fears of wrong at his hand——was born with a nature as clear as the sunlight, as confiding as the winds, and had seen too little of the world, at the period of which I speak, to have had experience unteach the sweeter lessons of his unsophisticated humanity. Let not the reader chide me as lavish in my eulogy; before he does so, let me pray him to suppose it written upon his tombstone.

We soon reached the flat, and were on our way across the river in a few minutes after. The little man in the black coat had, in truth, as my companion had predicted, a little pug−puppy nose, but in his other guesses he was quite out. We soon discovered that he was no sermoniser——there was any thing but hypocrisy in his character. On the contrary, he swore like a trooper whenever occasion offered; and I was heartily rejoiced, for the decency of thething, if for no other reason, to discover, as I soon did, that the fellow was about to take another road from ourselves. The other men, three in number, were farmers in the neighbourhood, who had been in to supply the Tuscaloosa market. Like the people of all countries who live in remote interior situations, and see few strangers who can teach them any thing, these people had each a hundred questions to ask, and as many remarks to make upon the answers. They were a hearty, frank, plain spoken, unequivocal set, who would share with you their hoe

cake and bacon, or take a fling or dash of fisticuffs with you, according to the several positions, as friend or foe, which you might think proper to take. Among all the people of this soil, good humour is almost the only rule which will enable the stranger to get along safely.

We were soon over the river, which is broad and not so rapid at this spot as at many others. The Tuscaloosa, or Black Warrior river, is a branch of the Alabama.

The site of the town which bears its name, and which is now the capital town of Alabama, was that of the Black Warrior's best village. There is no remnant, no vestige, no miserable cabin, to testify to what he and his people were. The memorials of this tribe, like that of all the American tribes, are few, and yet, the poverty of the relics but speak themore emphatically for the mournfulness of their fate. Who will succeed to their successors, and what better memorials will they leave to the future? It is the boast of civilisation only, that it can build its monument, leave its memorial, and yet, Cheops, could he now look upon his mausoleum, might be seen to smile over the boast. Enough of this.

We had no sooner separated from our companions of the boat, and got fairly into the shelter of the woods, than I reminded William of the inspection of our fire arms, which I proposed to make after the cautionary hint of my landlord. We rode aside accordingly into a thick copse that lay to the right, and covered a group of hills, and drew out our weapons. To the utter astonishment of my companion, and to my own exasperation, we found, not only no priming in the pans of our pistols, but the flints knocked out, and wooden ones, begrimed with gunpowder, substituted in their place. Whom could we suspect of this but our two shuffling companions of the chamber? The discovery was full of warning. We were in a bad neighbourhood and it behoved us to keep our wits about us. We were neither of us men to be terrified into inactivity by the prospect of danger, and though aroused and apprehensive, we proceeded to prepare against the events which seemed to threaten us, and we knew not on which hand. Fortunately, we had other flints, and other weapons, and we put all of them in readiness for instant requisition. We had scarcely done so, and remounted, when we heard a horseman riding down the main track towards the river. We did not look to see who the traveller might be, but taking our own course, entered upon the left hand trail of a fork, which took us out of the main, into a neighbouring road, by which we proposed to reach the plantation of Mr. Grafton in the rear, avoiding the front or main road as it was some little distance longer. To our own surprise we reached the desired place in safety and without the smallest interruption of any kind. Yet our minds had been wrought up and excited to the very highest pitch of expectation, and I felt that something like disappointment was predominant in my bosom, for the very security we then enjoyed. A scuffle had been a relief to that anxiety which was not diminished very greatly by the knowledge that, for a brief season, we were free from danger. The trial, we believed, was yet to come, and the suspense of waiting was a greater source of annoyance, than any doubts or apprehension, which we might have had, of the final issue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"This night at least * * * * *
The hospitable hearth shall flame
And * * * * *
Find for the wanderer rest and fire."
—— Walter Scott

Colonel Grafton——for we are all colonels more or less in the southern and southwestern states—— received us at the doorsteps of his mansion, and gave us that cordial kind of reception which makes the stranger instantly at home. Our horses were taken, and, in defiance of all our pleading, were hurried off to the stables, while we were ushered into the house by our host, and made acquainted with his family. This consisted of his wife, a fine portly dame of forty−five, and some five children, in the several stages from seven to seventeen. The eldest, a lovely damsel, with bright blue eyes, and dark brown hair, fair as a city lily; the youngest, an ambitious urchin, the cracking of whose knotted whip filled the room with noises, which it required an occasional finger−shake of the indulgent mother finally to subdue. Hospitality was a presidingvirtue, not an ostentatious pretender, in that pleasant household, and, in the space of half an hour, we felt as comfortably at home with its inmates as if we had been associates all our lives. Colonel Grafton would not listen to our leaving him that night. When William pleaded his business, he had a sufficient answer. The man whom he sought lived full twelve miles off, and, through a tedious region of country, it would take us till dark, good riding, to reach and find the spot, even if we started before dinner——a violation of good breeding not to be thought of in Alabama. We were forced to stay, and, indeed, needed no great persuasion. The air of the whole establishment took us both at first sight. There is a household as well as individual manner, which moves us almost with as great an influence; and that of Colonel Grafton's was irresistible. A something of complete life——calm, methodical, symmetrical life——life in repose——seemed to mark his parlour, his hall, the arrangement of his grounds and gardens——the very grouping of the trees. All testified to the continual presence of a governing mind, whose whole feeling of enjoyment was derived from order——a method as rigorous as it was simple and easy of attainment. Yet there was no trim formality either in his own or his wife's deportment; and as for the arrangement of things about his house, you could impute to neither of them a fastidiousnicety and marked disposition to set chairs and tables, books and pictures, over and against each other of equal size and like colour. To mark what I mean more distinctly, I will say, that he never seemed to insist upon having things in their places, but he was always resolute to have them never in the way. There is no citizen of the world who will not readily conceive the distinction.

We had a good dinner, and after dinner, taking his wife, and all his children along, he escorted us over a part of his grounds, pointed out his improvements, and gave us the domestic history of his settlement. Miss Grafton afterwards, at her father's suggestion, conducted us to a pleasant promenade of her own finding, which, in the indulgence of a very natural sentimentality, she had entitled, "The Grove of Coronattee," after a love−sick Indian maiden of that name, who, it is said by tradition, preferred leaving her tribe when it emigrated to the Mississippi, to an exile from a region in which she had lived from infancy, and which she loved better than her people. She afterwards became the wife of a white man named Johnson, and there the tradition ends. The true story——as Colonel Grafton more than hinted——was, that Coronattee was tempted by Johnson to become his wife long before the departure of the tribe, and she, in obedience to natural, not less than Scripture laws, preferred cleaving toher husband to going with less endearing relations into foreign lands. The colonel also intimated his doubts as to the formality of the ceremony by which the two were united; but this latter suggestion was made to us in a whisper;——Julia Grafton wholly denying, and with some carnestness I thought, even such portions of her father's version of the romance as he had permitted to reach her ears.

That night we rejoiced in a warm supper, and when it was ended, I had reason to remark, with delight, the effect upon the whole household of that governing character on the part of its head, which had impressed me at first entering it. The supper things seemed removed by magic. We had scarcely left the table, Mrs. Grafton leading the way, and taken our places around the fire, when Julia took her mother's place at the waiter; and without noise, bustle or confusion, the plates and cups and saucers were washed and despatched to their proper

places. A single servant only attended, and this servant seemed endowed with ubiquity. She seemed to have imbibed the general habits of her superiors, and did quite as much, if not more, than would have been done by a dozen servants, and with infinitely less confusion. Such was the result of method in the principal——there is a moral atmosphere, and we become acclimated, when under its action, precisely as in the physical world. The slave had tacitly fallen into the habits and moods of those above her ——as inferiors are very apt to do——and, without a lesson prescribed or a reason spoken, she had heeded all lessons, and felt, though she might not have expressed, the reasons for all. The whole economy of the household was admirable——not an order was given——no hesitation or ignorance of what was needed, shown——but each seemed to know by instinct, and to perform with satisfaction, his or her several duties. Our repasts are seldom conducted any where in the Southwest with a strict attention to order. A stupid slave puts every thing into confusion, and we do not help the matter much by bringing in a dozen to her aid. The fewer servants about houses the better——they learn to do the more they are required to do, and acquire a habit of promptness without which a servant might be always utterly worth ess.

When the table was removed Julia joined us, and we all chatted pleasantly together for the space of an hour. As soon as the conversation seemed to flag, at a signal from Colonel Grafton, which his daughter instantly recognised and obeyed, she rose, and bringing a little stand to the fireside, on which lay several books, she prepared to read to us in compliance with one of the fireside laws of her father—— one which he had insisted upon, and which she had followed, from the first moment of her being able toread tolerably. She now read well——sweetly, unaffectedly, yet impressively. A passage from the "Deserted Village" interested us for half an hour; and the book made way for conversation among the men, aud needle work among the women. But the whole scene impressed me with delight. It was so natural, yet so uncommon in its aspect——done with so much ease, with so little effort, yet so completely. Speaking of it in compliment to our host when the ladies had retired, we received a reply which struck me as embodying the advantages of a whole host of moral principles, such as are laid down in books, but without any of their cold and freezing drynesses. "Sir," said Colonel Grafton, "I ascribe the happiness of my family to a very simple origin. It has always been a leading endeavour with me to make my children love the family fireside. If the virtues should dwell any where in a household, it is there. There I have always and only found them."

And there they did dwell of a truth. I felt their force and so did my companion. William, indeed, was so absolutely charmed with Julia Grafton, that I began to apprehend that he would not only forget his betrothed, but his journey also——a journey which, I doubt not, the reader, agreeing with myself, would have us instantly resume. But we had consented to stay with our friendly host that night; and before we retired we made all necessary inquiries touchinghis debtor. Colonel Grafton gave my friend little encouragement on the subject of his claim.

"I am almost sorry," he said, "that I endorsed that man's note. I fear I shall have to pay it; not that I regard the loss, but that it will make me the more reluctant hereafter to assist other poor men in the same manner. The dishonesty of one beginner in this way affects the fortunes of a thousand others, who are possibly free from his or any failings of the kind. When I signed the note for Webber, he was my overseer but disposed to set up for himself. I had found him honest——or rather, I had never found him dishonest. If he was, he had rogue's cunning enough to conceal it. Since he left me, however, he has become an object of suspicion to the whole neighbourhood, and many are the tales which I hear of his misconduct. It is not known how he lives. A miserable patch of corn and one of potatoes form his only pretence as a farmer, and to these he pays so little attention, that his apology is openly laughed at. The cattle are commonly in the cornfield, and the hogs do what they please with the potato patch. He does not see, or does not care to see. He is seldom at home, and you may have to return to−morrow without finding him. If so, scruple not to make my house your home so long as it may serve your purpose and prove agreeable."

We thanked him with due frankness, and he proceeded——

"This man has no known resources whatsoever, yet he is seldom without money. He is lavish of it, and must get it easily. It is commonly thought that he gambles and is connected with a vast association of gamblers that live upon the steamboats, and harass the country from Georgia to Louisiana, assessing the unwary traveller wherever they meet with him——and you know how many thoughtless, confident youth we have, who lose their money from an unwillingness to believe that they can be outwitted by their neighbour."

My eye, as these words were spoken, caught that of William, which turned away in confusion from my

glance. I felt mischievous enough to relate our adventure at the Tuscaloosa tavern, but Colonel Grafton talked too well, and we were both too much interested in what he said to desire to interrupt him. He proceeded——

"It is even said and supposed by some that he does worse——that he robs where he cannot win, and seizes where he cannot cheat. I am not of this opinion. Rogues as well as honest men find it easy enough to get along in our country without walking the highway; and, though I know him to be bold enough to be a ruffian, I doubt whether such would be his policy. My notion is that he is a successful gambler, and, as such, if you find him at home, I doubt not that you will get your money. At least, such is my hope for your sake as well as my own. If you do, Mr. Carrington, you will trust again, and I——yes——I will endorse again the poor man's promise to pay."

"And how far from you is the residence of this man?" was my question.

"From twelve to fourteen miles, and through a miserably wild country. I do not envy you the ride; you will have an up−hill journey of it full two thirds of the route, and a cheerless one throughout. I trust you may not take it in vain; but——whether you do or not, you must return this way. It is your nearest route to Columbus, and I can put you on your way by a short cut which you could not find yourselves. I shall, of course, expect you."

Such was the amount of our conference with this excellent man that night. We separated at twelve o'clock——a late hour in the country, but the evening had passed too pleasantly to permit us to feel it so. A cheerful breakfast in the morning, and a renewal of all those pleasant thoughts and images which had fascinated us the night before, made us hesitate to leave this charming family; and slow were the first movements which carried us from the happy territory. Well provided with directions for finding the way, and cautions to be circumspect and watchful, we set out for the dwelling of our suspicious debtor.

CHAPTER XIX.

Old Giaffar sat in his divan,
Deep thought was in his aged eye;
And though the face of Mussulman
Not oft betrays to standers by
The mind within——well skill'd to hide
All but unconquerable pride——
His pensive cheek and pondering brow
Did more than he was wont avow.
—— Bride of Abydos

Our host had in no respect exaggerated the tediousness of our journey. Perhaps it became doubly so to us from the pleasant consciousness, fresh in our minds, of the few preceding hours which had been so unqualifiedly delightful. The hills rose before us, and we felt it to be indeed toilsome to ascend them, when we knew that by such ascent, we only threw them as barriers between us and the spot to which we both felt every disposition to return. It is strange how susceptible to passing and casual influences are the strongest among us. Let our pride not rise in our path as a dogged opponent, and what flexibility is ours——what may we not become——what not achieve! How lovely will seemplace and person, if, when they commend themselves to our affections, they forbear to assail or offend our pride! I could tear myself from the dwelling of my childhood——from the embrace of the fondest of mothers——from all the sympathies and ties to which I had been accustomed——yea, from the sight of her to whom all my hopes had been addressed——in obedience to this arbitrary influence; and, failing to derive even the coldest satisfaction from friends and family and birth place, could yet be sensible of pleasure derived from the contemplation of a strange home, and a passing intercourse with strangers. Perhaps it may be safe to assert that the greatest enemy to our affections, is our mind. The understanding, even among the weakest——as if conscious of its superior destiny——will assert its sway, and sacrifice the heart which depends on it for life, in deference to that miserable vanity which lives only on its diseases. I have always been conscious of this sort of warfare going on with me. I have spoken the sarcasm to the loved one, even when my own bosom felt the injustice, and when my heart, with the keenest sympathy, quivered also with the pang.

We had ridden, perhaps, an hour, and were winding our way down from gorge to gorge among a pile of hills of which there seemed to be no end, when we came suddenly upon three men, sitting among thebushes at a little distance from the road side. Two of them we knew at the first glance to be our chamber companions at Tuscaloosa. The third we had neither of us seen before. He was a short thickset person of black hair and unimposing features, presenting, in his dress, a singular contrast to the trim and gaudy caparison of his comrades. They were sitting around a log, and may have been eating for aught we knew. They had something between them which called for their close scrutiny, and seemed so well to receive it that we completely surprised them. When they heard us, there was a visible start, and one of the two gamblers started to his feet. I rode on without giving them the least notice; but, thoughtless as ever, William half advanced to them, and in a good humoured, dare−devil style of expression, cried out to them aloud.

"Halloo, my good fellows, do you feel like another game to day."

What their answer was, and whether they sufficiently heard to understand his words or not, I cannot say——they stood motionless and watched our progress; and I conceived it fortunate that I was able to persuade my companion to ride on without farther notice. He did not relish the indifference with which they seemed to regard us, and a little pause and provocation might have brought us intoa regular fight. Perhaps——the issue of our journey considered——such would have been a fortunate event. We might not have suffered half so much as in the end we did.

"Now could I take either or both of those fellows by the neck, and rattle their pates together, for the fun of it," was the speech of my companion, as we rode off.

There was a needless display of valour in this, and my answer exhibited a more cautious temper. Rash enough myself at times, I yet felt the necessity of temperateness when in company with one so very thoughtless as my

friend.

"Ay, and soil your fingers and bruise your knuckles for your pains. If they are merely dirty dogs, you would surely soil your fingers, and if they were at all insolent, you would run some risk of getting them broken. The least we have to do with all such people, the better for all parties——I, at least, have no ambition to couple with them either in love or hostility. Enough to meet them in their own way when they cross the path, and prevent our progress."

"Which these chaps will never do, I warrant you."

"We have less need to cross theirs——the way is broad enough for both of us. But let us on, since our road grows more level, though not less wild. Iam tired of this jade pace——our nags will sleep at last, and stop at the next turning."

We quickened our pace, and, in another hour we approached the confines of our debtor's habitation. We knew it by the generally sterile and unprepossessing aspect of every thing around it. The description which Colonel Grafton had given us was so felicitous that we could have no doubts; and riding up to the miserable cabin, we were fortunate enough to meet in proper person the man we sought.

He stood at the entrance, leaning sluggishly against one of the door posts——a slightly built person, of slovenly habits, an air coarse, inferior, unprepossessing, and dark lowering features. His dress was shabby, his hat mashed down on one side of his head——his arms thrust to the elbows in the pockets of his breeches, and he wore the mocasins of an Indian. Still, there was something in the keen lively glances of his small black eye, that denoted a restless and quick character, and his thin, closely pressed lips were full of promptness and decision. His skin was tanned almost yellow, and his long, uncombed but flowing hair, black as a coal, falling down upon his neck which was bare, suited well, while contrasting strongly with his swarthy lineaments. He received us with civility——advanced from his tottering door steps on our approach, and held our horses while we dismounted.

"You remember me, Mr. Webber?" said my companion calling him by name."

"Mr. Carrington, I believe," was the reply——"I don't forget easily. Let me take your horses, gentlemen?"

There was a composure in the fellow's manners that almost amounted to dignity. Perhaps, this too was against him. Where should he learn such habits——such an air? From whence could come the assurance——the thorough ease and self complacency of his deportment? Such confidence can spring from two sources only——the breeding of blood——the systematic habits of an unmingled family, admitting of no connection with strange races, and becoming aristocratic from concentration——or the recklessness of one indifferent to social claims, and obeying no other master than his own capricious mood.

We were conducted into his cabin, and provided with seats. Wretched and miserable as every thing seemed about the premises, our host showed no feeling of disquiet or concern on this account. He made no apology; drew forth the rude chairs covered with bull's hides; and proceeded to get the whiskey and sugar, the usual beverage presented in that region to the guest.

"You have ridden far, and a sup of whiskey will do you good, gentlemen. From Tuscaloosa this morning——you've ridden well."

William corrected his error by telling where we had stayed last night. A frown insensibly gathered above the brow of the man as he heard the name of Colonel Grafton.

"The Colonel and myself don't set horses now altogether," was the quick remark——"he's a rich—— I'm a poor man."

"And yet I should scarce think him the person to find cause of disagreement between himself and any man from a difference of condition," was the reply of William to this remark.

"You don't know him, Mr. Carrington, I reckon. For a long time I didn't know him myself——I was his overseer you know, and it was then he put his name to that little bit of paper, that I s'pose you come about now."

Carrington nodded.

"Well," continued the debtor, "so long as I was his overseer, things went on smoothly; but the Colonel don't like to see men setting up for themselves; and tried to keep me from it, but he couldn't; and since I've left him, he doesn't look once in the year over to my side of the country. He don't like me now I know——did you hear him say nothing about me?"

I could detect the keen black eye of the speaker, as he finished, watching the countenance of Carrington as he waited for the reply. I feared that the perfect frankness of William might have betrayed him into a partial

revelation of Colonel Grafton's information; but he evaded the inquiry with some address.

"Yes, he gave us full directions how to find your place, and warned us that we might not find you at home. He said you travelled a great deal about the country and didn't plant much. You deal in merchandise, perhaps?"

The fellow looked somewhat disappointed as he replied in the negative. But dismissing every thing like expression from his face, in the next instant he asked if we had met with any travellers on the road. I replied quickly by stating with the utmost brevity, the fact that we had met three——whose appearance I briefly described without giving any particulars, and studiously suppressed the previous knowledge which we had of the gamblers at Tuscaloosa; but I had scarcely finished when William, with his wonted thoughtlessness, took up the tale where I had left it incomplete, and omitted nothing. The man looked grave, and when he was ended, contented himself with remarking that he knew no person like those described, and inquired if we had not met with others. But, with my wonted suspiciousness of habit, I fancied that there was a something in his countenance that told a different story, and whether there were reason for this fancy or not, I was inlypersuaded that our debtor and the two gamblers were birds of a feather. It will be seen in the sequel that I was not mistaken. There was an awkward pause in the conversation, for Carrington, like a man not accustomed to business, seemed loth to ask about his money. He was relieved by the debtor.

"Well, Mr. Carrington," he said, "you come I s'pose about that little paper of mine. You want your money, and, to say truth, you ought to have had it some time ago. I would have sent it to you but I couldn't get any safe hand going down into your parts."

Carrington interrupted him.

"That's no matter, Mr. Webber, I didn't want the money, to say truth, till just now; but if you can let me have it now, it will be as good to me as if you had sent it to me six months ago. I'm thinking to buy a little land in Mississippi, if I can get it moderate, and can get a long credit for the best part of it, but it will be necessary to put down something, you know, to clinch the bargain, and I thought I might as well look to you for that."

"To be sure——certain——it's only reasonable; but if you think to go into Mississippi to get land now on a long credit, and hardly any cash, Mr. Carrington, you'll find yourself mightily mistaken. You must put down the real grit if you want to do any thing in the land market."

"Oh, yes, I expect to put down some——"

The acute glance of my eye, arrested the speech of my thoughtless companion. In two minutes more he would probably have declared the very amount he had in possession, and all the purposes he had in view. I do not know, however, but that the abrupt pause and silence which followed my interposition, revealed quite as much to the cunning debtor as the words of my companion would have done. The bungling succession of half formed and incoherent sentences which William uttered to hide the truth and conceal that which, by this time, was sufficiently told, perhaps contributed to impress him with an idea of much greater wealth in our possession than was even the case. But, whatever may have been his thoughts, his countenance was too inflexibly indifferent to convey to us their character. He was stolid and seemingly unobservant to the last degree, scarcely giving the slightest heed to the answers which his own remarks and inquiries demanded. At length, abruptly returning to the business in hand, he spoke thus:

"Well, now, Mr. Carrington, I'll have to give you a little disappointment. I can't pay you to−day, much as I would like to do it, for you see, my money is owing to me and is scattered all about the neighbourhood. If you could take a bed with me to night, and be satisfied to put off travelling for aday, I could promise you, I think for certain, to give you the whole of your money by to−morrow night. I can get it, for that matter, from a friend, but I should have to ride about fifteen or twenty miles for it, and that couldn't be done to day."

"Nor would I wish it, Mr. Webber," was the reply of William. "To−morrow will answer, and though we are obliged to you for your offer of a bed to night, yet we have a previous promise to return and spend the night with Colonel Grafton."

The brows of the man again blackened, but he spoke in cool deliberate accents, though his language was that of enmity and dissatisfaction.

"Ay, I supposed as much. Colonel Grafton has a mighty fine house, and every thing in good fix——he can better accommodate fine gentlemen than a poor man like me. You can do what you like about that, Mr. Carrington——stay with me to−night, or come at mid−day to−morrow——all the same to me——you shall still have your money. I'll get it for you at all hazards, if it's only to get rid of all farther obligation to that man. I've

been obligated to him too long already, and I'll wipe out the score to−morrow or I'm no man myself."

On the subject of Webber's motive for paying his debt, the creditor of course had but little to say. But the pertinacity of the fellow on another topic annoyed me.

"You speak," said I, "of the greater wealth and better accommodations of Colonel Grafton, as prompting us to prefer his hospitality to yours. My good sir, why should you do us this wrong? What do you see in either of us to think such things? We are both poor men——poorer, perhaps, than yourself——I know I am, and believe that such too is the case with my companion."

"Do you though?" said the fellow coolly interrupting me. I felt that my blood was warming—— he perhaps saw it, for he instantly went on——

"I don't mean any offence to you, gentlemen—— very far from it; but we all very well know what temptations are in a rich man's house more than those in a poor man's. I'm a little jealous you see, that's all; for I look upon myself as just as good as Colonel Grafton any day, and to find people go from my door to look for his, is a sort of slight, you see, that I can't always stomach. But I suppose you are another guess sort of people; and I should be sorry if you found any thing amiss in what I say. I'm a poor man, it's true, but by God, I'm an honest one, and come when you will, Mr. Carrington, I'll take up that bit of paper almost as soon as you bring it."

We drank with the fellow at parting, and left him on tolerably civil terms; but there was something about him which troubled and made me apprehensive and suspicious. His habits of life——as we sawthem——but ill compared with the measured and deliberate manners and tone of voice which he habitually employed. The calmness and dignity of one, conscious of power and practised in authority, were conspicuous in every thing he said and did. Such characteristics never mark the habitually unemployed man. What then were his occupations? Time will show. Enough for the present to know that he was even then meditating as dark a piece of villany as the domestic historian of the frontier was ever called upon to record.

CHAPTER XX.

——They are a lawless brood,
But rough in form nor mild in mood;
And every creed and every race,
With them hath found——may find a place.
—— Byron

We had not well departed from the dwelling of the debtor before it was occupied by the two gamblers, whose merits we had discovered in Tuscaloosa, and the third person whom we had seen with them on the road side. They had watched and followed our steps, and by a better knowledge of the roads than we possessed, they had been enabled to arrive at the same spot without being seen, and to lurk in waiting for the moment of our departure, before they made their appearance. No sooner were we gone, however, than they emerged from their place of concealment and made for the house. A few words sufficed to tell their story to their associate, for such he was.

"Do you know the men that have left you? What was their business with you?"

They were answered, and they then revealedwhat they knew. They dwelt upon the large sum in bills which William had incautiously displayed to their eyes, and, exaggerating its amount, they insisted not the less upon the greater amount which they assumed——nay, asserted——to be in my possession; a prize, both sums being considered, which, they coolly enough contended, would be sufficient to reward them for the most extreme and summary efforts to obtain it.

"We must pursue them instantly," said the scoundrel who had sought to bully us at the tavern. "There are four of us, and we can soon overhaul them."

"They are armed to the teeth, George," said our debtor.

"We have seen to that," was the reply. "Ben had an opportunity to inspect their pistols, which they wisely left in their chamber when they went down to eat; and with his usual desire to keep his neighbours from doing harm, he knocked out the priming, and for the old flints, he put in fine new ones, fashioned out of wood. These will do no mischief, I warrant you, to any body, and so let us set on. If my figures do not fail me, these chaps have money enough about them to pay our way, for the next three months, from Tennessee to New Orleans and back."

His proposal was seconded by his immediatecompanions, but the debtor, with more deliberateness and effectual judgment, restrained them.

"I'm against riding after them now, though all be true, as you say, about the money in their hands."

"What! will you let them escape us——are you growing chicken, Mat, in your old days?——you refuse to be a striker, do you?——it's beneath your wisdom and dignity, I suppose," said our bullying gambler, who went by the name of George.

"Shut up, George, and don't be foolish," was the cool response. "You ought to know me by this time, and one thing is certain, I know enough of you. You talk of being a striker. Why, man, you mistake. You're a chap for a trick——for making a pitfall, but not for shoving the stranger into it. Be quiet, and I'll put you at your best business. These men come back here at mid−day to−morrow."

"Ha!——the devil they do."

"Ay——they dine with me, and then return to Colonel Grafton's. To one of them, as I told you—— the younger of the two——a full−faced, good natured looking fellow——I owe a hundred or two dollars. He hopes to get it by coming. Now, it's for you to say if he will or not. I leave it to you. I can get the money easily enough; and if you've got any better from that camp meeting that you went to, on the 'Bigby, you will probably say I ought to pay him——but if not——"

"Psha!" was the universal answer. "What nonsense. Pay the devil. The very impudence of the fellow in coming here to make collections should be enough to make us cut his throat."

"Shall we do that, men?" was the calm inquiry of the debtor.

"It's best," was the bloody answer of the gambler, George. Cowards of bad morals are usually the most sanguinary people when passion prompts and opportunity occurs. "I'm clear," continued the same fellow, "for making hash of these chaps. There is one of them——the slenderer fellow with the long nose, (meaning

me)——his d——d insolence to me in Tuscaloosa is enough to convict him. The sooner we fix him the better."

"George seems unwilling to give that chap a chance. I rather think it would be better to let him go in order that the two might fight out their quarrel. Eh, George, what say you?"

The host proposed a cutting question, but in his own cool and measured manner. It did not seem to fall harmlessly upon the person to whom it was addressed. His features grew darkly red with the ferocity of his soul, but his reply was framed with a just knowledge of the fearless nature of the man who had provoked him.

"You know, Mat, I can fight well enough when it pleases me to do so."

"True," was the answer; "nobody denies that. I only meant to say that you don't often find pleasure in it; nor, indeed, George, do I; and that's one reason which I have for disagreeing with you about these stranger chaps."

"What!" said one of the companions, "you won't lift?"

"Who says I won't? To be sure I will. We'll lift what we can, and empty the sack; but I'm not for slitting any more pipes if I can help it——not in this neighbourhood, at least."

"Mat's going to join the Methodists. He'll eat devil's broth, but dip no meat," said George.

"No——if it's needful I'll eat both; but one I don't like so much as the other, and when I can get the one without the other I'll always prefer to do so."

"But they'll blab."

"So they may——but what care we about that when we're going where they can't find us? Let us keep them quiet till to−morrow midnight, and then they may use their pipes quite as much as they please. By that time we shall all be safe in the Nation, and the sheriff may whistle for us."

"Well, as to that part of the plan," said George, "I'm opposed to it now, and have always been against it. I see no reason to leave a country where we've done, and where we're still doing, so excellent a business."

"What business——no striking for a week or more," said one of the party.

"But what's the chance to−morrow. These very chaps show us the goodness of the business we may do by holding on a time longer. Here's hundreds going for the Nation and thereabouts every week, and most of them have the real stuff. They sell out in the old states, raise all the cash they can, and give us plenty of picking if we'll look out and wait for it. But we mustn't be so milk−hearted. There's no getting on in safety if we only crop the beast's tail and let it run. We can stay here six months longer, if we stop the mouth of the sack when we empty it."

"Ah, George, you are quite too brave in council, and too full of counsel in the field," was the almost indifferent reply of the debtor——"to stay here six weeks would be to hang us all. The people are getting too thick and too sober between this and 'Bigby. They'll cut us off from running after awhile. Now, you are too brave to run——you'd rather fight and die any day than that. Not so with me——I'm for lifting and striking any where, so long as the back door's open; but the moment you shut up that, I'm for other lodgings. But enough of this. We've made the law for going already, and it's a mere waste of breath to talk over that matter now. There's other business before us, and if you'll let me, we'll talk about that."

"Crack away," was the answer.

"These lads come here to−morrow——they dine with me. The old trick is the easiest——we'll rope them to their chairs, and then search their pockets. They carry their bills in their bosoms, I reckon, and if they've got specie it's in the saddle bags. We can rope them, rob them, and leave them at table. All the expense is a good dinner and we'll leave them that too, as it will be some hours, I reckon, before any body will come along to help them out of hobble, and they'll be hungry when their first trouble's fairly over. By that time, we'll be mighty nigh Columbus, and if the lads have the money you say they have, it wlll help us handsomely through the Nation. It will be a good finishing stroke to our business in this quarter."

The plan thus briefly stated, was one well understood by the fraternity, as it had been practised in their robberies more than once before; and it received the general approbation. The bully, George, was opposed to leaving us alive, but he was compelled to yield his bloody wishes in compliance with the more humane resolution of the rest.

"I am against cutting more throats than I can help, George," said the calculating host——"It's a dirty practice and I don't like it, as it's always so hard for me to clean my hands and take the spots out of my breeches. Besides, I hate to see a mandropped like a bullock never to get up again. There's only one chap in the world that I have such a grudge against that I should like to shed his blood, and even him I should forgive if he was only willing to bend his neck when a body meets him, and say 'how d'ye do,' with civility."

"Who's that, Bill?" demanded George.

"No matter about the name. If I have to cut his throat I don't care to trouble you to help me."

"I'm willing."

"Ay, if I hold him for the knife. Enough, George——we'll try you to−morrow. You shall have the pleasure of dropping the slip over that fellow with the long nose. See that you do it bravely. If you don't pinion his arms you may feel his elbow, and he looks very much like a chap that had bone and muscle to spare."

"I'll see to that——but suppose they refuse to dine?" was the suggestion of the bully.

"Why, then, we must take them when at the drink, or as they go through the passage. You must watch your chance, and choose the moment you like best; but you who are the strikers must be careful to move together. If you miss a minute you may have trouble, for one will certainly come to help the other, and it may compel us to use the knife at last."

"It's a shorter way to use it at first," said George.

"Perhaps so——but let me tell you it lasts much longer. The business is not dead with the man; and when you have done that sort of thing once or twice, you'll find that it calls for you to do a great deal more business of different kinds which will be not only troublesome but disagreeable. I tell you, as I told you before, it is the very devil to wash out the stains."

This affair settled, others of like nature, but of less immediate performance, came up for consideration; but these need not be related now. One fact, however, may be stated. When they had resolved upon our robbery, they set themselves down to play for the results, and having made a supposed estimate of our effects, they staked their several shares in moderate sums, and won and lost the moneys which they were yet to steal. It may be added that my former opponent, the bully George, was one of the most fortunate; and having won the right from his comrades to the spoils which they were yet to win, he was the most impatient for the approach of the hour when his winnings were to be realised. Let us now relate our own progress.

CHAPTER XXI.

So thy fair hand, enamour'd fancy! gleans
The treasured pictures of a thousand scenes;
Thy pencil traces on the lover's thought
Some cottage home, from towns and toil remote,
Where love and peace may claim alternate hours
With peace embosom'd in Idalian bowers!
Remote from busy life's bewilder'd way
O'er all his heart shall taste and beauty sway——
Free on the sunny slope, or winding shore,
With hermit steps to wander and adore.
—— Campbell

On our return to Colonel Grafton's, we were received with a welcome due rather to a long and tried intimacy than to our new acquaintance. There we met a Mr. Clifton——a young man about twenty−five years of age——of slight, but elegant figure, and a face decidedly one of the most handsome I had ever seen among men. It was evident to me after a little space that such also was the opinion of Julia Grafton. Her eyes, when an opportunity offered, watched him narrowly; and I was soon enabled to see that the gentleman himself was assiduous in those attentions which are apt enough to occasion love, and to yield it opportunity. I learned casually in the course of the evening, and after the young man had retired, what I had readily inferred from my previous observation——namely, that they had been for some time known to each other. Mr. Clifton's manners were good——artless exceedingly, and frank, and he seemed in all respects, a perfect and pleasing gentleman. He left us before night, alleging a necessity to ride some miles on business which admitted of no delay. I could see the disappointment in the cheek of Julia, and the quivering of her lovely lips was not entirely concealed. That night she sang us a plaintive ditty to the music of an ancient but nobly toned harpischord, and trembling but anticipative love was the burden of her song. The obvious interest of these two in each other, had the effect of carrying me back to Marengo——but the vision which encountered me there drove me again into the wilderness and left me no refuge but among strangers. I fancied that I beheld the triumphant joy of John Hurdis; and the active and morbid imagination completed the cruel torture by showing me Mary Easterby locked in his arms. My soul shrank from the portraiture of my fancy, and I lapsed away into gloom and silence in defiance of all the friendly solicitings of our host and his sweet family.

But my companion had no such suffering as mine, and he gave a free rein to his tongue. He related toColonel Grafton the circumstances attending our interview with the debtor, not omitting the remarks of the latter in reference to the Colonel himself.

"It matters not much," said the Colonel, "what he thinks of me, but the truth is, he has not told you the precise reason of his hostility. The pride of the more wealthy is always insisted upon by the poorer sort of people, to account for any differences between themselves and their neighbours. It is idle to answer them on this head. They themselves know better. If they confessed that the possession of greater wealth was an occasion of their constant hate or dislike they would speak more to the purpose, and with far more justice. Not that I think that Webber hates me because I am wealthy. He spends daily quite as much money as I do——but he cannot so well convince his neighbours that he gets it as honestly; and still less can he convince me of the fact. In his own consciousness lies my sufficient justification for the distance at which I keep him, and for that studied austerity of deportment on my part of which he so bitterly complains. I am sorry for my own sake, not less than his, that I am forced to the adoption of a habit which is not natural to me and far from agreeable. It gives me no less pain to avoid any of my neighbours than it must give them offence. But I act from a calm conviction of duty, and this fellow knows it. Let us say no more abouthim. It is enough that he promises to pay you your money——he can do it if he will; and I doubt not that he will keep his promise, simply because my name is on his paper. It will be a matter of pride with him to relieve himself of an obligation to one who offends his self−esteem so greatly as to provoke him to complaint."

About ten o'clock the next day we left Colonel Grafton's for the dwelling of the debtor. He rode a mile or two with us, and on leaving us renewed his desire that we should return and spend the night with him. His residence lay in our road, and we readily made the promise.

"Could I live as Grafton lives," said William, after our friend had left us——"Could I have such an establishment, and such a family——and be such a man ——it seems to me I should be most happy. He wants for nothing that he has not——he is beloved by his family, and has acquired so happily the arts of the household——and there is a great deal in that—— that he cannot but be happy. Every thing is snug, and every thing seems to fit about him. Nothing is out of place; and wife, children, servants——all, not only seem to know their several places, but to delight in them. There is no discontent in that family; and that dear girl——Julia——how much she reminds me of Catharine——what a gentle being, yethow full of spirit——how graceful and light in her thoughts and movements, yet how true, how firm."

I let my friend run on in his eulogy without interruption. The things and persons which had produced a sensation of so much pleasure in his heart, had brought but sorrow and dissatisfaction to mine. His fancy described his own household, in similarly bright colours to his mind and eye——whilst my thoughts, taking their complexion from my own denied and defeated fortunes, indulged in gloomy comparisons of what I saw in the possession of others, and the cold, cheerless fate——the isolation and the solitude——of all my future life. How could I appreciate the enthusiasm of my friend——how share in his raptures? Every picture of bliss to the eye of the sufferer is provocation and bitterness. I felt it such and replied querulously——

"Your raptures may be out of place, William, for aught you know. What folly to judge of surfaces. But your young traveller always does so. Who shall say what discontent reigns in that family, in the absence of the stranger? There may be bitterness and curses for aught you know, in many a bosom, the possessor of which meets you with a smile and cheers you with a song——and that girl Julia—— she is beautiful you say——but is she blest? she loves ——you see that!——Is it certain that she loves wisely, worthily——that she wins the object of her love——thathe does not deceive her——or that she does not jilt him in some moment of bitter perversity and chafing passion? Well did the ancient declare, that the happiness of man could never be estimated till the grave had closed over him."

"The fellow was a fool to say that, as if the man could be happy then. But I can declare him false from my own bosom. I am happy now, and am resolved to be more so. Look you, Dick——in two weeks more I will be in Marengo. I shall have entered my lands, and made my preparations. In four weeks Catharine will be mine; and then, hey for an establishment like Grafton's. All shall be peace and sweetness about my dwelling as about his. I will lay out my grounds in the same manner——I will bring Catharine to see his——"

I ventured to interrupt the dreamer: "Suppose she does not like them as much as you do? Women have their own modes of thinking and planning these matters. Will you not give her her own way?"

He replied good−naturedly but quickly: "Oh! surely; but she will like them——I know she will. They are entirely to her taste; and whether they be or not, she shall have her own way in that. You do not suppose I would insist upon so small a matter?"

"But it was any thing but a small matter whileyou were dwelling upon the charms of Colonel Grafton's establishment. The grounds make no small part of its charms in both our eyes; and I wonder that you should give them up so readily."

"I do not give them up, Richard. I will let Catharine know how much I like them, and will insist upon them as long as I can in reason. But, however lovely I think them, do not suppose that I count them as any thing in comparison of the family beauty——the harmony that makes the circle a complete system in which the lights are all clear and lovely, and the sounds all sweet and touching."

"I will sooner admit your capacity to lay out your grounds as tastefully as Colonel Grafton than to bring about such results in your family, whatever it may be. You are not Colonel Grafton, William; you lack his prudence, his method, his experience, his years. The harmony of one's household depends greatly upon the discretion and resolve of its master. Heaven knows I wish you happy, William, but, if you promise yourself a home like that of this gentleman, you must become a cooler headed, and far more prudent personage than any of your friends esteem you now. You are amiable enough, and, therefore, worthy to have such a family; but you are not grave enough to create its character, and so to decree and impel, as to make the lights revolve harmoniously in your circle, and call forth the musicin its place. Your lights will sometimes annoy you by their glare, or go out when

you most need their assistance; and your music will ring in your ears at times when your evening nap seems to you the most desirable enjoyment in nature. Joy, itself, is known to surfeit, and you, unhappily, are not a man to feed in moderation."

He received my croakings with good nature, and laughed heartily at my predictions.

"You are a sad boy, Richard. You are quite too philosophical ever to be happy," was his good natured reply. "You analyse matters too closely. You must not subject the things which give you pleasure to a too close inspection of your mind, or ten to one you despise them. The mind has but little to do with the affections——the less the better. I would rather not think, but only believe, where I have set my heart. It is so sweet to confide——it is so worrying to doubt. It appears to me now, for example, that the fruit plucked by Eve, producing all the quarrel between herself and daddy Adam, was from the tree of jealousy."

"What a transition!" was my reply. "You have brought down your generalisation to a narrow and very selfish point. But give your horse the spur, I pray you——when your theme becomes domestic I feel like a gallop."

He pricked his steed in compliance with my wish;but the increased pace of our horses offered no interruption to his discourse on a subject so near his heart. He continued to speak in the same fashion.

"Once fairly married, Dicky, you will see how grave I can be. I will then become a public man. You will hear of me as a commissioner of the poor, of roads, bridges and ferries. I will get up a project for an orphan asylum in Marengo, and make a speech or two at the muster ground in favour of an institute for coupling veteran old maids and inveterate old bachelors together. The women will name all their first children after me, and in five years I will be god−father to half Marengo. You smile—— you will see. And then, Dick, when Kate gives me a dear little brat of our own——ah! Dick."

He struck the spur into his steed, and the animal bounded up the hill as if a wing, like that in the soul of his master, was lifting him forwards and upwards without his own exertions. I smiled, with a sad smile, at the enthusiast lover; and bitterly did his dream of delight force me to brood over my own experience of disappointment. The brightness of his hope was like some glowing and breathing flower cast upon the grave of mine. I could almost have quarrelled with him for his joy on such a subject. Little did he, or I, think, poor fellow, that his joy was but a dream——that the doom of denial, nor of denial merely, was already written by the fates against him. Terrible indeed, with a sudden terribleness——when I afterwards reflected upon his boyish ardor, appeared to me the sad fate which lay, as it were, in the very path over which he was bounding with delight. Could he or I have lifted the thick veil at that moment——how idle would have appeared all his hopes——how much more idle my despondency.

CHAPTER XXII.

I hate him for he is a Christian——
But more, for that, in low simplicity,
He lends out money gratis, and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him once upon the hip
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
—— Merchant of Venice

We at length reached the dwelling of our debtor He received us as before, with a plain, rude indifference of manner, mingled with good nature, nevertheless, that seemed willing to give pleasure, howover unwilling to make any great exertion for it. There was nothing to startle our apprehension or make us suspicious. Nobody appeared, save the host, who played his part to admiration. He would have carried our horses to the stable, but we refused to suffer him to do so, alleging our intention to ride back to Colonel Grafton's as soon as possible.

"What! not before dinner!——you will surely stay and dine with me. I have prepared for you."

The rascal spoke truly. He had prepared for us with a vengeance. I would have declined for I did not like, though to confess a truth, I did not distrust, appearance. But finding us hesitate, and fearing probably to lose his prey, he resorted to a suggestion which at once determined us.

"I'm afraid if you can't stop for dinner, I can't let you have the money to day. A neighbour of mine to whom I lent it a month ago, promised to bring it by meal−time, and as he lives a good bit off, I don't look for him before."

This, uttered with an air of indifference, settled our irresolution. The idea of coming back again to such a place, and so wasting another day, was any thing but agreeable, and we resolved to stay by all means, if by so doing, we could effect our object. Still, as we were bent to ride, as soon as we had got the money, we insisted that he should not take our horses, which were fastened to the swinging limbs of a shady tree before the entrance, in instant readiness for use. This preparatory conference took place at the door. We then entered the hovel, which it will be necessary, in order to detail following events, briefly to describe. In this particular, our task is easy——the arts of architecture, in the southwestern country, being of no very complicated character. The house, as I have said before, was built of logs, unhewn, unsquared, rude, ill−adjointed ——the mere hovel of a squatter, who cuts down fine trees, spoils a good site, and establishes what he impudently styles his improvements! It consistedof a single story, raised upon blocks four feet from the ground, having an entrance running through the centre of the building with apartments on either hand. To the left hand apartment which was used as a hall, was attached at each end, a little lean−to or shed, the doors to which opened at once upon the hall. These rooms were possibly meant as sleeping apartments, nothing being more common in the southwest than such additions for such purposes. In this instance, however, all regard to appearances seemed to have been neglected, since, in attaching the shed to each end of the hall, one of these ugly excrescences was necessarily thrown upon the front of the building, which, without such an incumbrance was already sufficiently uncouth and uninviting. If the exterior of this fabric was thus unpromising what could be said of it within? It was a mere shell. There was no ceiling to the hall, and the roof which covered it, was filled with openings that let in the generous sun−light, and with undiscriminating liberality would have let in any quantity of rain. The furniture consisted of an old sideboard, garnished with a couple of common decanters, a pitcher with the mouth broken off, and some three or four cracked tumblers. A ricketty table was stationary in the centre of the room, which held, besides, some half dozen high backed and low bottom chairs, the seats of which were covered with untanned deer−skins.

Into these we squatted with little ceremony. Our host placed before us a bundle of segars. I did not smoke and declined to partake; but my companion joined him, and the two puffed away cosily together to my great annoyance. Mean while an old negro wench made her appearance, spread a cloth which might have been clean in some earlier period of the world's history, but which was inconceivably dirty now, and proceeded to make other shows, of a like satisfactory nature, of the promised dinner. The cloth was soon laid——plates, dishes, knifes and forks, produced from the capacious sideboard, and, this done, she proceeded to fill the decanter from a jug which she brought from the apartment opposite. She then retired to make her final preparations for the feast.

To join with him in a glass of whiskey was the next proceeding, and setting us a hearty example by half filling his own glass, he would have insisted upon our drinking with equal liberality. Fortunately for me, at least, I was stubborn in my moderation. I was not moderate from prudence, but from fastidiousness. In the society and house of one whom I esteemed more than I did the vulgar creature who sought to persuade me, I feel, and confess, I should have been more self indulgent. But Icould not stomach well the whiskey of the person, whose frequent contact I found it so difficult to endure. I should not have drank with him at all, but that I was unwilling to give offence. Such might have been the case in the event of my refusal, had it been his cue to quarrel.

We drank, however, and resumed our seats; our host with a sang froid which seemed habitual if not natural, dashing into speech without any provocation.

"So you're going back to Colonel Grafton's, are you. He's a mighty great man now−a−days, and it's no wonder you young men like him. It's natural enough for young men to like great men, particularly when they're well off and have handsome daughters. You've looked hard upon Miss Julia, I reckon?"

I said nothing, but Carrington replied in a jocular manner, which I thought rather too great a concession of civility to such a creature. He continued:

"Once, to tell you a dog−truth, I rather did like him myself. He was a gentleman to say the littlest for him; and, dang it! he made me feel it always when I stood before him. It was that very thing that made me come to dislike him. I stood it well enough while I worked for him, but after I left him the case was different——I didn't care to have such a feeling when I set up business for myself. Andthen he took it upon him to give me advice, and to talk to me about reports going through the neighbourhood, and people's opinions of me, and all that d——d sort of stuff, just as if he was my god−father. I kicked at that, and broke loose mighty soon. I told him my mind, and then he pretty much told me his——for Grafton's no coward——and so we concluded to say as little to one another as we well could spare."

"The wisest and safest course for both of you, I doubt not," was Carrington's remark.

"As for the safety now, Mr. Carrington," replied the debtor, "that's neither here nor there. I would not give this stump of tobacco for any better security than my eyes and fingers against Grafton or any other man in the land. I don't ask for any protection from the laws——I won't be sued and I don't sue. Catch me going to the squire to bind my neighbour's fist or fingers. Let him use them as he pleases; all I ask is good notice beforehand, a fair field, and no favour. Let him hold to it then, and see who first comes bottom upwards."

"You are confident of your strength," was my remark——"yet I should not think you able to match with Colonel Grafton. He seems to me too much for you. He has a better frame, and noble muscle."

Not displeased at what might look like personaldisparagement, the fellow replied with cool good nature.

"Ah! you're but a young beginner, stranger, though it may be a bold one. For a first tug or two, Grafton might do well enough; but his breath wouldn't hold him long. His fat is too thick about his ribs to stand it out. I'd be willing to run the risk of three tugs with him to have a chance at the fourth. By my grinders, but I would gripe him then. You should then see a death hug, stranger, if you never saw it before."

The fellow's teeth gnashed as he spoke, and his mouth was distorted, and his eyes glared with an expression absolutely fiendish. At the same moment dropping the end of the segar from his hand, he stuck forth his half contracted fingers, as if in the effort to grasp his opponent's throat; and I almost fancied, I beheld the wolf upon his leap. The nails of his fingers had not been cut for a month, and looked rather like the claws of a wild beast than the proper appendages of a man.

"You seem to hate him very much," was my unnecessary remark. I uttered it almost unconsciously. It prompted him to farther speech.

"I do hate him," was the reply, more than I hate any thing beside in nature. I don't hate a bear for I can shoot him; nor a dog, for I can scourge him; nor a horse for I can manage him; nor a wild bull,for I have taken him by the horns when he was maddest. But I hate that man, Grafton, by the eternal; and I hate him more because I can't manage him in any way. He's neither bear, nor bull nor dog——not so dangerous, yet more difficult than all. I'd give all I'm worth, and that's something, though you don't see it, perhaps, only to meet him as a bear, as a bull, as a dog——ay, by the hokies, as all three together——and let us all show after our own fashion, what we are good for. I'd lick his blood that day, or he should lick mine."

"It seems to me," I replied, and my looks and language must both have partaken largely of the unmitigated disgust within my soul——"It seems to me strange, indeed, how any man, having the spirit of manhood, should

keep such a hatred as that festering in his heart, without seeking to work it out. Why, if you hate him, do you not fight him?"

"That's well enough said, young master——" he cried, without hearing me to the end——"but it's easier to say that, and to desire it, than to get it. Fight it out indeed——and how am I to make him fight? send him a challenge! Ha! ha! ha! why he'd laugh at it, and so would you, young sir, if he showed you the challenge while you happened to be in the house. His wife would laugh; and his daughter would laugh, and even nigger Tom would laugh. You'd have lots of fun over it——Ha! ha! a challengefrom Mat Webber to Colonel John Grafton, Grafton Lodge! what a joke for my neighbour democrats. Every rascal among them——each of whom would fight you to−morrow, sir, if you ventured to say they were not perfectly your equal, would yet laugh to split their sides to think of the impudence of that poor devil, Webber, in challenging Colonel John Grafton, Squire Grafton——the great planter of Grafton Lodge. Oh no, sir——that's all my eye. There's no getting a fight out of my enemy in that way. You must think of some other fashion for righting poor men in this country."

There was certainly some truth in what the fellow said. He felt it, but he seemed no longer angry. Bating a sarcastic grin, and a slight and seemingly nervous motion of his fingers, which accompanied the words, they were spoken with a coolness almost amounting to good nature. I had, meanwhile, got somewhat warmed by the viperous malignity which he had indicated towards a gentleman, who, as you have seen, had won greatly upon my good regards, and, without paying much attention to the recovered ease and quiet of the fellow——so entirely different from the fierce and wolfish demeanour which had marked him but a few moments before——I proceeded, in the same spirit in which I had begun, to reply to him.

"Had you heard me out, sir, you would, perhaps,have spared your speech. I grant you that it might be a difficult, if not an impossible thing to bring Mr. Grafton to a meeting; but this difficulty would not arise, I imagine, from any difference between you of wealth or station. No mere inequalities of fortune would deprive any man of his claim to justice in any field; or my own affairs would frequently subject me to such deprivation. There must be something beside this, which makes a man incur a forfeiture of this sort."

"Yes, yes," he replied instantly, with surprising quickness——"I understand what you would say. The world must esteem me a gentleman."

"Precisely," was my careless reply. The fellow looked gravely upon me for an instant, but smoothing down his brow, which began to grow wrinkled, he proceeded in tones as indifferent as before.

"I confess to you I'm no gentleman——I don't pretend to it——I wasn't born one and can't afford to take up the business. It costs too much in clothes, in trinkets, in fine linen, in book learning and other matters."

I was about to waste a few sentences upon him to show that these were not the requisites of gentility, but he spared me any such foolish labour by going on thus:

"That's neither here nor there. You were going to tell me of some way by which I could getmy revenge out of Grafton. Let's hear your ideas about that. That's the hitch."

"Not your revenge——I spoke of redress for wrong."

"Well, well," he replied, shaking his head, "names for the same things, pretty much——but, as you please. Only tell me how, if you are no gentleman, mark that——I don't want the revenge——the redress I mean, of a gentleman——I want the redress of a man——tell me how I am to get it, when the person who has wronged me, thinks me too much beneath him to meet me on a fair ground. What's my remedy? Tell me that, and I'll give you my thanks, and call you a mighty clever fellow in the bargain."

His insolence annoyed me, and he saw it in my quick reply: "I thank you, sir, I can spare the compliment——"

He grinned good naturedly: "You a poor man!" he exclaimed, interrupting me; "by the hokies, you ought to be rich, and your mother must have had some mighty high notions when she carried you. But go on——I ask your pardon——go on."

I should not have complied with the fellow's wish but that I felt a secret desire which I could not repress, to goad him for his insolence: "Well, sir, I say that I see no difficulty, if the person injured has the commonest spirit of manhood in him, in getting redress from a man who has injured him whatever be his station. I am convinced, if you seriously wish for it, you could get yours from Grafton. There is such a thing, you know, as taking the road of an enemy."

"Ha! ha! ha! and what would that come to, or rather what do you think it would bring me to, here in

Tuscaloosa county? I'll tell you in double quick time——the gallows. It wouldn't bring you to the gallows, or any man passing for a gentleman, but democrats can't bear to see democrats taking upon themselves the airs of gentlemen. They'd hang me, my good friend, if they didn't burn me beforehand, and that would be the upshot of following your counsel. But, your talk isn't new to me, I have thought of it long before. Do you think—— but to talk about what you didn't do, is mighty little business. To put a good deal in a small calabash, let me tell you then that Mat Webber isn't the man to sit down and suck his thumbs when his neighbour troubles him, if so be he can help himself in a quicker way. I've turned over all this matter in my mind, and I've come to this conclusion, that I must wait for some odd hour when good luck is willing to do what she has never done yet, and gives me a chance at my enemy. Be certain when that hour comes, stranger, my teeth shall meet in the flesh."

He filled his glass and drank freely as he concluded. His face had in it an air of resolve as he spoke which left little doubt in my mind that he was the ruffian to do what he threatened, and involuntarily I shuddered when I thought how many opportunities must necessarily arise to him for the execution of any villany from the near neighbourhood in which he lived with the enemy whom he so deeply hated. I was not suffered to meditate long upon this or any subject. The negro woman appeared bringing in dinner. Some fried bacon and eggs formed the chief items in our repast, and with an extra hospitality which had its object, our host placed our chairs, which were both on the one side of the table, he, alone, occupying the seat opposite. Without a solitary thought of evil we sat down to the repast, which might well be compared to the bait which is placed by the cunning fowler for the better entrapping of the unwary bird.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Titius Sabinus.
——Am I then catch'd?
Rufus.
——How think you, sir? you are.
—— Ben Jonson

Though neither William Carrington nor myself sat entirely at ease at the table of our host, neither of us had any suspicion of his purposes. Regarding the fellow as essentially low in his character, and totally unworthy the esteem of honourable men, we were only solicitous to get our money and avoid collision with him. And so far, we had but little reason to complain. Though indulging freely in remarks upon persons——Colonel Grafton for example——which were not altogether inoffensive, his language in reference to ourselves was sufficiently civil; and bating a too frequent approach which he made to an undue familiarity, and which, when it concerned me particularly, I was always prompt to check, there was nothing in his manner calculated to offend the most irritable. On the contrary the fellow played the part of humility in sundry instances to admiration; when we resisted him on any subject he shrank from pursuing it, and throughoutthe interview exhibited a disposition to forbear all annoyance, except possibly on the one subject of Colonel Grafton. On that point even his present policy did not suffer him to give way——his self esteem had been evidently wounded to the quick by his former employer, and with a forbearance like his own, which, under any other circumstances, would have been wisdom, we avoided controversy on a topic in which we must evidently disagree. But not so Webber. He seemed desirous to gain aliment for his anger by a frequent recurrence to the matter which provoked it, and throughout the whole of our interview until the occurrence of those circumstances which served, by their personal importance, to supersede all other matters in our thoughts, he continued, in spite of all our discouragements, to bring Grafton before us in various lights and anecdotes, throughout the whole of which, his own relation to the subject of remark was that of one who hated with the bitterest hate, and whom fear, or some less obvious policy, alone, restrained from an attempt to wreak upon his enemy the full extent of that malice which he yet had not the wisdom to repress.

It was while he indulged in this very vein that we heard the approaching tramp of horses. Webber stopped instantly in his discourse.

"Ah, there he comes," he remarked——"the debtor is punctual enough, though he should have been here an hour sooner. And now, 'Squire Carrington, I hope we shall be able to do your business."

Sincerely did I hope so too. There was an odd sort of smile upon the fellow's lips as he said these words which did not please me. It was strange and sinister. It was not good humoured certainly, and yet it did not signify any sort of dissatisfaction. Perhaps, it simply denoted insincerity and for this I did not like it. Carrington made some reply; and by this time we heard a bustling among our horses which were fastened to the branches of a tree at the entrance. I was about to rise, for I recollected that we had money in the saddle bags, when I was prevented by the appearance of the stranger who entered in the same moment. One glance at the fellow was enough. His features were those of the undisguised ruffian; and even then I began to feel some little apprehension though I could not to my own mind define the form of the danger which might impend. I could not think it possible that these two ruffians, bold however they might be, would undertake to grapple with us face to face, and in broad day light. They could not mistake our strength of body; and, body and soul, we felt ourselves more than a match for them, and a third to help them. And yet, when I reflected upon thelarge amount of money which William had in his possession, I could not but feel that nothing but a like knowledge of the fact, was wanting to prompt, not only these but a dozen other desperates like them, to an attempt, however unfavourable the aspect, to possess themselves of it. Besides, we had surely heard the trampling of more horses than one when the newcomer was approaching. Had he companions? Where were they? These thoughts began to annoy and make me suspicious, and I turned to William. Never was unquestioning confidence so clearly depicted in any countenance as in his. He looked on the stranger with, perhaps, no less disgust than myself, but suspicion of foul play he had none. I determined that he should be awakened, and was about to rise, and suggest the conclusion of our business, in such

a manner as to make it absolutely impossible that he should not see that I was placing myself against the wall, when Webber of himself proposed the adjustment of the debt. Every thing seemed to be unequivocal and above board. The stranger pulled forth his wallet, and sitting down to the table, on the side next to Carrington, proceeded to count out the money before him. The amount was in small bills, and having completed his count, which took him an uneasy time, he pushed the bundle towards Webber, who slowly proceeded to go through a like examination. I grew impatient atthe delay, but concluded that it would be better to say nothing. To show temper at such a moment might have been to defeat the purpose which we had in view; and send us off with a satisfaction, essentially different from that for which we came. The face of Webber grew more grave than usual as he counted the money, and I could observe that his eyes were frequently lifted from the bills, and seemed to wander about the room as if his thoughts were elsewhere. But he finished at length, and handing the required sum over to William he begged him to see that all was right. The latter was about to do so——had actually taken the bills in his hand, when I heard a slight footstep behind me——before I could turn, under the influence of the natural curiosity which prompted me to do so, I heard a sudden exclamation from my companion, and in the very same instant, felt something falling over my face. Suspicious of foul play before, I leaped, as if under a natural instinct, to my feet, but was as instantly jerked down, and falling over the chair behind, dragged it with me upon the floor. All this was the work of a moment. Striving to rise, I soon discovered the full extent of my predicament, and the way in which we were taken. My arms were bound to my side——almost drawn behind my back ——by a noose formed in a common plough line, which was cutting into the flesh at every movementwhich I made. That I struggled furiously for release need not be said. I was not the man to submit quietly to martyrdom. But I soon found my exertions were in vain. The cords were not only tightly drawn, but securely fastened behind me to one of the sleepers of the cabin——a vacant board from the floor enabling my assailants to effect this arrangement with little difficulty. Added to this, my struggles brought upon me the entire weight of the two fellows who had effected my captivity. One sat upon my body as indifferently as a Turk upon his cushions, while the other, at every movement which I made, thrust his sharp knees into my breast, and almost deprived me of the power of breathing. Rage for the moment, added to my strength, which surprised even myself as it surprised my enemies. More than once, without any use of my arms, by the mere writhings of my body did I throw them from it; but exhaustion did for them what their own strength could not; and I lay quiet at length and at their mercy. The performance of this affair took far less time than the telling of it; and was over, I may say, in an instant. With William Carrington the case was different. He was more fortunate. I thought so at the time, at least. He effected his escape. By what chance it was I know not; but they failed to noose him so completely as they had done me. The slip was caught by his hand indescending over his shoulders, and he threw it from him, and in the same moment with a blow of his fist that might have felled an ox, he prostrated the ruffian who had brought the money, and who stood most convenient to his hand. Without stopping to look at the enemy behind, with that prompt impulse which so frequently commands success, he sprang directly over the table, and aimed a second blow at Webber, who had risen from his seat, and stood directly in the way. With a fortunate alacrity the fellow avoided the blow, and darting on one side drew his dirk, and prepared to await the second. By this time, however, I was enabled, though prostrated, and overcome, to behold the combat in which I could bear no part. I saw that the only chance of my companion was in flight. Our enemies, as if by magic, had sprung up around us like the teeth of the dragon. There were no less than seven persons in the room beside ourselves. With my utmost voice I commanded William to fly. He saw, in the same instant with myself, the utter inability of any efforts which he might make, and the click of a pistol cock in the hands of a fellow behind me, was a warning too significant to be trifled with. With a single look at me which fully convinced me of the pang which he felt at being compelled to leave me in such a situation, he sprang through the entrance, and in anothermoment had disappeared from sight. Webber and three others immediately rushed off in pursuit, leaving me in the custody and at the mercy of the three remaining.

CHAPTER XXIV.

How stubbornly this fellow answer'd me.

—— Beaumont and Fletcher

When, more complacently, I looked around, and in the faces of my captors, what was my surprise to behold in the most turbulent, the bullying gambler with whom I had refused to play at the tavern in Tuscaloosa. The countenance of the rascal plainly showed that he remembered the transaction. There was a complacent and triumphant grin upon his lips which, as I could not then punish him, added to the bitterness of my situation. I tried to turn away from regarding him, but the relative situation in which we were now placed was but too grateful to his mean and malicious soul, and changing his position to correspond with mine, he continued to face me with a degree of coldness which could only be ascribed to his perfect consciousness of my inability to strive with him. I felt that my anger would be not only vain to restrain him in his impudence, but must, from its impotence, only provoke him to an increased indulgence of it, besides giving him a degreeof satisfaction which I was too little his friend to desire. I accordingly fixed my eyes upon him with as much cool indifference as I could of a sudden put into them, and schooling my lips to a sort of utterance which fell far short of the feverish wrath in my bosom, I thus addressed him.

"If you are the same person who would have cheated me at cards in Tuscaloosa a few days ago, I congratulate you upon a sudden increase of valour. You have improved amazingly in a very short space of time, and though I cannot say that your courage is even now of the right kind, yet there's no saying how fast one may acquire it who has commenced so happily. Perhaps——as I doubt not that you desire still farther to improve——you would be pleased to give me some little opportunity to try you, and test your progress. If you would but free an arm or so, and let us try it with fist or hickory——ay, or with other weapons with which I see you are well enough provided——I should very much alter the opinion I had formed of you at our first meeting."

The fellow chafed to hear these words and let fly a volley of oaths which only served to increase the coolness of my temper. I felt that I had a decided advantage over him, and a speech so little expected from one in my situation, and so contemptuous at the same time, provoked the unmitigated laughter of the fellow's companions, who had assumed with him the custody of my person.

"And what the h——ll is there to grin about," he said to them as soon as their subsiding merriment enabled him to be heard——"do you mind, or do you think I mind the crowings of this cock sparrow, when I can clip his wings at any moment? Let him talk while he may——who cares? It will be for me to wind up with him when I get tired of his nonsense."

"But won't you let the chap loose, Bully George," cried one of the companions——"let him loose as he asks you, and try a hickory——I know you're famous at a stick fight——I saw you once at the Sipsy, when you undertook to lather Jim cudworth. You didn't know Jim, before that time, George, or you wouldn't ha' chose that weapon——but this lark now——he, I reckon's, much easier to manage than Jim——let him try it, George."

This speech turned the fury of the bully from me to his comrades. But it was the fury of foul language only, and would not bear repetition. The fellow, whom they seemed pleased to chafe, foamed like a madman in striving to reply. The jest was taken up by the two who bandied it to and fro, as two expert ball players do their ball without suffering it once to fall to the ground, until they tired of the game; and they repeated and referred to a numberof little circumstances in the history of their vexed associate, all calculated at once to provoke him into additional fury and to convince me that the fellow was, as I had esteemed him at the very first glance, a poor and pitiable coward. In due proportion as they found merriment in annoying him, did they seem to grow good natured towards myself, perhaps, because I had set the ball in motion which they had found it so pleasant to keep up; but their sport had like to have been death to me. The ruffian, driven almost to madness by the sarcasms of those whom he did not dare to attack, turned suddenly upon me, and with a most murderous determination aimed his dagger at my throat. I had no way to ward the weapon, and must have perished but for the promptitude of one of the fellows who seemed to have watched the bully closely and who caught his arm ere it descended and wrested the weapon from him. The joke had ceased. The man who stayed his arm now spoke to him in the fierce language of a superior.

"Look you, Bully George, had you bloodied the boy I should ha' put my cool steel into your ribs for certain."

"Why, what is he to you, Geoffrey——that you should take up for him?" was the subdued answer.

"Nothing much, and for that matter you're nothing much to me either; but I don't see the profit ofkilling the chap, and Mat Webber ordered that we shouldn't hurt him."

"Mat Webber's a milk and water fool," replied the other.

"Let him hear you say so," said Geoffrey, "and see the end of it. It's a pretty thing, indeed, that you should talk of Mat being a milk and water fool ——a man that will fight through a thicket of men, when you'd be for sneaking round it. Shut up, Bully George, and give way to your betters. The less you say the wiser. Don't we know that the chap's right——if you were only half the man that he seems to be, you wouldn't be half so bloody minded with a prisoner. You wouldn't cut more throats than Mat Webber, and, perhaps, you'd get a larger share of the plunder. I've always seen that it's such chaps as you that don't love fight when it's going, that's always most ready to cut and stab when there's no danger, and when there's no use for it. Keep your knife 'till it's wanted. It may be that you may soon have better use for it, since if that other lark get off, he'll bring Grafton and all the constables of the district upon us."

"It's a bad job, that chap's getting off," said the other ruffian. "How did you happen to miss, Geoffrey?"

"The devil knows. I had the rope fair enough, I thought, but some how he twisted round, or raisedhis hand just when I dropped it over him, and threw it off a bit quicker than I threw it on. He's a stout fellow, that, and went over the table like a ball. I'm dubious he'll get off. Look out, John, and say what you see."

The fellow complied, and returned after a few moments with an unsatisfactory answer. Some far ther conference ensued between them touching the probable chances of Carrington's escape, and my heart grew painfully interested, as I heard their cold and cruel calculations as to the wisest course of action among the pursuers. Their mode of disposing of the difficulty, summary and reckless as it showed them to be, was enough to inspire me with the most anxious fear. If they, unvexed by flight, and unexcited by the pursuit, could yet deliberately resolve that the fugitive should be shot down, rather than suffered to escape, the event was surely not improbable. I could listen no longer in silence.

"I hear you, sir——" I said, interrupting the fellow who was styled Geoffrey, and who seemed the most humane among them——"you coolly resolve that my friend should be murdered. You cannot mean that Webber will do such a deed? I will not believe you. If you only think to annoy and frighten me, you are mistaken. I am in your power, it is true, and you may put me to death, as your companion, who thinks to make up in cruelty what he lacks in courage, appeared just now to desire——but is this your policy? What good can come of it? It will neither help you in present flight nor in future safety. As for my money, if it is that which you want, it is quite as easy for you to take that as my life. All that I have is in your possession. My horse, my clothes, my cash——they are all together; and having these, the mere shedding of my blood can give you no pleasure, unless you have been schooled among the savages. As for your men overtaking my friend, I doubt it, unless their horses are the best blood in the country. That which he rides I know to be so, and cannot easily be caught."

"A bullet will make up the difference," said Geoffrey; "and sure as you lie there, Webber will shoot if he finds he can't catch. He can't help doing so if he hopes to get off safely himself. If the chap escapes, he brings down old Grafton upon us, and Webber very well knows the danger of falling into his clutches. We must tie you both up for to−night if we can. As for killing you or scaring you, we want to do neither one nor t'other, if we can tie up your hands and shut up your mouths for the next twenty−four hours. If we can't——"

He left the rest of the sentence unuttered, meaning I suppose to be merciful in his forbearance; and nothing more was said by either of us for some time, particularly affecting the matter in hand; a fullhour had elapsed, and yet we heard nothing of the pursuit. My anxiety began to be fully shared among my keepers. They went out to the road, alternately at frequent periods, to make inquiries, but without success. Geoffrey at length, after going forth with my gambling acquaintance of the Tuscaloosa tavern, for about fifteen minutes, returned, bringing in with them, to my great surprise, the saddle bags of William Carrington. In my first fear, I demanded if he was taken, and my surprise was great, when they told me he was not.

"How then came you by those saddle bags?" was my question.

"What! are they his?" replied Geoffrey.

"Yes."

"Then he's taken your horse, and not his own," was the answer; "for we found these on one of the nags that

you brought with you."

They were not at all dissatisfied with the exchange, when they discovered the contents, which they soon got at, in spite of the lock, by slashing the leather open with their knives in various places. The silver dollars rolled from the handkerchief in which they had been wrapped, in every direction about the floor, and were scrambled after by two of the fellows, with the avidity of urchins gathering nuts. But, I observed that they put carefully together all that they took from the saddle bags, as ifwith reference to a common division of the spoil. The few clothes which the bags contained were thrown out without any heed upon the floor, but not till they had been closely examined in every part for concealed money. They got a small roll of bills along with the silver, but I was glad when I recollected that William had the greater sum in his bosom. Poor fellow——at that moment I envied him his escape. I thought him fortunate; and regarded myself as the luckless wretch whom fate had frowned upon, only. Alas! for him I envied——my short−sightedness was pitiable. Little did I dream, or he apprehend, the dreadful fate that lay in his path.

CHAPTER XXV.

Hub.
Behold, sir,
A sad writ tragedy, so feelingly
Languaged and cast; with such a crafty cruelty
Contrived and acted; that wild savages
Would weep to lay their ears to.
—— Roe. Davenport.

It may be just as well that the knowledge of the reader should anticipate my own; and that I should narrate in this place those events of which I knew nothing till some time after. I will therefore proceed to state what happened to William Carrington after leaving me at the hovel where I had fallen into such miserable captivity. Having, by a promptness of execution and a degree of physical energy and power which had always distinguished him, gained the entrance, he seized upon the first horse which presented itself to his hand, and which happened to be mine. It was a moment, when, perhaps, he could not discriminate, or if he could, when it might have been fatal for him to attempt to do so. The blood−hounds were close in pursuit behind him. He heard theircries and following footsteps; and in an instant tore away the bridle from the swinging bough to which it was fastened, tearing a part of the branch with it. He did not stop to throw the bridle over the animal's neck. To a rider of such excellent skill, the reins were hardly necessary. He leaped instantly upon his back making his rowels answer all purposes in giving the direction which he desired him to take. His foes were only less capable and energetic than himself; they were no less prompt and determined. With a greater delay, but at the same time better preparedness, they mounted in pursuit. Their safety, perhaps, depended upon arresting his flight, and preventing him from bringing down upon them a competent force for their arrest, which certainly would be the case if they suffered him to convey the intelligence to such an active magistrate as Colonel Grafton. Their desire was farther stimulated by the knowledge which they had of the large amount of money which William carried with him. If their motives were sufficent to quicken their movements to the utmost point within their endeavours, his were not less so. His life, he must have known, depended upon his present escape. Nor was it merely necessary to keep ahead of them; he must keep out of bullet reach also to be safe. But I will not do him the injustice to suppose for an instant that his considerations were purely selfish. I knewbetter. I feel assured that my safety was no less the matter in his thoughts than his own. I feel sure he would never have been content with his own escape did he not believe that mine now depended upon it. These were all considerations to move him to the fullest exertion; and never did good steed promise to serve at need his rider better than did mine in that perilous flight. An animal only inferior to his own, my horse had the blood of a racer that was worthy of his rider's noble nature. He answered the expectations of Carrington without making necessary the frequent application of the spur. He left the enemy behind him. He gained at every jump; and the distance between them at the first, which was not inconsiderable, for the movement of William had been so unexpected as to have taken Webber and the rest by surprise, was increased in ten minutes nearly double. At moments they entirely lost sight of him, until very long stretches of a direct road again made him visible; but he was already far beyond the reach of their weapons. These, with but one exception, were pistols of large size, which in a practised hand might carry truly a distance of thirty yards. Webber, however, had a short double−barrelled ducking gun, which he had caught up the moment his horse was ready. This was loaded with buck shot, and would have told at eighty yards in the hands of theruffian who bore it. But the object was beyond its reach, and the hope of the pursuers was now in some casualty, which seemed not improbable in the desperate and headlong manner of Carrington's flight. But the latter had not lost any of his coolness in his impetuosity. He readily comprehended the nature of that hope in his enemies which prompted them to continue the pursuit; and, perhaps less confident than he might have been, in his own horsemanship, he determined to baffle them in it. Looking round, as he did repeatedly, he availed himself of a particular moment when he saw that he might secure his bridle and discard the fragment of the bough which was still attached to it, before they could materially diminish the space between them; and drawing up his horse with the most perfect coolness, he proceeded to unloose the branch and draw the reins fairly over the head of the animal. The pursuers beheld this, and it

invigorated the pursuit. If the reader knows anything of the region of country in which these events took place, he will probably recognise the scene over which I now conduct him. The neighbourhood−road leading by Grafton's and Webber's, was still a distinct trace, though but little used, a few years ago. It was a narrow track at best and had been a frontier road for military purposes before the Chickasaws left that region. The path was intricate and winding, turning continually toright and left, in avoiding sundry little creeks and difficult hills which sprinkled the whole face of the country. But the spot where William halted to arrange his bridle was more than usually straight, and for a space of half a mile, objects might be discerned in a line nearly direct. Still the spot was an obscure and gloomy one. The road in one place ran between two rising grounds, the elevations of which were greater and more steep than usual. On one side there was an abrupt precipice, from which the trees almost entirely overhung the path. This was called at that period, the "Day Blind" in a taste kindred with that which named a corresponding region, only a few miles off, "the Shades of Death." For a space of forty yards or more, this 'blind' was sufficiently close and dense, almost to exclude the day——certainly the sunlight. William had entered upon this passage, and the pursuers were urging their steeds with a last and despairing effort, almost hopeless of overtaking him, and, perhaps, only continuing the chase under the first impulse of their start, and from the excitement which rapid motion always provokes. He now felt his security and laughed at the pursuit. The path, though dim and dusky, was yet distinct before him. At the outlet the sunshine lay, like a protecting spirit, in waiting to receive him; and the sight so cheered him, that he half turned about upon his horse, and while he stayed not his progress, he shook his unemployed arm in triumph at his enemies. Another bound brought him out of the dim valley through which he had ridden; and when he was most sure of his escape, and when his pursuers began to meditate their return from the hopeless chase, a sudden shot was heard from the woods above, and in the same instant, Webber, who was in the advance, saw the unhappy youth bound completely out of his saddle, and fall helplessly, like a stone upon the ground, while his horse passed from under him, and, under the impulse of sudden fright, continued on his course with a more headlong speed than ever. The event which arrested forever the progress of the fugitive, at once stopped the pursuit as suddenly. Webber called one of his companions to his side—— a sallow and small person, with a keen black eye, and a visage distinguished by dogged resolution, and practised cunning.

"Barrett," said the one ruffian to the other—— "we must see who it is that volunteers to be our striker. He has a ready hand and should be one of us, if he be not so already. It may be Eberly. It is high time he should have left Grafton's, where the wonder is he should have trifled so long. There's something wrong about that business; but no matter now. We must see to this. Should the fellow that tumbled the chap not be one of us, youmust make him one. We have him on our own terms. Pursue him though he takes you into Georgia. Away now——sweep clean round the blind and come on his back——he will keep close when he sees us two coming out in front; and when you have got his trail, come back for an instant to get your instructions. Be off now; we will see to the carrion."

When Webber and his remaining companion reached the body it was already stiff. In the warm morning of youth, in the flush of hope——with a heart as true and a form as noble, as ever bounded with love and courage, my friend, my almost brother, was shot down by a concealed ruffian to whom he had never offered wrong. What a finish to his day! What a sudden night, for so fair a morning!