

THE RANGERS AND REGULATORS OF THE TANAH.



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THE
RANGERS AND REGULATORS

OF THE

TANAHA:

OR,

Life Among the Lawless.

A TALE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS.

BY

CHARLES SUMMERFIELD,

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AUTHOR OF "SKETCHES OF THE SOUTH-WEST."

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To The Memory

OF

THE SONS OF IMMORTAL GENIUS,

Whose political wisdom extended the luminous area of Freedom by the successive additions of Florida's ever-green peninsula, of the imperial domain and priceless delta of Louisiana, of the world-controlling cotton-fields of Texas, of California's golden valleys, and the silver mountains of New Mexico—and to all those who inherit the same passion for pioneering progress, and equal love for the glory of their native land, this work is dedicated in humility and hope by the

AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E .

THE design of the author in the humble conception and hasty preparation of the following work was to give explicitly an accurate picture of one phase in the development of South-Western life, namely, the pioneering or transition state, and inferentially to account for its existence in the peculiar social circumstances of its actual environment. I had thought, at first, to present the matter in a purely narrative form, with precise localities, names, and dates, so as to realize a veritable history, as thrilling and intensely dramatic in its events as any probable romance could be. But a little reflection soon satisfied me that such a method of treatment would be unnecessarily cruel, as many of the actors in those stormy scenes which find a place in the sequel are still living, while the others now no more, have left friends and relatives who would be pained to a profound degree by revelations of so special a character. I was compelled, therefore, by motives of humanity, to exhibit the facts in the shape of a tale or story, indulging at the same time in a few of the liberties allowed by that species of composition. Nevertheless, I can truly affirm, that in no instance have I suffered myself to deal in exaggerations, or to interpolate utterly fictitious incidents. I have even omitted the historical consequence of "the poisoned wedding," not only from want of space, but in order to avoid too great an accumulation of deadly horrors. For as it now stands, the delineation will doubtless be charged with an excess of dark and gloomy coloring. I admit the objection, and offer in excuse the unanswerable plea of fidelity to the facts. I have described society in the given sphere as it was, and I may add, as it always will be under similar circumstances.

Every new country, when first opened to emigration, is settled by a strange mixture of heterogeneous elements—by the enterprising and the virtuous seeking to improve their condition, and by the vicious of different grades who desire to escape from the trammels or the terrors of the law. In such cases, a collision between the opposing interests and passions becomes inevitable. Theft, robbery, and fearful homicides precipitate the crisis; and in the absence of all legitimate authority and regular organization, the remedy of *lynching* is the natural result. That is the epoch of strife, turbulence, and general combat—the state of nature, which is always a state of war, when sanguinary crimes provoke still more sanguinary punishments; and savage fury and brutal force inaugurate the reign of universal terror.

It must not be supposed, however, that this transitional period is peculiar to any geographical section of the country. It has been witnessed in Illinois, in Wisconsin, and in Missouri, as well as in Arkansas, Texas, and California; and everywhere it has been the effect of the same social causes. In all the instances, too, the phenomenon has been equally brief in duration. The evil soon runs its course. The anarchists and desperadoes are either exterminated or driven farther to the west; and the beautiful spirit of order and progress emerges from the chaos of confusion and blood. For, not even in the petty contests of life on the frontier, any more than in the mightiest shock of adverse nations and races, will humanity or civilization ever suffer a permanent check, or lose a single important battle.

C O N T E N T S .

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
The Travellers in the Storm,	18
CHAPTER II.	
Colonel Miles—The Midnight Alarm,	26
CHAPTER III.	
Major Morrow and Sol Tuttle—Captain Carlyle,	38
CHAPTER IV.	
The Ball—The Departure,	50
CHAPTER V.	
Major Morrow and Joanna,	62
CHAPTER VI.	
Captain Carlyle and Lucy—The Murder,	78
CHAPTER VII.	
Sol Tuttle—The unexpected Meeting,	85
CHAPTER VIII.	
Uncle Jack,	96
CHAPTER IX.	
The Two Duels,	107

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER X.	
Revenge,	118
CHAPTER XI.	
Plots and Counterplots,	136
CHAPTER XII.	
The Negro Meeting,	143
CHAPTER XIII.	
The Narrow Escape,	154
CHAPTER XIV.	
The Battle at the Block-House—Judge Moore,	163
CHAPTER XV.	
Sol Tuttle and Brother Dave—The Brothers Barton and the Sisters Ewing,	181
CHAPTER XVI.	
Carlisle and Curran,	194
CHAPTER XVII.	
Lucy,	209
CHAPTER XVIII.	
The Trial by Torture,	224
CHAPTER XIX.	
The Trial—An Execution,	240
CHAPTER XX.	
The Rangers,	257
CHAPTER XXI.	
Mary and Lucy,	275
CHAPTER XXII.	
Major Morrow and Joanna,	293

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER XXIII.	
The Defeat of the Lynchers,	310
CHAPTER XXIV.	
The Defeat of the Robbers,	327
CHAPTER XXV.	
Major Morrow and Dave Tuttle,	345
CHAPTER XXVI.	
The Jail,	362
CHAPTER XXVII.	
The Last,	390

THE
RANGERS OF THE TANAH.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAVELLERS IN THE STORM.

ABOUT the middle of the afternoon, on the second day of April, 1842, a couple of travellers coming from Louisiana, along the old dim pathway known as "Morrow's Trace," crossed the famous boundary of the river Sabine, into Shelby county, in the Republic of Texas.

One of these, and evidently the first in natural as well as civil *status*, was a tall, very handsome youth, richly dressed in dark cloth, and mounted on a powerful black horse, with a pair of revolvers in the holsters before his saddle. It would have been impossible to imagine the stranger's real standing in life, from the mere survey of his person. His countenance combined all the shrewd intelligence usually found in the face of the lawyer, with the more pleasing air revealed by that of the politi

cian, while the live light of bravery radiant in his vivid blue eyes, perhaps, indicated a son of that Southern chivalry, whose fiery prowess rivals any that the world has yet witnessed. His carriage presented a happy mixture of ease, dignity, and grace, and the heyday of wild joy and ardent hope, those twin-lustres of the innocent and inexperienced heart, beamed on all his features, pure as the sunshine of spring in the azure of heaven above his head.

The young man's companion, and apparently his servant, was a large negro of the darkest dye, and from his clothing and demeanor, clearly a considerable favorite of the master. As if for the sake of contrast in color, he rode an enormous white mule, of whose appearance and performances, as he gazed at it frequently and fondly, he seemed immeasurably vain.

Their course meandered through the deep forest on the right bank of the Sabine, and it would be difficult to conceive a picture of more profound and utter solitude, than that which met their eyes. Gigantic trees, like an army of ancient Titans, the monstrous birth of unknown centuries, towered on high; while the luxuriant undergrowth of the most brilliant green, blended with millions of parasites, and silvered over with that grey wizard's hair, the waving long moss, formed a wild web of tangled verdure, almost impenetrable to the wings of a bird, save where this one poor path had been opened by the axe of the pioneer, or tomahawk of the hunter. It looked like an asylum for the refugees and robbers, who were said to abound in the country, and certainly no bandit's heart could have wished for a more secure hiding-place.

Some such fancy appeared to trouble the mind of the negro as he glanced around timidly, and inquired in anxious tones; "Say, massa Bolling, how fur am y' guyin' yit?"

"A dozen miles, or so, Cæsar," was the careless reply

"Oh, Lordy! it's nearly night jist now! what roarin' noise am that?" cried the black, in the greatest terror.

As he spoke, the lurid clouds, which had been gradually mustering, for the last hour, suddenly darkened the old woods, and a low moaning sound was heard in the southwest, like the distant roar of the sea.

"It is the wind!" exclaimed the young master; "we shall have a hurricane, and that will be awful in such a forest! come on, Cæsar, and keep close behind me." And they spurred their animals to the highest speed. Nevertheless, escape seemed impossible, so narrow was the winding trail, while the pendent branches, and drooping vines overhead, frequently forced them to pause.

In the meantime, the wilderness, previously still as the chamber of death, without so much as the murmur of a zephyr's wing, now began to sigh, like some breaking heart, and all the pine-tops sung a melancholy song, as if whispering to each other the weird secrets of their impending doom. And then, all in a moment, quick as the coming of a thought, one wide, wild, wavering flash, the big billow from an ocean of electric fire, dashed away the darkness, and like the conflagration of a world, illuminated the earth and sky. A peal of thunder followed, as long, as loud, as appalling as the simultaneous burst of ten thousand pieces of artillery. This was the signal for the onset of the storm.

"Oh! massa, we'll never see Alabam' agin!" lamented the negro, with looks of horror.

"Fear not, Cæsar!" shouted the youth; "we will soon reach more open woods."

But the hurricane howled more wildly than ever, and even hope died in the quivering heart, before that dreadful scene of utter desolation. Immense limbs were torn from the tallest trees, while the small ones lost their green leaves and golden flowers, as if stripped to nakedness by some human hand. The poor birds fled from their ruined nests, and unable to ride on the giddy gyrations of the whirlwind, flapped their useless wings.

and fell upon the earth. The most savage beasts, all their ferocious instincts quelled by the presence of a common peril, filled the forest with yells of terror, or cries of mortal anguish.

Then, all became hushed ; but the silence was more awfully ominous than the rolling reverberations of the thunder, or the deepest roar from the voice of the storm. The wild animals, soothed by the delusive calm, and deeming the danger already past, ceased their frightful clamor, and all was still.

"Now is the time, Cæsar," exclaimed the young master, "let us fly for our lives !" And they sped onwards with the velocity of the wind, and shortly reached a small glade, where they leaped from their saddles, and sought a precarious shelter under the boughs of a low, but sturdy oak, near the centre of this natural meadow.

"I think that we are safe, at last," murmured the youth, with white lips.

"I guess so," ejaculated the slave, through the chattering teeth.

But at the instant, blacker darkness enveloped the earth, and more lurid lightning rent the sky. The tornado, like a drunken devil fresh from slumber, awakened with more frightful fury. It seized the soaring pine trees in the surrounding forest, twisted them together like ropes, and hurled them down in great heaps of ruin. Titanian trunks, that had braved the thunder of a thousand storms, bowed in the dust almost without resistance.

The terrified horse and mule plunged, snorted, and broke away from their bridles, but only to return and sink upon their trembling knees, as if to implore human protection.

Then, the very vault of heaven itself appeared to part, as it split asunder by the lightning of an archangel's sword ; and the great rain, in roaring cataracts, rushed out of the clouds, like another deluge, to drown the world.

But again, the tempest paused ; and a ribbon of radiant blue sky was seen low down in the west, from which the setting

sun soon poured a flood of golden glory, with beams as divinely bright as if no tears had ever stained the fair face of either man or nature.

"All right, now ! hurrah for Alabam' and Massa Bolling !" shouted Cæsar, with a sudden light of joy in his enormous white eyes, ardent in the ratio of his recent horror.

All at once, a faint, startled cry was heard, then a wild, piercing shriek, and a young girl emerged from the forest, with pale features, and fear-frenzied looks, exclaiming, in a voice of sweet, yet indescribably mournful music, "Oh ! save me, for the love of Christ !"

Her snowy robes, thoroughly saturated with the late rain, revealed a slender form of matchless symmetry and grace, and her visage, though pallid in the extreme, was beautiful as the picture of an angel.

The young traveller, thinking that she would faint with her nameless agitation, flew to meet her, and extended his arms for support, when suddenly, as the last burning bolt of the thunder-storm, a forked arrow of amethystine flame dashed between them, and both sank upon the earth, with their unconscious lips in contact, while a final peal from heaven, louder than all the rest, sounded like a knell for their funeral !

"Oh ! my dear Massa Bolling !" cried the terrified slave, rushing to the fallen youth. But the latter had been only stunned, and quickly recovering, devoted himself to the resuscitation of the lovely being who had been struck down by his side.

She lay among the flowers on the greensward, without motion or any signs of life ; and yet the young man thought her far more beautiful than any form of animated flesh that ever had dawned on his gazing eyes, or glittered even in his rarest dreams.

He lifted her up in his arms. He chafed her soft white hands and snowy temples. He pressed her bosom to his heart, as if

he might warm that bewitching clay, by the fires which he felt in his own blood. He breathed upon her pale lips; but still seemingly all in vain.

He raised a countenance of unutterable agony towards the pitiless arch of heaven, exclaiming, in half frantic accents, "Great God! let her yet live! she is too beautiful to die!"

At last her breast stirred gently. Like some new-born zephyr, an almost inaudible sigh fluttered again on her sweet rose-bud of a mouth. The lily-like lids and raven lashes parted, and the brilliant black eyes shone out with a bewildered expression, like one suddenly aroused from the weird enchantment of a horrible dream.

The youth uttered an ejaculation of insuppressible joy; and even Cæsar murmured his humble, quiet gratitude, "Thank the good Lordy; for she's the finest gal eber I seed!"

"Where am I? Who are you?" said the young girl, in a faint, frightened whisper, withdrawing herself from the involuntary embrace of the traveller, with a blush of maiden modesty, not unmixed with many tokens of alarm.

"I am the stranger," answered Bolling, in tones of unspeakable kindness, "from whom you requested protection the moment before we were both smitten to the earth by lightning; and I now offer you any assistance which it may be in my power to render."

She gazed upon his countenance with her dark, starry eyes, timid and tearful, as if in doubt as to the prudence of trusting one that she knew not, and had never previously seen.

"Fear me not, fair lady," remarked the youth, tenderly, but with a certain air of noble pride; "I am a gentleman, and as such would sooner behold my right hand wither than harm, or even insult, by word, look, or gesture any being bearing the sex of my sainted mother, much less a virgin lovely and pure as the one now before me and who has so nearly met death by my side"

"Miss, believe massa William Bolling," interposed Cæsar, in accents of gentle persuasion; "he's of the first family in old Virginny. His father's judge in Alabam', and all of 'em am rich as cream."

Soothed by the delicious music of the master's voice, and by the seeming candor of the servant's manner, the suspicions of the girl rapidly gave way, but still she remained silent.

"May I be permitted to inquire," said Bolling, in tones of the deepest sympathy, "what unfortunate chance exposed you thus to the fury of the storm, in a place so far from the settlements?"

As he spoke, the wild notes of a bugle, long, loud, and lingering, rung on the evening air, at the distance of some half a mile to the left, and immediately a similar sound, as of a preconcerted signal, responded from the right.

The effect on the mind of the maiden was instantaneous and awful as magic. At one frightful leap, she sprung back to the bosom of her proffered protector, and clinging there with convulsive energy, her quivering arms around his neck, she gasped, "The robbers! the robbers! I am lost!"

In vain the astonished traveller sought to ascertain the causes of her apprehension. She still murmured, "The robbers! the robbers! Save me, or I am lost!"

"I will save you, or sink in death by your side," answered the youth, in accents of terrible determination, as his brave blue eyes flashed with the lightning of battle. He instantly sprang into the saddle, and commanded, "Cæsar, help her up behind me. They must have swift horses to overtake mine, and a formidable force to withstand my two revolvers!"

The gigantic slave lifted the fairy form to her seat, as easily as if she had been an infant, so great was his strength; and the party hurried away along the path towards Shelbyville.

But they were destined to encounter many difficulties, which rendered their progress slow and toilsome; for the tempest had

blown down several large trees across the trail, and in other localities, had filled it with tangled branches. At length, they emerged from the wreck left by the hurricane, which had expended its principal force in a circular space, of not more than three miles in diameter; but the pale shadows of evening had deepened into the darkness of night, and although the burning beauty of a thousand stars glittered on high, their mild lustre could not penetrate the thick mantle of foliage that hung on the surrounding forest, almost as rayless as the gloom of a cavern. The young man, no longer able to perceive any trace of the path, dropped the reins on his horse's neck, confiding in the sharper vision and peculiar instincts of the noble animal. A death-like silence reigned in the solemn woods, broken only by the occasional shrieks of some night-bird, or the savage cries of rage or hunger uttered by the wild beasts in their nocturnal forays.

The arms of the virgin clasped the waist of the traveller more trustfully. He could hear, in fancy, the beating of her heart. He felt upon his cheek her warm breath, intoxicating his senses like some delicious perfume. Ah, me! how many unimaginable consequences, for good or evil, might that mysterious chance have to answer for, which thus strangely threw those young souls together! What glowing hopes it might kindle or quench! What hearts it might bless to beatitude, or break for ever! What luxuries of love, what horrors of hatred, what curses of crime, innumerable, all-absorbing, endless, might it not entail on these two, and others! What wonderful, yet weak and wavering beings we are!—human atoms floating at random on the great life-sea, that every wind and tide may toss about at will. A sudden concurrence of circumstances, the most unexpected, the most trivial and fortuitous—the tones of one voice, the glance of an eye, the birth of a babe, the bridal of a relative, every scene that can be enacted from the infant's cradle to the old man's grave—the wafture of a finger,

the flight of a feather, or the fall of a fan, may change, from their deepest foundations, all our settled plans, all our firmest purposes, as if we were truly what the ancient heathens deemed us, but mere dice in the iron hand of Destiny, to be played at the pre-appointed hour, in accordance with the evolutions of an unknown and irresistible law!

But no such serious reflections troubled the imagination of William Bolling. He only yearned to become better acquainted with the history of the fair creature that fortune had committed, for the time, to his keeping. At last they emerged from the impenetrable shadows of the forest into a space more free from foliage, and the glimmering starlight revealed at the distance of a few hundred yards before them, a luminous expanse of sky, indicating the vicinity of a prairie.

"You need not have any more fear of the robbers, now," remarked the young man, with inexpressible tenderness.

"Where do you reside?"

"My father lives two miles beyond Shelbyville," she answered, in a whisper.

"At the large block-house on the hill?" he inquired, in the same kind tones.

"That is the one."

"I remember having observed it, on my visit to the country, last fall, though I did not learn the name of the owner," said Bolling.

"Colonel Miles," replied the maiden, to this indirect question

"And what does the colonel call his beautiful daughter?"

"Mary."

"Mary! the divine name!" murmured the youth, fondly: "the sweetest of all words, ever whispered by a lover, lisped by the lips of childhood, or sung in the notes of song! pardon my enthusiasm; it was the first sound I uttered when an infant—the name of my dear mother."

"Is she living?" she said, with a stifled sigh.

"In heaven!" he responded, in accents of painful sadness.

"And mine is the same," sobbed the young girl.

"Then, you have a still warmer claim for my sympathy and protection, as a sister orphan of the heart," returned Bolling, in a voice of touching devotion. After a few minutes of silence, he added, with evident anxiety: "I shall likely become a citizen of Shelby County, and I hope that we shall be friends."

"I trust so," she answered, in a whisper so faint, yet magical, as to make every chord in his bosom vibrate as if his heart itself had been thrilled with the point of a golden arrow.

Suddenly the hoarse voice of Cæsar was heard close behind them: "Massa Bolling, lend me one of yer shooters; thar's sumthen comin arter us, sure!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the master; "but here, take it, if you wish; and he handed the slave a revolver.

Hardly had he done so, when the shrill blast of a bugle sounded in their rear, and so unexpectedly, and with such wild, war-like tones, as to startle, for an instant, even the chivalrous bravery of young Bolling.

The effect on the frightened virgin was appalling. The youth vainly essayed to allay her terrors with suggestions, which his own reason failed to recognize. "They cannot be bandits," he urged; "for if so, they would not blow a trumpet to put us on our guard. They are, probably, wandering hunters, or travellers, who have lost their way."

"No, no," she replied, in despairing accents, and quivering in every nerve, like a loose leaf in the whirlwind: "that was Comanche Ben's bugle; I would know it among a hundred. Fly instantly, if you would save our lives!"

"If we perish, we will die together," he returned; for to his fevered and fiery imagination, there was a sweet drop of pleasure even in that bitter reflection.

At the moment, the horse pricked up his sharp ears, and gave a loud, hasty snort, as if he scented danger, and immediately

afterwards, the figure of a man appeared from behind the trunk of an immense oak, and standing in the middle of the path, saluted them in tones of strange, yet sinister melody. "Good evening, sir. Old Boreas, on his huge guitar of thundering forests, swept a grand march for the gods to-day. Did you happen to hear any of the rich music?"

"More than enough," answered the young man, wondering greatly at the poetical style of the intruder.

The latter continued: "Do you travel by starlight from choice or necessity, or, perhaps, you may be a devotee of the divine science, astrology?"

"I never respond, with the tongue, to impertinent questions," said the other, sternly; "will you please to get out of the way, and let us pass?"

"What! there are two of you?" replied the stranger, in sneering accents; "I thought as much, from the glimpse of a white garment on your horse's flank; and so I inferred that you worship at the altar of the sweet Paphian divinity, rather than before the shrine of the wiser Muses!"

"Move out of the path, or by Heaven, I will pistol you like a dog!" cried the youth, in a terrible voice.

"That would only prove you to be a fool," said the stranger, "for half a dozen of my best forest rangers are in ambush, not ten paces before you, while as many more are stationed in the rear, to cut off all hopes of retreat; and as discretion is allowed to be the better part of valor, you must, of necessity, exhibit your approval of the maxim, by surrendering unconditionally."

"Oh! God, we are lost!" exclaimed the maiden, in an agony of terror.

"Is that you, my Madonna, loveliest of all the Marys?" cried the robber, in mocking tones, as if recognizing her voice. And then, he immediately added; "I have a proposition to offer, by way of compromise, Sir Traveller. Give me up the girl and your purse, and you may go about your business."

"Hold fast now, and we will ride over him, and escape," whispered the young man in the ear of his shuddering companion; and, applying the spurs suddenly to the sides of his horse, the spirited animal made a mighty leap forwards, and trampling down the bandit, dashed along the road with the swiftness of an arrow. The action was so unexpected, and the velocity so furious, that the other villains in ambuscade, in vain endeavored to intercept their flight. Guns flashed, pistols roared, and fierce cries and curses rent the air, as if troops of demons were fighting in the darkness; but neither the youth or maiden received any wound. In a minute they gained the open prairie, and were not pursued.

As soon as they found themselves safe from the appalling peril, the young girl inquired, anxiously: "Where is Cæsar?"

"I fear that we shall never see the faithful fellow, again," lamented his master, in tones of deep emotion. "The misfortune is indeed a sad one to me. He has been my comrade, rather than servant, from the cradle; and never have I seen cause to question either his affection or fidelity. I know well that, at any hour, for my sake, he would willingly have laid down his life, as he doubtless has just now done."

As if to confirm his worst apprehensions, they soon heard the clatter of galloping hoofs, and the white mule came up without its rider.

With melancholy hearts they continued their journey to the home of Mary's father, discoursing in musical whispers that thrilled through each other's souls. Was this tender feeling love, at first sight? Who can say? But one thing is certain, it must have been so, if they were destined ever to love at all; for there cannot be a pure passion worthy of the name, which does not come in all its force, like the lightning of heaven, at the flash of the eyes only, and all divine.

Who waits for the second view, or the rigid criticism of cold, calculating reason, to worship the boundless beauty of stars and

rainbows, the opaline lustres on the wings of brilliant birds, the music of night winds among the pine-tops, or the solemn murmur of the sounding sea? For love follows beauty, as light doth the sun.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL MILES—THE MIDNIGHT ALARM.

WHEN young Bolling and the Beauty of the Forest reached the residence of her father, they beheld a scene of the greatest confusion, which had been caused by the mysterious absence of the fair daughter. Half a hundred slaves, armed with flaming pine torches, were flying about wildly, piercing the darkness in all directions, shouting in startled tones, "Mary! Mary! oh! dear young Missus!" with countless other fond, yet frightened exclamations, evincing the most intense grief for the supposed loss of their favorite.

Their almost frantic joy at her reappearance surpassed even the tumultuous tokens of their recent terrors, and they all gathered around her with loud cries of delight, the women and children kissing her hands and the very hems of her garments, asking, at the same time, a thousand questions. "Whar have you been? Wur you out in the rain? Did y' git lost in the woods?" While many of the more silent, among the sable sea of eager faces, sobbed and wept, as if the beautiful girl had been their own child. For there is no burning ardor of affectionate friendship to excel that which the black servant of the South feels for a truly kind master or mistress.

Mary, however, did not seem disposed to gratify the natural curiosity of the anxious negroes, by giving any account of her late perilous adventures, but asked distractedly for her father.

Upon being informed that the Colonel had been absent since morning, she turned to the young traveller, and remarked in disquieted accents, "I must put you in the care of the slaves, to-night. Here, Tony, see that this stranger has every possible attention. I was indebted to him for my life, by his brave assistance in the tornado. Mr. Bolling, I wish you a pleasant sleep and happy dreams." And with a smile, pale, but sweet as the radiance of starlight, she glided out of the room; and the youth felt as if some celestial lustre had suddenly left the now darkened air, but the music of her soft, singing tones still rung in his soul; for she possessed one of those rich, rare voices, whose echoes, like the bewildering cadence of a strange, wild tune, linger in the ear, and haunt the enraptured recesses of the listener's brain, long after the words have ceased to warble on the speaker's lips.

Bolling was so absorbed in this new, nameless melody, that he did not notice, until after three repetitions, the obsequious question of the black waiter, "Will mas'r have something to eat?"

"Yes," replied the traveller, abstractedly.

"Here, Dinah," ordered Tony, with a look of pompous command, "run y' nigger, and git this gen'man's supper, quick. Gin him the fust chop, do y' hear? And you, Sam Snowball, don't stand thar turnin' up the whites of yer eyes, like a dyin' duck; put up his hoss, and stuff 'im chock full of con and fodder. Stir yer stumps, like a hog on ice."

The traveller now directed his attention to the huge form and ebon face before him, but experienced little satisfaction in the survey. Those great eyes gleamed with an aspect of mingled cunning and ferocity, while the simulated, deceitful smile, on the coarse, animal features, reminded one of the nursery myths about grinning fiends and hobgoblins, and more especially of Congo and cannibals.

With a low bow of ludicrous courtesy, Tony inquired, "I ax yer pardon, mas'r, but, wur y' out in the harracane to-day?"

"Yes," was the brief and somewhat stern response.

"And where mout y' coteh young missus?"

"I met with her by accident during the storm; and it is singular how she happened to be in such a wilderness, remote from a human dwelling," said the young man, hoping to extract a little light out of so dark a subject, for the complexion of the negro seemed so supremely black, that the very sight of it might have been supposed enough to extinguish a candle.

But Tony eluded the force of the suggestion, replying, quite innocently, "I knows nuthen' about it; but, mas'r, did y' see any robbers?"

"Do you have such dangerous people in these parts?" inquired Bolling, watching earnestly the countenance of the slave.

"Oh, Lordy! plenty of 'em," affirmed Tony, with an aspect of real, or well-feigned horror; "and lots of Bobolitioners, too. They make the darkies run off like wild hogs."

Aunt Dinah soon brought in a luxurious meal, and this being dispatched, the traveller, accompanied by his waiter, with candle in hand, went to the sleeping apartment, on the same floor as the parlor.

Here, as Bolling was undressing, the sable gossip lingered, and ventured a final assault. "Mas'r, don't you think young missus Mary is a very nice gal?"

"Certainly," returned the youth, in impatient accents, but with a blushing face.

"I know of a pusson who lubs her to kill!" said Tony, with a mysterious air.

The traveller suddenly felt his heart beat like the roll of a drum in battle, but he asked calmly, "Does the happy lover, of whom you speak, succeed in his courtship with the fair girl?"

"I can't say as to that, mas'r; but I spec as how he'll hev her, any how," remarked the black, with a strange gleam on his repulsive visage. "Jemany!" he cried, as Bolling deposited his weapons on a stand beside the bed; "What magnifyin' pistols!

Aint them darlins'! A feller wouldn't laugh what was shot with sich fixins! I swow, they're most as fine as the Captain's!"

The young man glanced at the countenance of the negro, at the moment when this warm eulogy was uttered, and thought that he had never before witnessed so sinister a physiognomy. The twinkle in his white eyes looked even murderous.

Here Tony approached him with a certain cunning smile, and interrogated in a sort of confidential whisper, "Mas'r, am y' one of the speckelaters what 'em calls Forest Rangers?"

"No," answered the youth in astonishment.

"Then why do y' take so many tools?" demanded the negro, with saucy impertinence; and wheeling round he left the room, muttering as he went, "He's not one of 'em, that's a fac'; but he 'ssembles the Captain, and he has a hoss-load of shootin' irons!"

The traveller immediately blew out his candle, and threw himself upon his couch; but the sweet seraph of sleep touched not his eyelids with the dew-dropping finger that baptises the soul with Lethean waters, or brings golden dreams. The events of the past day all came back in vivid scenes, marching before his mind like the figures of a shifting panorama, as manifest to his imagination as they had been to his bodily senses. Again, he listened to the roar of the hurricane; he saw the falling forest, wrapped in sheets of amethystine flame, and fled for life, with the faithful Cæsar by his side. Again, he held the angel of beauty in his arms, and felt her perfumed breath upon his cheek. And then, once more, he heard the blast of the bandit's bugle, the firing of guns, the wild shouts of infuriate men, and made his escape from the dreadful danger, with that one face shining brighter than the starlight so near to his own.

After a time, however, his thoughts assumed a more practical tendency. He reflected, with painful emotions, on the singularity of the circumstances, under which he met the beautiful Mary, and a horrible doubt darkened the divinity, before which

his spirit had so nearly bowed down to worship. How happened she to be there, so far from the settlement, and alone in the wilderness? She recognized even the tones of the robbers' trumpet, and the leader of the band also knew her. She had avoided any explanation as to the particulars of her misfortune among the outlaws; she had refused even to answer the questions of the sympathising slaves, or so much as to intimate that she had been menaced with peril other than from the tornado. And then, as the statement of Tony occurred to his recollection, that she was ardently beloved by some one, he inferred the foolish *non sequitur*, that she probably reciprocated the passion, and he resolved to think no more about her.

In this manner the tedious hours rolled slowly away until long after midnight, when suddenly his quick ear detected the murmur of voices near the window, and rising softly, he parted the curtains, and glanced out through the panes of glass into the darkness. He perceived two men standing on the ground outside, one of medial height, and the other unusually tall, his head reaching the sill, which was more than six feet from the earth.

The youth stooped down, and was enabled to catch some fragmentary sentences of their whispered conversation.

"I wonder what can keep Bill and Comanche Ben so long," said one, impatiently.

"The devil, their master, only knows," replied the other; "but we need not wait for them. Let us do the business ourselves."

"Impossible!" answered the first; "for, ten to one, the traveller came home with the girl, and he would fight for her like a wildcat, and arouse all the buck niggers on the plantation. It won't do, Captain; we must have more help."

"I tell you, Jack," said the latter, with an oath, "we must get Mary away to-night, or she will tell everything, and we shall have another lynching scrape, worse than the last one in Missouri."

"You are afraid also, that she will find a fresh lover in the handsome stranger," suggested his companion, with a half-suppressed titter.

"Cease your silly jesting," commanded the other; "she shall be in my embrace before daylight, or sleep in the skeleton arms of death! You must remember that the Colonel will be back in the morning, and would surely file a strong bill of exceptions against our kind claims to his daughter."

At the moment, a slight whistle was heard, and a huge form approached the robbers, and speaking to them in a faint whisper, they all disappeared around the corner of the house. Although the sky was much obscured by passing clouds, the young man thought that the third person, whose advent in the scene had caused the actors to change their place so quickly, could be no other than the loquacious Tony; and believing that they had gone to the sleeping room of their virgin victim, he instantly took his resolution. Having already put on his clothing, when he ascertained the infernal purpose of the villains, he now filled his pockets with pistols, relumed his candle, and rushing into the hall, rung the bell furiously.

In a minute afterwards, the adjacent cabins of the Africans resounded with noise and confusion, and dusky visages swarmed into the house in great excitement and fear. The traveller related briefly what he had overheard, and ordered an immediate search for the bandits, leading the pursuit himself. But the reverberating echoes of flying hoofs from the bridge above the neighboring stream, at the distance of some hundred yards, proclaimed that the ruffians had taken the alarm, and effected their successful retreat.

On returning to the parlor, the young man was pained to a degree that he could not comprehend himself, with the appearance and conduct of the maiden, whom the previous peril most nearly concerned. Her features were exceedingly pale, but her

dark eyes remained fixed upon the floor, and she asked no questions.

Breaking the oppressive silence, the youth remarked, with agitation, "The boldness of these bandits is unaccountable. It almost staggers belief."

"Yes," murmured Mary, "Dinah has told me what you heard; but did they say anything about me?"

"Only, that they intended to carry you off, or murder you."

"Was that all?" she gasped, with a countenance of terror.

"That was all," answered the youth, keeping back half the tale of horrors from motives of delicacy.

The response seemed to relieve her soul from the spectre of some appalling thought, and actuated by a sudden and uncontrollable impulse, she sprung forwards, and grasping the traveller's hand, exclaimed in tones of the deepest feeling, "You have delivered me twice from a doom more dreadful than the tortures of the most cruel death. Oh, tell me how I shall ever thank you enough!"

His doubts all fled away before the celestial music of that bewitching voice, more divinely sweet, more pure, more spiritual, than the wildest wind-notes of the *Æolian* harp, when heaven's own breath plays among its strings beneath the pale lustre of the evening star.

The fascinated youth, with difficulty repressing the warmer words that burned for utterance on his tremulous lips, replied, with almost passionate fondness, "The gratitude of one so good and beautiful repays me ten thousand times for any little service which I have rendered you, and deserves even the devotion of a life."

At the instant, she dropped his fingers from hers, and uttered a startled cry, "My father!"

The young man glanced towards the door, and beheld a tall,

dark-featured man, gazing upon them with a surprised, yet stern and menacing look.

Mary hesitated a moment, and then bounded to the parental bosom, crying, "Father, this stranger saved my life to-day in the storm."

"And how did you chance to be out in the storm?" said the Colonel, incredulously.

"I started in the morning for a walk to Shelbyville, but was assaulted by the robbers, when about half the way. They carried me off many miles into the forest, when the tempest overtook us, and amidst their fear and confusion I made my escape; yet I should have been captured again, but for the protection and bravery of this generous young man."

"How long did it take you to manufacture this romance?" asked the father, with a bitter sneer; "or perhaps you had able assistance," he added, with a disdainful gesture at the stranger.

The latter responded warmly, "I can vouch for the truth of the most important facts of the story. We were attacked by the bandits, and I lost a valuable servant in the rencounter, and what is stranger still, two members, as I believe, of the same gang, have been here to-night, at this very house, for the purpose of doing a deadly injury to your daughter, which I was fortunately enabled to prevent, from overhearing their whispered conversation beneath my window."

The Colonel's face lost its color, and he replied, with a quivering voice, "Pardon my unjust suspicions, and accept my grateful acknowledgments for your brave and generous conduct in the rescue of my only child."

"But oh, father," said Mary, shuddering at the mere recollection, "you could never imagine who the robbers were."

"What! did you know them?" gasped the Colonel, reeling as if he had been stunned by a thunder-bolt.

"Alas! but too well," affirmed the pale, shuddering girl, "One of them was Captain"—

"Not another word ! not for your life !" shouted her father, grasping her arm with a force that caused an involuntary cry of pain. He then hastily turned to Bolling, remarking in hollow tones, "Young man, as your rest has been so badly broken, you had better retire again to your bed, and get some sleep."

As soon as the youth had left the parlor, Colonel Miles asked in low whispers, as if he feared that the very walls might overhear and report the awful secret, "Mary, who were the ruffians?"

She repeated two names, the sound of which sent every drop of blood from her father's face back in frozen currents upon his heart, as he inquired, "What happened?—tell me all; but speak softly, my dear child, you dream not how terrible is the danger."

"I had reached the thicket in the Tanaha bottom," said the daughter, "when I turned aside to cull some beautiful crimson flowers, that I saw gleaming through the wild vines. At the moment, the two came up from opposite directions, and saluting each other, halted and engaged in conversation. I was so entirely concealed by the leafy bushes that they did not perceive me; and not wishing to play the eavesdropper, which I could not avoid doing while in such a position, I had resolved to emerge from the tangled foliage into the road, and address them, when the appalling character of their discourse arrested my steps, and as it were rooted my feet to the spot. It causes the very blood in my veins to run cold, when I recall the horrible revelations of their villainy. They spoke of robbery, theft and murder as the common pursuit and pastime of their lives. They avowed their purpose to seduce half the slaves in the country from their masters, under promises of freedom, and then to run them off to Louisiana, and sell them for their own gain. They boasted of the numbers that belonged to their band, and specified several men of influence as among them."

"Mary, did they mention me in any manner? Say, for God's sake, did they name me?" inquired the Colonel, pale as a corpse.

"No," said the maiden; "but they spoke of me in such a way that I could not wholly suppress an involuntary cry of horror. Instantly the Captain darted through the foliage, and seizing me by the arm, dragged me still farther into the woods, while his comrade followed, leading their horses. All my prayers and entreaties were unavailing. They said that I had become acquainted with their plans, and that they must therefore make sure of my secrecy. They conducted me to their camp, and were discussing the question as to their action towards me, whether they should send me to their great council-ground, as they called it, in the Red River swamp, or murder me at once, when the hurricane began to howl in the forest, and the trees cracked like hail-stones on a skylight. It looked like the end of the world. They were too much terrified to notice me, and I escaped."

"Have you related the facts to the young traveller?" interrogated the Colonel, anxiously.

"No; I only told him my fear of the robbers when we first met."

"Did you mention their names?"

"I did not."

"Did you inform any of the negroes?"

"I have not done so as yet."

Her father reflected a minute, and said, with the pale shadow of a simulated smile on his dark features, "Mary, the whole thing was a sheer joke, conversation and all, to frighten you; for they are both men of the highest honor, although a little wild, and too fond of such practical jests."

The astounded daughter gazed on his visage with a look of utter bewilderment, as if unable to credit the evidence of her own ears, or deeming the speaker distracted.

"Do you not think my explanation plausible?" he asked, scrutinizing her countenance.

"What!" she cried, with sudden, and almost angry anima

tion, "did the villains gag me for mere fun? Was the roar of firearms, was the hissing hail of bullets, the natural result of a childish frolic? Did the murderous wretches slay or steal the stranger's servant for the sake of the wild sport? Father, I am as much surprised as grieved to witness your indifference when you spoke, but an instant ago, of danger the most deadly."

"Well, Mary, at all events, it is absolutely necessary that we should keep the matter a close secret," responded the Colonel, in a voice and with an aspect of unutterable fear.

"And why so?" she hastily inquired, with flashing eyes. "If we cover up such deeds, do we not become accomplices in their guilt? Oh, my dear father, for once, take your loving child's advice. Denounce the red-handed murderers, and drag them to the bar of avenging justice. My testimony alone, and I will rejoice to give it, will be sufficient to hang them."

The Colonel paced the floor in terrible agitation. At length he faltered, "Mary, I approve your feelings, but we must not act as you desire—nay, hear me out—we dare not. The rogues in this country are really in the majority, and even command the most important offices, including those of judges and sheriffs. They have witnesses to swear away any man's life that they wish out of their path, and when offended, they do not hesitate to shoot down their enemies, wherever they may find them—by the fire-side, in the field, at the wedding, at the funeral, in the church, or even in the court-house, anywhere and everywhere, without scruple, or mercy, or the dread of punishment. No, Mary, we must not betray by any, the least word or sign, the consciousness of this foul outrage. We must be in all respects precisely as we were before it occurred."

"In all respects?" questioned the young girl, in tones of frightful agony.

"We must, or perish!"

"Must I still endure the disgusting attentions of this murderous monster, the hateful captain, whom I always detested?"

"There is no help for it."

"Father, I would rather die!" exclaimed Mary, reeling suddenly, as if shocked beyond endurance.

"What do you say, girl?" yelled the Colonel, gripping her arm till he nearly fractured the bone, while his features writhed in hideous distortions; "would you kill me? I tell you that my property, my reputation, my life—all, all are in that man's power. It matters not how. He is the master, and I the slave. Will you save me by a little courtesy, or murder me by your cruel pride?"

"I will do as you direct," murmured Mary, in a hoarse whisper; "anything, everything but give my person to the polluting bridal with a devil! That I will never do; no, not for the salvation of the whole world."

"I shall not demand it, my child," said the father, weeping tears of agony. "Only let me have a brief space, a few months, to mature my plans, to get my hand out of the infernal wild beast's mouth, and I will find the means of settling all accounts in one bloody payment."

He pronounced the last sentence in a voice that made the very marrow creep in his daughter's bones. She had never before seen the face of her father look like that of a demon. What could it all mean? What was this strange, diabolical mystery, which seemed to demand the sacrifice of a child so fair?

CHAPTER III.

MAJOR MORROW AND SOL TUTTLE—CAPTAIN CARLYLE.

WHEN William Bolling arose the next morning, after a brief and troubled slumber, he found breakfast already prepared on the table ; for the people of the backwoods, like the birds and beasts of their own dewy forests, are early risers. The Colonel saluted his guest with a show of much cordiality, but his manner evinced uneasiness and apprehension, notwithstanding all his efforts to be pleasing. At first, the young man scarcely observed the singular embarrassment of his host, his attention being occupied by the appearance of the fair daughter. She had greeted him with a distant bow, as if he had been a mere stranger. Her lovely features were pale, and her dark eyes dim, from the traces of recent tears. Even her slight, snowy fingers quivered nervously, rendering her task difficult to fill their cups with the steaming, fragrant coffee.

By way of apology for her too obvious agitation, the Colonel remarked, "We must excuse Mary's awkwardness this morning; she has not yet recovered from the effects of yesterday's adventure."

"It is no wonder that the recollection should be profound, as well as painful," said Bolling, thoughtfully.

"Such occurrences are so common in this country that they have almost ceased to excite surprise," returned the other, indifferently.

"It must be a strange state of society—nearly as bad as the

MAJOR MORROW AND SOL TUTTLE—CAPTAIN CARLYLE. 39

lawless condition of savage life," answered the youth. "I regret it the more, as I had intended to make this section of the republic my future home." Mary raised her eyes with a quick glance of mingled pleasure and curiosity.

"Did you purpose opening a plantation?" interrupted Colonel Miles.

"Such was my plan," replied Bolling ; and then, hesitating an instant between the prudence which forbade him to be over communicative and his desire to effect a favorable impression in the mind of the charming daughter, the latter motive preponderated, and he added, "my business in Texas is rather that of an agent than of a principal. My father and uncle have deputed me to select and purchase a large quantity of lands, with a view to their own actual settlement, as well as subsequent speculation in sales."

"A most perilous enterprise, truly," exclaimed the Colonel, seriously.

"I should think any sort of enterprise perilous, after the scenes I have witnessed," answered the young man ; "the rights of property might be as safe among the Camanches."

"You mistake my meaning," replied the other ; "I do not allude to the impotency of legal restraint, or to the absence of civil protection for our security, nor yet to the social anarchy which prevails in the community. I refer to the deadly prejudice of the people against speculators in land. Most of the squatters would rather shoot one of that odious class than butcher the wildest wolf. So if you have any regard for your personal welfare, or even for your life, you will relinquish all such dangerous designs."

Nettled somewhat by the language and tone of this gratuitous advice, Bolling retorted haughtily, "I am not accustomed to change my schemes, either from the fear of individual men or of mobs."

"That is a proper spirit, and perfectly natural in the ardent

season of reckless youth, and especially as you are yet unacquainted with the country; but one year's experience in the tumults of Texas will not fail to teach you, that where mobs are too powerful for the law, they must always vanquish the bravest private citizen."

"Yes; but the cause of order ever triumphs in the end, and if it has its victims and martyrs, it can boast of its heroes also," said the young man, his face beaming with enthusiasm.

"That time will doubtless come in this purple land, at last; but I am afraid it is far distant, and before the day arrives many a noble heart must pour out its blood like rain," remarked the Colonel, mournfully.

From the tenor of his host's conversation, Bolling concluded, perhaps too hastily, that the other, for some unimaginable reason, did not wish him to locate in the country, and he addressed a question, by way of proving the truth of this inference: "Is there no other part of the republic free from the objections which you have urged so forcibly?"

"Oh, yes," answered the Colonel, apparently much relieved by the idea; "there are large tracts farther west, nearly destitute of population, and which may be bought for a mere song."

"And which are annually visited by Comanches," suggested Mary, timidly. The father gave her a stealthy, but stern glance of reproof, which sent her eyes to the floor.

"Your observations strike me as being important," remarked the young man, "but I must see more of the country and its inhabitants before I can determine on my course."

"Remain with us to-day," said Colonel Miles, "and you will have an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with our citizens. Everybody will be here to witness the grand shooting-match." The words were kind enough, but there seemed to be no warm welcome in the tones or countenance of the speaker, and Bolling's lofty pride prompted a brief refusal, when he caught an anxious, blushing look on Mary's beautiful face, which

checked the cold response of denial, and he answered in an indifferent voice,

"I thank you, Colonel; I will accept your courteous offer of hospitality. I must stay in the neighborhood a few days, and perhaps I may obtain tidings of my lost servant."

"Make my house your home," said the other, with the same icy air; and then he added, coloring to the temples, as if ashamed of what he was about to say, "I have one request to make, on your own account, as well as my own, that you will say nothing in relation to the unfortunate events of yesterday and last night. You cannot conceive, nor can I explain, the terrible consequences to me and to my daughter, which would follow from the public agitation of the subject. In the mean time, I will assume the task of discovering your slave, if he be alive."

It would be impossible to paint the astonishment expressed by the young man's features, on hearing this proposition, but he noticed the imploring glance of Mary's dark eyes, and promised as the Colonel desired.

They had hardly ended their morning repast when the people began to gather for the shooting-match, and its incidental pastimes. The assemblage was of the most wonderful and miscellaneous description. No human hand could approach a correct delineation of the different characters—no, not even the coarse pen of Sterne, or the comic pencil of Hogarth. There were mingled in one immense motley crowd, both sexes, all ages, sizes, colors, classes,—hunters, herdsmen, gamblers, merchants, mechanics, planters, preachers, robbers, assassins, and honest men,—poverty, independence, and the proudest wealth. There might be seen in close proximity, fops, fluttering in gay plumage, and sun-burnt forms clothed in leather and crowned with coon-skin caps; bright belles, rustling in robes of silk, and flashing with the gleam of golden ornaments, and modest maidens in rude, homespun raiment, the fabric of their own looms—all enjoying the common holiday, and associating on equal terms,

as if the ideal perfection of Democracy, so long doubted as a political myth, had been at last realized.

On such occasions, a stranger, with any *prestige* of either fame or appearance, is always an object of universal attention on the frontier; and accordingly, William Bolling soon found himself, much to his vexation and annoyance, the cynosure of all eyes, a star, a lion of the first magnitude, with the masses. The interest was exaggerated, in his case, by some faint rumors of his recent encounter with the bandits. For although Colonel Miles had sworn the Africans to the strictest secrecy on the subject, they could not help whispering all the items within their keeping to others, under a similar injunction of inviolable silence. And hence, every person to whom he was introduced by his host, and many who forced their acquaintance upon him, without formality, cross-examined him critically as to the adventure in question. He, however, evaded the general inquisition with as little departure from the truth as might be, answering to all, that the affair amounted to nothing more than a slight alarm, which might, perhaps, be without any certain foundation.

Indeed, he endeavored to avoid the throng as much as he could, remaining in the house in the vicinity of Mary. He was prompted to this course, not only by that magnetic thread of mysterious attraction, which drew him involuntarily to the side of the forest-born beauty, but also by the more worldly wish, to scrutinize her countenance, at the entrance of each new arrival, and thus to learn, from her looks, who were the bandits of yesterday, if they should chance to be in attendance.

Among the first introductions, was a Major Morrow with his lady. The former presented a great brawny frame, with a small, globular head; fierce and irregular features, deeply marked with yellow freckles; keen and cruel grey eyes, restless and menacing; enormous red whiskers, and hair of the same fiery tint; hands huge and apparently heavy as sledge hammers; with an aspect, combining the strangest mixture of cunning, ferocity, and satanic

pride. He was fashionably dressed in rich black cloth, and seemed not a little vain of a magnificent gold watch, which he consulted every few minutes, like one awaiting impatiently for the moment of an important appointment.

The wife, as if for the sake of contrast, was a pale, delicate figure, lithe and slender as a sylph, with features sufficiently comely, had they possessed one tinge of color, and eyes of so unearthly a black, wild, sad, and glittering, as to fill the heart of the beholder with involuntary and nameless awe. Had she been less youthful, and more deficient in personal charms, she would probably have been mistaken by vulgar superstition for a witch; but as the case was, she might have sat for the picture of some melancholy ghost, that had been disembodied by love and suicide.

"I hear, Mr. Bolling, that you had a fight yesterday with the robbers," said Major Morrow, in that singular thumping tone, which, more than any other physical peculiarity, distinguishes the man of belligerent passions.

"I met with some ruffians whose conduct indicated evil intentions; but I may, perhaps, have misjudged them," answered the youth, carelessly.

"Eh! you don't want to talk more about it. You have too much modesty to blow your own trumpet. But I can tell you, the country swarms with rogues; and it never will be any better until we organize a company of Lynchers. We fixed them in Missouri—done the thing up brown, I may say—we hung half the thieves, and scared the rest to death!"

As the major uttered this truculent boast, the young man saw an individual who had just entered the room, cast upon the speaker a look of indescribable rage and hatred. He then advanced, and Colonel Miles, grasping his hand cordially, exclaimed, "I am glad to see you, Sol Tuttle: what success in your late hunt on the Trinity? Let me make you acquainted with Mr. William Bolling, of Alabama."

"Mr. Bolling!" said Sol Tuttle, with a low bow; "stranger I ax pardon; but if I mout be so bold, are you akin to the Bollings of Old Virginny?"

"I am the son of General William Bolling, formerly of the State you have mentioned, but now a judge in the city of Mobile."

"Then you are of the true grit, and no mistake, a great great grandson, or sumthen of the sort, of old Pocahontas," cried Sol, squeezing the youth's fingers so ardently, as nearly to crush the bones; "I'm myself of the same lineage, though of rather a poor branch."

"Mr. Tuttle, let me introduce you to Major Morrow," said the colonel.

"I know the major a leetle too well already," answered Sol, turning off, with a disdainful smile.

"What! do you mean to insult me?" cried Morrow, with flashing eyes.

"No, it ain't worth while," replied Tuttle, walking coolly out of the door; when the other muttered, "I'll fix him yet before the sun goes down!"

William Bolling continued to observe the countenance of Mary, as the various individuals arrived; but he could perceive no change which betrayed the advent of the bandits. She kept her eyes riveted on the entrance of the parlor, with a disquieted look, as if she feared or expected the appearance of some unwelcome guest. The youth then remembered that she had used the word captain, when checked by her father, on the previous night, in her incipient disclosure of the names which he so eagerly desired to ascertain; but he very soon found that this could afford him no clue to the discovery sought, since every third man in the crowd seemed to wear the *nom de guerre* specified, while the remainder were of higher military rank!

At length, they all adjourned their mass-meeting at the dwelling-house, and collected again in a small prairie, half a mile

distant, to witness the shooting-match. The target being set up, at sixty yards, the sport opened. A good deal of close firing followed, and considerable money was lost and won, but still nothing occurred to elicit unusual excitement, until Major Morrow took his station, and poising a long, heavy rifle off-hand, cried in boastful accents:—"Now, look, boys; and I'll show you how the Lynchers used to shoot in Missouri!" A loud roar drowned the last word and the ball pierced the centre of the target.

Deafening acclamations rent the air; and the major shouted:—"I'll bet a hundred dollars in gold, that no other man on the ground can beat it."

"You may well say that, for nobody can git nearer a mark than the centre," replied Sol Tuttle, with a sneer.

"Then, I'll bet, that no other man can equal it," said Morrow, frowning savagely.

"Done!" answered Sol, without an instant's reflection.

"But you must stake the cash; I don't do a credit business," remarked the Major.

"May be y' think I haint got the stuffin, old hoss-fly," retorted Tuttle, pulling out a long, greasy purse, and counting out the required sum. He then went to the stand, and measuring the distance with his eye, said in tones of thunder:—"Now, I'll show you how the Moderators used to whip the Lynchers in Missouri!" Instantly, he raised his rifle, almost as lengthy as himself, and fired quick as a thought.

"You have missed the tree!" cried the major, in tones of scornful triumph.

"I'll bet you another cool hundred, that my bullet has gone right into the same hole as yourn," answered Sol, with unwavering confidence.

"Done," was the response, and the money was placed in deposit. The spectators rushed around the tree, and a dozen blows of the axe decided the issue in favor of Tuttle. The two bits of lead were found buried together.

The features of the major absolutely writhed with vexation and rage, as he fulminated the brutal challenge :—" Suppose that we exchange this sort of target for living ones, such as will prove where the shot touches by streams of blood ! Let us aim at each other's hearts, and I'll bet you a thousand dollars on trust, if you wish, that you fall first !"

"I don't want to shoot you," replied Sol, "for yer hide ain't worth the trouble of skinnin' it from yer carkiss, and yer meat, old sinner, would be tougher than bull beef !"

An uncontrollable burst of laughter from the bystanders greeted the ludicrous retort ; and Morrow, nearly choking with fury and mortification, cried hoarsely, with the adjunct of a horrible oath :—" But you shall fight me, or I'll horsewhip you within an inch of your life !"

"Wait till the balance of the sport is over, and then we'll see about it," said Sol, with the greatest indifference.

At the moment, Colonel Miles announced that pistol shooting was next in order. The target was fixed at the distance of twelve paces, and as previously, many fine shots might be seen, but nothing which appeared to approach the ideal of the popular imagination. At last, it came to Major Morrow's turn, and again he drove out the centre. He repeated the same boastful offer of a bet, which was as promptly accepted by Sol Tuttle, and the identical consequences resulted, which had been witnessed in the contest with rifles. The pistol bullets were imbedded in one hole ! This time, however, the major uttered no verbal threat, but his dagger-like, grey eyes looked murder !

Suddenly, an immense shout rung on the air :—" Captain Carlyle ! Captain Carlyle ! He will show you how to shoot ! huzza for the gallant captain !"

A slender man, with handsome features, long flowing dark hair, and vivid black eyes, elbowed his way through the throng, bowing gracefully to the right and left, with the air of a courtier, in acknowledgment of the general acclamations.

Young Bolling glanced at Mary, and thought that the new comer must be the bandit of yesterday, from her extraordinary emotion, her face being mortally pale, and her form vibrating as if she were shaken by an earthquake ! But the demeanor of her father gave the lie to any such supposition. For he hailed the stranger with extreme cordiality, and even fulsome fawning. A still more disagreeable idea then gained possession of Bolling's mind, that Carlyle was the favored lover of the beautiful girl, and from this fact resulted her agitation. And although he could not be said to feel the consciousness of passion in his own bosom as yet, still the very possibility was painfully torturing, that her heart might already belong to another. Nevertheless, when he scanned the fascinating appearance of the captain, he could not discredit the hypothesis suggested by his jealousy. At all events, hope whispered to his fancy, "*he* has not saved her life as *I* have done !"

The target being again prepared, Captain Carlyle stepped off fifteen paces, and after turning his back towards the mark, suddenly wheeled, and fired quick as a flash of lightning. Plaudits followed like the roar of a whirlwind. His bullet had penetrated the centre ! He then snatched from his bosom a small pocket Deringer, and repeating the experiment, produced the same result. A moment afterwards, a raven flitted some sixty feet above his head, through the air ; he raised his other duelling pistol, and shot off its neck. The people shouted till they were hoarse, and this feat closed the contests with fire-arms. No one else dared try his skill that day.

William Bolling, when he found the opportunity, advanced towards Carlyle, so as to get a more accurate view of his features. Their eyes met, and encountered in a stern, searching, protracted gaze, as if their two secret souls were, at the first sight, measuring each other's strength, for some future and frightful conflict, where one would be sure to perish ! The captain did not, however, reveal in his countenance any tokens of recog-

niton, as if he had ever seen the youth before. He appeared to be actuated by a mysterious force of instinctive, natural hatred—one of those inexplicable antipathies, which baffle all analysis, and bemoor psychological laws—and similar to the emotion that moved the other simultaneously. Finally, after this mutual mute defiance had lasted nearly two minutes, the captain's glance fell, and he turned away with a smile of revenge, lurid as the light of purgatorial flames.

"He's afeerd of you," said a whisper in Bolling's ear; and casting his eyes around, he beheld the serious face of Sol Tuttle. "Yes, he's sartanly afeerd of you," iterated the hunter; "but you'd better keep yer eye skinned fur him: becaze he's an orful jewillist!"

"I shall not show the white feather, if it pleases the bully to cross my path," said the youth, haughtily.

"Oh! no danger of the old Pocahontas blood playin' crawfish;" replied the other; "but he beats the very devil with his pistol. It's wusser nor thunder!"

Hardly had the word left the speaker's mouth, when Major Morrow rushed to the spot, with a murderous light gleaming in his grey eyes, crying furiously:—"Tuttle, you must fight me now, or take the consequence!" and he flourished on high a heavy horsewhip.

"Ar' y' spilein' fur a tussle, old wolf?" asked Sol, with a merry, ringing laugh, and a visage indescribably comical.

"Will you fight me as a man, or must I whip you like a dog?" thundered the major, in tones of phrensied rage.

"Some breeds of dogs hev a dangerous habit of bitin' when y' kick 'em," retorted Tuttle, with a sly wink, and showing his teeth, as if to intimate that he belonged to the canine class specified.

The whip fell, but the howl of pain was uttered by Morrow, for quick as the flashing of a thought, Sol seized his wrist, and, giving a sudden jerk, dislocated the shoulder of his adversary,

and nearly crushed the bones of his arm, with a grasp like fingers of iron.

"Thar, that feeler will do this time, old coon," exclaimed Tuttle; "but if y' fool with me agin, I'll onjunte yer cussed neck!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALL—THE DEPARTURE.

THE savage personal rencounter described in the preceding chapter, did not interrupt the progress of the festivities. Only the defeated Major, with his lady, returned home, after he had availed himself of the little surgical aid which the united wisdom of half a dozen quack doctors could afford him. Colonel Miles feasted the multitude luxuriously during the afternoon, and at night they enjoyed themselves in their favorite pastime of drinking and dancing.

Captain Carlyle almost entirely monopolized the society of the fair Mary; and William Bolling, as he wandered about, like a restless spirit, among the throng of spectators, heard, with pain, many such expressions as the following: "What a handsome couple! I wonder when the wedding will take place!" and other intimations, showing the general belief that the future union of the pair was a fact fully arranged and settled. However, their behavior towards each other did not seem to indicate one particle of true affection on either side.

The eyes of the captain certainly glowed with the fiercest light of animal passion—desire without delicacy, tenderness or love; and his features had a haughty, sneering look, almost equivalent to positive hatred. The young girl, on the contrary, appeared utterly dejected, and floated through the mazy evolutions of the waltz, pale, silent, and seemingly unconscious, as if

dancing in a dream. She never once gazed upon the visage of her partner, or replied to his murmured words. Occasionally, indeed, her timid glance sought the face of William Bolling, but she instantly withdrew her eyes, with strong symptoms of alarm, on perceiving that he was regarding her with vigilant attention. The youth himself experienced the most disagreeable emotions of wonder and grief, but determined to wait patiently, and, at all hazards, to devise some means for the solution of the mystery, before the party should break up.

Captain Carlyle also noticed the unremitting observation of Bolling, and his aspect became positively fiendish, in its ominous, sarcastic smile of unutterable ferocity. He opened his thin, writhing lips, as if about to thunder some bloody menace of insult and defiance, when a frightful incident happened to prevent the act, if such really were his truculent intention.

Suddenly, in the yard, where hundreds had been carousing by the red illumination of an immense pine-log fire, a terrible outcry was heard. Shouts, shrieks, curses, and all the usual tokens of a murderous *mêlée* in the backwoods, rent the midnight air, accompanied by the roar of pistols and the ring of clashing steel. The populace seemed to be divided into different contending factions, some exclaiming, "Hurrah for Comanche Ben!" and others vociferating similar ejaculations for "Sol Tuttle," the hunter; and the tempest of the battle did not die away until the descendant of Pocahontas had compelled three of his opponents to beg for quarter, fighting with his fists alone against foes weaponed with firearms, who, having missed their intended victim, had unintentionally laid out several of the spectators dead in their tracks.

At the commencement of the affray, the crowd in the hall rushed out of the door, to witness the conflict, and young Bolling was left, for a few moments, alone with Mary. He had caught, amidst the noise, the name of Comanche Ben, which the maiden had associated with the bugle of the bandits, on the night

of their attack; but earnestly as he desired to unravel that mystery, there was another one deeper and dearer to his heart, now immediately before him, in the troubled countenance of the beautiful girl.

"You do not appear to enjoy the amusement very much," said the youth, hardly knowing how to begin.

"I detest such scenes," she replied, with a perceptible shudder.

"You surely cannot be displeased with the attentions of your partner, as he never leaves your side," suggested Bolling.

Turning white as a piece of paper, she murmured, in a tremulous whisper, "Oh, that he would leave me now and forever!"

"Then why do you tolerate his persevering gallantry?"

"For the love of Christ, for pity's sake, do not ask me!" she implored, shivering as with ungovernable fear.

"Miss Miles," said the youth, in low tones of infinite tenderness, "accident made us acquainted, under strange circumstances, yet such as should inspire mutual candor and confidence. You have interested me more than I can tell, or even explain to myself, unspeakably more than any other human being ever did on earth. May I claim your pardon for asking a private interview?"

Her cheek, before so pallid, now burned with the brightest crimson, as she commenced her answer in a sweet, sighing whisper. "Yes; I also wish to speak to you, if"—What proviso she was about to annex will never be known, as at the instant her father entered, from an adjoining apartment, and with angry features, commanded, "Mary, come here; I want you."

A moment afterwards the throng returned to the room, and the waltz went on again, as if nothing had occurred to mar their harmony, with the exception of the families whose circles had been so rudely broken by the murders in the adjacent yard. Mary, however, did not again appear in the hall, and as Bolling remained with his eyes riveted on the door through which she

had made her exit, it suddenly opened, revealing the handsome form and smiling face of Captain Carlyle. Their glances met in another long, fixed stare of speechless hatred. But the aspect of the duellist had a look of such deadly meaning, so cruelly, defiantly triumphant, and withal so scornful and overbearing, that the high-spirited young Virginian took one step forward to slap his cheek, when Colonel Miles caught him by the arm, and drawing him aside, remarked, "I want to converse with you on a matter of great importance."

The two walked out some distance into the garden behind the dwelling, and pausing, the colonel began abruptly, in a grave tone:—"Mr. Bolling, I take you to be a gentleman of the purest honor, and therefore, I say to you frankly, that any attentions of yours to my daughter, will be disagreeable both to her and myself."

"I have not voluntarily paid her any attentions—at least, any more than her late misfortunes forced me to render," answered Bolling, haughtily.

The other winced at this reference to services which deserved treatment so different, and responded hastily, in more friendly tones:—"We are not ungrateful for the brave defence which you made against the bandits; but I have the strongest reasons for the sentiment that I expressed in the outset."

"Perhaps, you may deem me unfit to associate on terms of equality with your family; if so, let me assure you, and the proof is easy, that I am your peer, both in wealth and respectability," said the youth, in accents of caustic bitterness.

"The motives for my conduct are not at all of the character which you would insinuate," remarked the Colonel, in a voice of displeasure. "In plain terms, Mary is affianced to another, and must, of course, be circumspect in her demeanor towards mere strangers."

"Oh, yes, I thought so; the duellist is the happy man. Colonel, let me congratulate you on the magnificence of your son-

in-law, and the misery of your only daughter," exclaimed Bolling, in tones of terrible irony.

"Why should she be miserable as the wife of one who possesses riches and popularity, and is universally beloved, and who could to-morrow be elected to Congress, if he desired the honor."

"Because she hates him as immeasurably as I do."

"How do you know that?" cried the father, grasping the young man's arm with convulsive energy, and trembling as with an ague.

"I infer it from all her looks and actions," answered Bolling, "and you are perfectly aware of the truth yourself."

"You are entirely mistaken," said the Colonel, breathing more freely; "and besides, if Mary's heart were perfectly free, you dare not offer her your hand, as I am well advised by information which I have received this very night."

"What do you mean?" interrogated the other, in great surprise.

"Because your proud and aristocratic friends would disown and cast you off as a beggar, if you should wed against their wishes, and with the family of such an indifferent a character as mine."

"Some person has told you a base falsehood," returned Bolling, with a certain lofty air; "I am not dependent on the caprices of my kindred, if they were as tyrannical as you allege, because I chance to inherit a fortune in my own right, by the partial will of my deceased grandfather. However, I will at once relieve you from my disagreeable presence, if you will be so obliging as to order my horse."

"Surely," said Miles, joyfully, and hurried away to give the proper mandate.

The youth walked rapidly back to the house, muttering, as he went, "Before my exit, I will claim payment from the captain for all the mute insults which he has offered me; and woe

to him if he denies the bloody debt!" But upon entering the hall, to his bitter disappointment, the foe had already gone.

Indeed, it was now nearly daylight, and the assembled multitude had begun to break up hastily. As the young man passed out of the door, with an icy bow to his late host, Sol Tuttle hailed him:

"Well, Mr. Bolling, I see you're about to cut dirt from these diggins; which way?"

"My road lies up the Tanaha," said the other.

"And mine, too," answered Sol; "and I'd be mighty proud of yer company."

Bolling gladly assented, in the hope to learn something more of several persons at the late gathering, from the friendly hunter. But the latter, at first, did not seem in the least disposed to gratify his curiosity. He rode on in moody silence, looking sharply into the bushes on the right and left, as if apprehending danger.

At length their path diverged from the black shadows of the forest, and entered a broad expanse of prairie, just as the diamond beauties of the golden dawn began to glitter in the starry orient; and almost immediately, the full, infinite effulgence of the divine day illuminated the earth and sky. For in that genial Southern land, the perfection and prime of light do not come by slow growth, as in the higher latitudes of the unfriendly frozen North. First, you see a faint sparkle, a gleam of pale fire, modest as the earliest love-beam of a timid eye; next a sweet suffusion, a crimson glow, like the blush of burning blood on the warm cheek of a virgin bride, as she moves on the arm of her chosen one to the altar; and then, quick as the rapid rush of lightning, the sun, in cloudless glory, parts the azure curtains of the air, and, like some almighty giant, as he is, leaps, at one flaming bound, out of heaven, upon the earth he loves, and clasps it with fiery caresses. All the bright birds warble,

the butterflies flash their rainbow wings, and the bees murmur around the honey-dew of the flower-cups.

At the instant, the spirits of the hunter became luminous with the air, and he banished all previous apprehension from his mind. The effect, it must be candidly confessed, did not originate so much from any sentiment arising out of the poetical beauty of the morning, as from the more rational sense of its practical utility. If he chanced to encounter enemies now, it would be even-handed, and they could not take him by surprise.

"It appears that you had quite a battle, last night," remarked Bolling, with another effort to elicit discourse.

"Yes; and it was all on yer account," said Sol, with a twinkle of humor in his merry black eye.

"How so?" inquired the youth.

"Yes," continued the hunter, not heeding the question; "and I've been uneasy all the way on yer account, too."

"Well, suppose that you explain the cause, and then I may perhaps sympathise with your feelings," remarked Bolling with a smile.

"It's rather a long story, and I'd rather not commence until arter breakfast," answered Sol, with an affected seriousness that failed to hide his anxiety to begin at once.

"Oh, as to that, you can cut the matter as short as you please; only let me have some fragment of the tale, as it so nearly concerns myself," urged Bolling, very interested.

"I guess as how it does," replied Tuttle. "Perhaps you mout know Mary Miles? Don't redden so about yer gills, for I seed you lookin' at her, mighty sweet. Well, I'm powerful intermate with her, and I'll tell you how it come. The gal has an uncle, old Jack Miles, who's the only neighbor in a day's ride of my wigwam; and so, as there be but two on us and our families, you may swear we don't quarrel. Every year, and sometimes oftener, Mary goes out thar to see her kinsfolks; for though

they be poor, like meself, she's too good to be proud; and so you see as how I come acquainted with her. Well, she took to sort o' likin' me, but I liked her better; and that's the 'casion of the intermacy I spoke about. Now maybe yer would wish to know what she said to me last night, consarnin' you!" interrogated the hunter, with a sly wink.

"As you please," said Bolling, coloring to the eyes.

"Well, jist before we left, she slipped round the house, and tuk me one side, and sez she, Mr. Tuttle, you wer interduced to a young man called William Bolling? 'Yes,' sez I. Sez she, 'He's in danger; some persons ar goin' to murder him.' 'Who?' sez I. 'I can't give their names,' says she; 'but, Sol, yer a brave feller, and if ye'll jist ride off with him, for my sake, and hold yer tongue on the subjec', I'll thank you as long as I have breath.' And then the big shinin' tears come into her black eyes, and in mine, too, and I swore I'd do it."

"Was that all she said?" inquired the youth, in accents of the deepest anxiety.

"Yes; for then the Colonel walked up, with a face mad as a thundercloud, and cussin' like blazes, told her to make herself scarce."

"Have you any idea when Miss Miles will visit her relations in your neighborhood again?" asked Bolling, with indications of emotion too profound for concealment.

"The fust of next month, so she told me yisterday; and if you'll jist go home with me, Susy and the children will be glad to see you; and by waitin' a week, you can chat with her as much as you want."

"I cannot accept your offered hospitality for the present, but I will endeavor to avail myself of it in a few days," replied the young man, kindly. "I must try to discover a valuable servant that I lost a short time since."

"I heerd about it," remarked Sol; "and thar's not a doubt the robbers have got him."

"What course would you advise me to adopt, under the circumstances?" interrogated Bolling, thinking that the hunter's familiar experience with the wild scenes of forest life might enable him to impart useful information.

The latter reflected seriously a brief space, and said, "You had better go to Major Morrow, and tell him all about it. He can do more for you than I can. He's got a secret Lynchin' company, and is up to all the cunnin' tricks of the rogues. You see, I give you misinterested counsel, for I hate the old sinner worse nor a polecat. I put his shoulder out of jint last night, but the next time that he fools with me, it shall be his neck."

"May I be allowed to ask what was the cause of the animosity between you?"

"He killed my brother in Missouri," answered Sol, in tones unutterably mournful, while the great round tears rolled down his sunburnt cheeks like rain-drops.

As soon as he became less agitated, in order to divert his attention from the painful subject of his thoughts, Bolling inquired, "What sort of a country is it where you reside?"

The hunter responded with almost poetic enthusiasm: "A perfect paradise—a big sea of prairies, level as a barn-floor, and sweet leetle islands of timber sprinkled all over it, with deers thick as cattle in a medder, the sile black as yer hat, the green grass up to yer head, and full of yellor flowers as the sky is of stars."

"Do you own the land where you live?"

"No; all that belongs to a rich speckerlater in Shelbyville, who won't sell less pieces than a thousand acres. He owns fifty miles square."

"Would you object, if I should purchase the entire tract?" asked Bolling, cautiously, remembering the statements of Colonel Miles as to the bitter prejudices of the squatters.

"By no means," answered the other, promptly; "I don't feel about it as some men do. I know the sile isn't mine, and

perhaps not much of it ever will be, so it matters not who else has it. But the wild bucks and buffaloes are my property as much as my own hoss, when they git within reach of my rifle; and them no speckerlater can take from me, unless he shoots 'em fust."

"How does it happen that Colonel Miles is so wealthy, while his brother is so poor?" interrogated Bolling, suddenly changing the theme.

"That is more nor I can say," responded the hunter, with a dubious shake of the head; "some people think that the Colonel has speckerlated mishonestly. One thing is sartin, that he's made his fortin since he went to Texas, only ten years ago."

"Are you acquainted with Captain Carlyle?"

"Ah! thar's another of them upstarters, that got rich in a hurry;" said Sol, thoughtfully. "Five winters past, and he fetch up in Shellyville, without a penny in his pocket, and now he has a big plantation, and works a hundred niggers. Prehaps he made it shootin' sumthin' else than birds!"

"Does any body accuse him of dishonest conduct?"

"No; every body is too much afeerd of him to speak a word agin him, and I advertise you to keep yer eye skinned when you meet him; fur it's my expression that he's the chap who intended to murder you last night, that yer gal spoke of."

"He will meet with me sooner than he expects," remarked Bolling, with a terrible look.


After deliberating in silence for some time, the youth determined to follow the hunter's advice, and seek an interview with Major Morrow. Having communicated his purpose to the other, Sol, after pressing him not to forget his promised visit, showed a dim path to the right, leading towards the heavy forests of the Tanaha, which he asserted, would conduct him to his destination, and they parted with emotions of mutual good will.

William Bolling pursued his journey alone over the wild

desolate prairie, waving with long grass, and sparkling with the most brilliant flowers, even at this early season of the young year. For in that glorious climate, the most divine in the world, the sunbeams of the first month in Spring turn to emerald verdure and amethystine blooms almost as soon as they touch the earth with kindly kisses of fire. The red deer wantoned in the balmy air, or reclined on the velvet green sward, the turkeys uttered shrill calls to their mates, the wild horses careered in the blue distance, tossing their free tails like banners in battle; but the unconscious youth, saw nothing, heard nothing, remembered nothing, save the self-created, but most vivid and bewitching spectres of his own thoughts. His soul wandered at will in a fairy and most fantastic world of dreams, the bright creatures of imagination and love. Yes, he loved. He felt it in every pulsation of his heart, in every changing idea of his feverish throbbing brain, and he realized the immutable fact, that he had never before in all his life, known even the meaning of the word passion. The new feeling, like an unutterable inspiration, the lightning shock of some celestial flame, mastered his reason, conquered his senses, absorbed all his essence, sowed the universe with stars, coined the air into bridal songs, transmuted every sand-grain on the common earth to gold. All the trees were of living emerald, and every rock glittered with the dust of diamonds.

While present by the dear one's side he had wavered, wondered, doubted. But a few brief hours of absence, had changed her into an angel of perfection, purity, and more than mortal beauty—a thing to be worshipped, sainted, and enshrined in the holiest place of the heart for ever more. What mattered it to him with this fire in his blood, this wild lightning in his brain, this sweet madness in his mind, that insuperable difficulties barred the road to fruition—that fortune, friends, other and older vows, fierce foes, and death itself, appeared in the path to the heavenly hope, and warned him away as with hands of horror. He

would vanquish all, do battle against impossibilities, reverse the iron wheel of destiny, unsphere the laws of nature, and grasp his prize, or suffer annihilation of the soul itself in the crisis of the conflict! For the first impulse of love, everywhere and ever, is a frenzy which embodies itself in fire-pictures of fancy and feeling.



CHAPTER V.

MAJOR MORROW AND JOANNA.

At length, aroused from his deep reverie—that heavenly dream of the heart, which comes to every human soul but only once, in the light of the golden dawn that lies on the sweet paradise of our youth—William Bolling found himself at the gate of an immense field, and, from the previous description of the place, as sketched by the hunter, he recognized it instantly as the residence of Major Morrow. Indeed, the plantation was so singularly arranged, that no one who had ever heard of it, could possibly mistake the locality. The dwelling of the owner, built of enormous pine logs, in the form of a block-house, pierced on all sides by port-holes, for musket and rifle, stood in the middle of the vast field, and at the centre of a considerable square, composed of negro cabins, as if the whole had been specially constructed for a strong position of defence. Nor were other indications wanting to prove the military forethought of the Major in a prudent provision to guard against surprise. The farm absolutely swarmed with dogs of every variety, among which the terrible bloodhound predominated in numerical force and ferocity.

As soon as the young man made his appearance, all these savage monsters seemed to consider him an intruder upon their domain, a natural enemy, upon whom they had an inalienable right to pounce, without a moment's warning; and uttering unearthly howls of rage, they rushed towards him from all

MAJOR MORROW AND JOANNA.

63

directions, like a whirlwind of hairy demons. Fortunately, the fence was high, and being outside of the enclosure, the stranger was safe from an immediate assault.

In a brief space, an African hastened from the house, and stilling the canine tempest by a few hearty curses and well-aimed blows, inquired, with a profound obeisance, "Pray, massa, what's yer will?"

"I desire to see Major Morrow."

"In dat case ye must send de name; fur him won't allow any wagabond strangers to come in de gate," remarked the slave, with a look of suspicion.

Bolling gave the required address, adding that he wished to consult the major in reference to a servant, who had recently been stolen by the robbers. The other hurried away on his mission, and shortly returning, with a countenance of evident satisfaction, opened the ponderous wooden gate, saying, "Massa Morrow be berry glad to see you."

The youth, however, hesitated to enter the hurricane of dogs, whose red gleaming eyes continued to watch him with unwavering attention. "Nebber be 'fraid of dem now, massa," said the negro, noticing the dubious apprehension of Bolling; "when me lets you in, dey acknowledge you fur a friend, and would fight for you, at de drop of a hat."

With this comfortable assurance, the other entered, and instantly experienced the truth of the African's assertion. The shaggy fiends suddenly changed their hostile attitude for one of the most intense welcome, leaping playfully around him, and filling the air with ringing, deep-mouthed music. How strange a mystery is the manifestation of animal instinct! This unerring sagacity without speech, this logic without laws, this peculiar inference of the senses, which often fails not even where human reason falters, and where the formal rules of the syllogism lead to fatal errors. Is there indeed a god within the bosom of the mere brute, as well as in the brain of his lordly master?

Bolling met with a most cordial reception from the major, which was perhaps due to the nature of his errand, more than to any personal predilection in the mind of the other.

"You must excuse the offer of my left hand," said Morrow, bowing, and holding out his great hairy fingers; "that hang-dog of a hunter pulled my shoulder out of joint yesterday; but it's set now, and will be all right in a week, and then"—He checked the menace, but his awful aspect told that it would have conveyed a murderous meaning: "Take a seat," he added. "And so you wish my assistance to find your nigger. You could not have called on a better hand. I'm arter the rogues with a sharp stick, and the end of it on fire. You were a little shy at the Colonel's ball; but that was right, as half the people there were thieves: and, cunning with courage, is the genuine watch-word for these diggins. Howsomever, you must now tell me all about it."

The young man commenced, and narrated the principal facts connected with his adventure among the bandits, suppressing only what related to the beautiful girl; his soul revolting at the bare idea of mentioning even her musical name in the presence of so coarse an auditor.

The major heard him with marked attention patiently to the close, and then exclaimed, with an air of deep thought, "It's a very bad case. These were no common robbers, or petty thieves, but the ringleaders of a powerful band, as bloody-minded as they are brave. Your nigger is a goner, I'm afraid."

"Do you think that they have killed him?" inquired Bolling, sadly.

"Oh, no danger of that," answered the other, "if they could help it. Their business is not to shoot darkies, which would be unprofitable sport, but to steal them and run them off to the States for sale. In this way some of the villains have become rich in a few years."

"Do you know who the chiefs of the enterprise are?"

"May be as how I do, and may be as how I don't, but cunning with courage is the right talk," said the major, with an inscrutable twinkle in his gleaming grey eye.

"You think then, that I may as well relinquish all hopes of recovering my servant?" interrogated Bolling in gloomy tones.

"Wait until to-morrow, and after consultin' some of my neighbors, I will be able to tell you better; but I'm sure we'll never do much with them rascals, unless we raise a big Lynching company, as we did in Missouri;" and the major uttered a low fiendish chuckle, at the recollection of scenes which, if described, would have startled his hearer with unmitigated horror.

"If we could only bring them all together at one grand barbacue, and poison them!" suggested a voice in strange mild sweetness.

"Just listen at her!" cried the major, with a frown; "pisen is Joanna's great medicine to cure the robbers of the itch on their fingers; but I call that downright murder!"

"Ah!" reasoned the wife, in the same mellifluous accents; "I cannot see the difference betwixt your medicine and mine. You stab, hang, burn, and whip the rogues to death. But certainly the most genteel, as well as easy way of dying, is by poison; I do not mean any of those common coarse drugs, but some quick subtle extract, that kills like a flash of lightning!"

"Shut up," ordered the husband savagely; "you make my very hair stand on an end!"

It must be confessed that young Bolling fully concurred in the major's sentiment. He gazed, with a cold shudder at the visage, immovable as marble, of that singular woman, who could thus deliberately avow and openly defend, the perpetration of crimes the darkest, the most atrocious in the calendar of human guilt, or even in that of devils! He thought at first, that her words must be ironical, but her features betrayed no such import. There was not a gleam on her pale colorless face, changeless as a surface of snow; while her wild black eyes

seemed as ever sad, and profoundly earnest. He was surprised, however, as well as shocked. Her forehead had a massive breadth and height, denoting much intellect, and her language at once luminous and grammatically accurate, revealed some mental culture. There was nothing about her positively displeasing, save the mouth, with icy thin lips, sculptured into a sinister smile, that seemed to have frozen there forever. Her age might amount to forty-five summers, but although she was the mother of a troop of sons and daughters, her appearance showed few traces to indicate the flight of time. Her brow presented not one furrow, and her luxuriant ringlets had the raven's blackness.

William Bolling, notwithstanding all his abhorrence, felt himself involuntarily spell-bound, bewitched, as it were, literally, by the unaccountable fascinations of this wicked-hearted female.

"Have you noticed my armory?" inquired Morrow, changing the subject, and pointing with a gesture of pride to the four corners of the room, which were all filled with enormous stacks of weapons, rifles, muskets and swords. The mantel-piece, too, was covered with knives, daggers and pistols of every form and caliber, from the long duelling barrel to the murderous revolver of Colt, and the not less deadly tube of Deringer.

"Ain't they darlin's?" asked the owner, with an aspect of infinite beatitude, as he smoothed and handled these shapes of steel, and even talked to them, as if they had been children of his bosom. These are the true friends," he said, with glowing enthusiasm. "They never desert one in the day of danger. They never lie or tattle or deceive. They never ask for anything but a thimblefull of powder and a small bite of lead, and they never talk at all, but in tones of thunder, and always speak to the purpose. They are gentler than horses, for they never kick; and far more obedient than slaves for they never jaw you back; and if you only touch them with even your little finger, they move in an instant, and lay the proudest foe humble at your feet!"

The major then proposed a walk over the farm. Bolling assented, and they rambled around the vast field, including nearly a mile square of level bottom land, fertile as the soil of a garden, and in a fine state of cultivation. The young corn was now about as tall as the knees, undulating in graceful green waves before the wind, like a sunny sea of emerald. Some fifty slaves were busily employed in ploughing and hoeing, and the young man thought that he could detect, in many of their countenances, tokens of bitter hatred towards their master.

They had approached the fence on the bank of the Tanaha, when suddenly a dark form sprung from the clump of bushes, and uttered a loud exclamation of the wildest joy; "O Massa Bolling! O dear dear Massa Billy, am you here?" and the lost Cæsar, weeping tears of unutterable emotion, rushed forwards and clasping the young man's hand, kissed it with as devout a fervor, as if it had been a holy relic.

"Where have you been? How did you escape? tell me all the circumstances," said the master with dewy eyelids, almost as excited as the slave himself.

"When you got away," began Cæsar, "I was so powerful glad, that I cried loud; thank God massa's safe; so one of them hollered to the rest, don't kill him for he's a nigger, but all of you catch him.' Then they tried to gather round me, but the white mule kicked like a whole team, and I kept blazin' fast as possible with your revolver, and I 'spec' I hit one or two of 'em, fur I heard 'em squall out, like roosters cotch by a fox, and then they tuk to shootin' back, and I 'cluded, that I'd never see Alabama any more. Then I thought of a trick, and jumpin' outen the saddle, run off through the bushes. Arterwards, I circled round till I found the trail some miles ahead, and I've kept on Selim's track ever since. I knowed it by a jog in the shoe. But I had to come dreadful slow, dodgin' about in the brush, fur I'se feer'd to be seen, 'case some one might steal me."

"I am very glad to see you," said the youth, his features

beaming with affectionate delight; "I had come to persuade this gentleman to aid me in searching for you."

"But whar's the angel gal?" inquired the slave anxiously. Bolling gave him a token to be silent on that subject, and the other then asked with signs of equal interest; "have you seed anything of Bob? poor fellow! I 'spec' the robbers am got him."

"O no," answered his master smiling; "the white mule overtook me, in a short time after the attack, and has continued with Selim since. You will find him in the stable."

"Ah! I'm so happy," cried Cæsar, still weeping; "I like Bob better nor anything in the world 'cept you."

The incident furnished the major a datum for the universal and necessary inference, which he deduced equally from all sorts of facts; "We must organize a great company of lynchers."

They all walked to the house, and Cæsar being dismissed to the kitchen, the major's family with their guest, sat down to supper, at the fashionable hour in the backwoods, a little before sunset. Bolling had now an opportunity of inspecting the other members of this peculiar social circle. They consisted of three sons, ranging from nineteen to twenty-three years of age, huge freckle-faced, red-haired images of their father, and two daughters, the eldest of whom proved her own paternity by the strongest species of ocular evidence; while the younger somewhat resembled her mother, having her eyes of unearthly black, and strange beauty of form and feature, without the corpse-like paleness of her complexion, and the icy smile of her sinister livid lips. This young girl, indeed, would have been extremely charming, but for the awkward, blushing, bashfulness of her manner, and her obvious want of intellectual cultivation. However, both these extraneous defects might yet, perhaps, be removed, as she had scarcely arrived at the verge of fifteen.

After the repast had ended, the major remarked to his guest, "Joanna and the girls must amuse you to-night, as I have important and pressing business in the neighborhood that will

engage me till a late hour. Come, boys, get your weapons and let's make tracks." And the old bear and his three cubs, shouldered their guns, loaded themselves with revolvers and bowie knives, and started on some unknown nocturnal mission.

In order to while away the time, as neither Joanna nor her timid daughters, seemed disposed to entertain him with their conversation, Bolling stepped to a large book-shelf, supported by pins driven into the wall, and which appeared to be well supplied with learned looking octavos. The first volume that he picked up, was the record of the most celebrated criminal trials in all ages and nations, at least, so the title announced in pompous phrase. Upon turning over the leaves, he discovered from their soiled thumb-worn condition, that they had been thoroughly studied, especially the numerous cases of prosecution for poisoning, which all, in addition to the horrible text, contained marginal notes, in a delicate female hand, showing that they had been devoured *con amore*. All the other books related to medical or chemical science, and the youth shuddered to perceive that several treatises on poison had been annotated, like the criminal record, previously mentioned, with reference to baneful herbs and their effect upon animal life.

Determined, if possible, to penetrate the mystery, he inquired apparently in careless tones; "may I ask, madam, if any of your relatives are physicians?"

"I am a female doctor, myself, as my mother was before me," replied the sweet sinister voice.

"It must be an interesting profession," suggested the youth, feeling his way.

The wild black eyes instantly sparkled with sudden animation, as the lady answered; "O it is a divine study, for which I always felt a love amounting almost to positive passion. Let poets and philosophers prate as much as they like, about the wonder-working control of the mind over matter, what is that compared with the still mightier effects of matter upon mind?"

A few grains of opium can wrap the soul in dreams of elysian luxury, or thrill it with infernal pangs of fiery torture ! The green tincture of an Indian herb, can bring bliss which the rose bower of Eden never knew. The purple juice of a plant, that creeps on the bosom of every prairie, can fill the mind with murderous madness, such as all the sages on earth could never hope to cure. Wild weeds grow in every forest, that yield an essence by proper distillation, one drop of which on the tongue, will kill the strongest giant of mortal mould, quick as the blaze of a thunderbolt. One fact alone decides the issue of strength between the two worlds, the spiritual and material ; the mind cannot destroy one living organ, but ten thousand forms of matter, can wither and dissolve the entire frame, and send the spirit away on its last long journey."

The other looked at the feminine speaker, with feelings of unutterable astonishment. He had shared the common prejudice, that very little intelligence might be expected on the frontier, forgetting that countless different causes—misfortune, poverty, crime, and innate restlessness, have combined to drive exiles from every land into the sheltering shadows of those dark green woods. At length he asked ; "Where was your native place?"

"London," she answered, her countenance returning to its old sad expression ; "my father was an eminent professor of Chemistry till a great calamity compelled us to emigrate. We wandered to Missouri, where the dust of all my family now rests in quiet, which no storm can ever more disturb." She paused a moment, and added in a strange tone, "did you never feel that it would be a joy to die?"

"I cannot say that I ever experienced the desire of which you speak," responded Bolling, a sense of the ludicrous, rapidly effacing his previous serious impression.

"I do not allude," she continued, "to the sweet tranquillity which death insures the dreamless repose, the freedom from all pain and passion ; from the doubts of love, and from the agonies

of hate although for these and all other earthly ills, the darkness of the grave is a sovereign remedy. I refer to the knowledge which the immortal mind may, perchance, attain when liberated from the thrall of the material senses. I want to pierce the secret heart of the universe ; to get behind the shifting scenes of purple clouds, and painted sunshine, and hold the hand which moves them ; to scan the golden axles of ten thousand rolling worlds, and see on what they hang. To perceive, to know, and never more to guess, or vaguely imagine, ah ! may not death give us that, for surely life never can?"

"But may it not also give us something more than that?" said the youth weighing slowly his words, and watching their effect ; "may it not bring us justice ? may it not measure out punishment for all our sins ? may it not place us face to face with the victims that we have so cruelly wronged in life ? May not the circumstances be reversed, and the victims exercise the office of avengers ? may not those who were the slain in this world become the slayers in the next ?"

She started suddenly as if stung by an adder, her thin lips were convulsed as by spasms of shooting pain, and she spoke no more that night.

In the meantime, as singular, and perhaps a much more amusing discussion was going on, in one of the small negro cabins, some fifty yards distant. The sable interlocutors were a vain but ignorant mulatto, with sinister features, whom they called Hannibal, or by the usual abbreviation, Han., Cæsar and Tony, the latter having arrived after nightfall from the plantation of Colonel Miles.

"I wonder, Darky, that you did not stay away when you had got rid of yer master so easy?" remarked Han with a sneer.

"Whar would I stay, out amongst the wolves?" answered Cæsar innocently.

"He's ignorant as a goose !" said Han with a look of affected pity.

"He don't know nuthin' of life, no more nor a blind hoss!" added Tony with an air of pride.

"Would you have me to live on grass, like a buffalo?" interrogated Cæsar with a puzzled countenance.

Lor no, you black booby!" laughed Han; "couldn't you use yer legs, and make 'em carry you to the free States?"

"Whar's that?" asked Cæsar, opening his big white eyes, till they appeared like two enormous dogwood blossoms.

"Jist listen to him!" cried Han, while he and Tony burst into loud peals of merriment, showing all their ivory.

"Well, I s'pose I must colluminate yer ignorance, poor Nigger," observed Han with a face of commiseration: "there am free states way up toward the north star."

"Do you mean heaven?" interrupted Cæsar.

"O Lor! you'll kill this here chile!" shouted Han, laughing until the tears rolled down his cheeks; while Tony tumbled on the floor, and kicked with tempestuous mirth, as if in convulsions.

As soon as Han could master his emotions, he continued; "The free states am in Canady, and thar' niggers am better nor anybody else. Them am the gentlemen, and the others black thar boots. Them do jist what 'em please; marry white gals and cuts up all sorts of shines. Well, s'pose you don't know the way thar, plenty of white men in these parts to show you. These have meetin's in de woods arter night, and tell you all 'bout it. Thar am one to-morrow evenin', s'pose you go 'long on us; but if you cheap, we'll cut yer throat."

"What do they call these white men that help niggers to run off?" asked Cæsar.

"Hobbolitions, or bobolitionists, I don't know circumspec' which," replied Tony.

"I'll see about it," Cæsar remarked prudently, and the meeting adjourned, *sine die*.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN CARLYLE AND LUCY—THE MURDER.

THE residence of Captain Carlyle was situated in the rich alluvial delta of the Tanaha and Sabine, near their point of junction. It consisted of a large farm in a high state of cultivation, well peopled by numerous choice slaves, while the dwelling was a sort of fortress, very similar to that of Major Morrow's, with this difference, that instead of standing in the middle of the field, it occupied the bank of the river, which happened in that place to be high and precipitous.

On the morning of the day when the events occurred that I have just related, the proprietors of the plantation might have been seen seated at a most sumptuous breakfast in a small room of his house, which he chose to dignify with the name of "Library," and which, it must be confessed, was not altogether unworthy of the title. An elegant book-case, of black walnut, was well supplied with gold-dust of the immortal dead, embracing the *élite* of the ancient and modern classics, but especially the works of the great masters in jurisprudence and political science. A costly sofa, and several handsome chairs, with some beautiful paintings, and a full-length portrait of the owner on the walls, gave an air of luxury and refinement to the apartment, seldom witnessed in the backwoods.

Nor did the presiding genius of the place appear ill-adapted to the scenes around him. He was a slender man, about thirty years of age, with a regular face, a somewhat dark complexion,

eyes of vivid, burning black, shining with calm and steady lustre, beneath a forehead unusually broad and well developed, but, to a certain degree, wanting in height. His long, rich hair, of the raven's hue, with a slight tendency to natural curls, floated unpruned around his shoulders, and combined with the slightness and symmetry of his general features, would have rendered his aspect too feminine, but for the mighty, massive firmness of his chin, and the stern shortness of the upper lip, clothed with its jetty mustache; while his teeth, of a dazzling whiteness, wide apart and sharply pointed, gleamed in a mouth expressing iron resolution and savage force. The only physical trait which could be detected about his person, at all disagreeable, was in the voice, its tones having a strange, sinister sweetness, indicating insincerity—it would have been impossible for the hearer to tell why, or even to define the effect that he could not deny.

But the captain, although breakfasting in his library, did not enjoy the repast in solitude. In a chair, facing his own, sat a young woman, who could not have seen more than twenty summers. To the glance of a Sybarite, the charms of this beautiful being would have seemed of the most fascinating description; however, they might be too warm and sensual for the purest taste, that which prefers that the animal splendor of form and feature should have some rays of spiritual light mingled with the fires of emotional feeling. Her figure blended the rarest mixture of lithe fairy slenderness of the waist, with healthy fulness in the bust and bosom, and her brilliant black eyes literally blazed with the flames of passion. Her exquisite face betrayed no token of African descent, and yet her complexion was dark, or, more properly, of a golden yellow, and of a singular transparency, considering its tint, revealing the crimson blood at play in the arteries of the temples, like lightning beneath a rainbow. It would have been impossible to say what might be her lineage. She might have been an Italian, an Andalusian woman, a gorgeous creature from the mountains of Circassia, a creole

from Louisiana, or even one of those bewitching quadroons that one sometimes meets in the gay avenues of New Orleans.

"How did you enjoy the ball, last night?" interrogated the female, in a slightly foreign accent.

"Very well, Lucy," said the captain, carelessly, without removing his eyes from the plate before him.

"How is Miss Mary?" asked the girl, and her features became pale as she pronounced the name.

"Beautiful as ever," answered Carlyle, raising to her countenance a cold, cruel glance, as if he sought to inflict pain.

Her dark eyes blazed wildly, and her very lips grew livid. Her agitation, and the fury depicted on her distorted visage, revealed volumes of meaning—love, jealousy, rage, revenge, every idea that can burn the brain or madden the heart of a passionate woman, who feels that she has suffered an irreparable wrong.

Suddenly she calmed the internal storm, by a wonderful effort of will, and gazing fixedly at the other, said in low tones, stern and almost masculine, "Captain Carlyle, have you forgotten that this day is an anniversary in your life and mine, but greater in mine than your's? Do you remember your promise, not yet fulfilled, made five years ago?"

"I am not likely to forget it while your tongue is able to move," retorted the other, with a bitter sneer.

"Do you intend to keep it?" she inquired in a thrilling whisper, while the flame in her black eyes became lurid as the red light of a forge.

Her writhing countenance startled even the haughty spirit of Carlyle, and he faltered a response of evasive acquiescence: "Yes, certainly, Lucy, at a suitable time, so soon as I realize a sufficient fortune to make us peers of the proudest in your sweet city of the river Crescent."

At the moment, a servant entered hastily with the message, "Parson Cole is in the parlor, and wishes to see you."

The Captain bounded from his seat so suddenly, that he nearly overthrew the table, and rushed from the room. As soon as he had gone and Lucy remained alone, an extraordinary change like a mysterious transfiguration passed over her pale face. A saddened look of ineffable tenderness, blended with measureless despair, appeared in her dark eyes, and she bowed her head upon her jewelled hands, and gave way to a passionate tempest of tears.

In the mean time the interview had commenced in the parlor, after Carlyle had carefully closed and bolted the doors. Parson Cole's picture needs no delicate touches of the pen. He was a lean diminutive man, some fifty years of age, with a long thin, melancholy countenance, relieved only from utter gloom by a pair of pale blue eyes, denoting much shrewdness with a spice of dissimulation; with a nose like the beak of a bird, and flowing hair of snowy whiteness. In fine, his profile resembled that of a grey hawk in contour, but in expression the solemnity of the owl.

"Have you just arrived from Arkansas?" inquired Carlyle eagerly.

"Yes," said the other in hollow tones; "I have, however, travelled slowly, often stopping to labor in the vineyard of the gospel, for as the good book says, the harvest is great but the reapers are few."

"Reserve your hypocritical foolery for camp-meetings, and talk like a man of sense, or I will hurl you out of the window," threatened the Captain with a frown.

"Well then," replied the other, instantly changing his manner, and uttering the ghost of a laugh; "question, and thy servant will answer."

"How are your friends getting along in the Ozark mountains?"

"Increasing in basket and store, I mean raking together as fine a lot of nigger flesh as ever you set eyes upon."

"Were you at the encampment in the big swamp?"

"Surely, and they are doing still better there."

"Were you at our council-ground on Soda lake?"

"Certainly, and the boys there are bringing in their game by hundreds."

"Does our great secret appear to have leaked out any where, so far as you can ascertain?"

"Not unless it has in this county," responded the parson with a troubled look; "all other parts of the line, from Iowa to Texas are perfectly safe; when a darkey is missing in Missouri, they suppose that he has gone to the free States; in Arkansas he is imagined to have escaped into the Indian country and nobody dreams that we have an organized band, with a strong chain of posts, extending along the frontier, for fifteen hundred miles. Occasionally one of our fellows gets nabbed, but he never cheaps, knowing that we can release him from the jail, whenever it suits us."

"But you spoke of this county, as if some danger might be apprehended here," remarked the Captain in anxious tones.

"Yes; there is danger here, deep, pressing, immediate," said the parson, with looks of evident alarm.

"What is it? Do not horrify me with a moment's suspense?" exclaimed Carlyle, impetuously.

"Do not gripe my shoulders so;" answered Cole, moving his chair back, to avoid the involuntary grasp of his friend's fingers.

"I put up last night with my beloved brother, parson Johnson; after I had prayed a very powerful prayer, in which by good luck, I bore down rather hard upon rogues in general, and nigger thieves in particular, when the family had retired to bed, my fat brother said in a whisper, that he had an important secret to tell me. He then related all our plans and purposes of speculation with most astounding accuracy. It was not necessary for me to feign any horror, as you may easily imagine, the emotion was too real, and I felt it in every hair of my head."

"But could he give the names of our association, or indicate its leaders?" asked the Captain with symptoms of intense interest.

"He only mentioned yourself," said Cole, "but he informed me, that they would know the rest to-night."

"How to-night?" cried Carlyle pallid as a corpse.

"They have a meeting to arrange a grand company of Lynchers, and some person will be there, with a full list of our names."

"Where is it to take place?"

"In the Tanaha bottom, one mile from Major Morrow's, under the large hollow sycamore, on the left side of a little lake."

"I recollect the spot," replied Carlyle, and he became immediately buried in profound meditation. At length he raised his head suddenly, and his dark eyes beamed with the light of resolution and hope, as he exclaimed firmly in commanding tones; "parson, you must attend that meeting."

"I!" gasped Cole, in a voice tremulous with horror.

"Surely you must and shall, in order to master their secrets."

"But when they come to read the names of our band, and mine appears among them, old Morrow will have me hung in a twinkling," urged the parson shuddering in every limb.

"O, no," argued the Captain, "you can deny the charge stoutly, cry out persecution, protest and pray as at the altar; the holy brethren will believe you; and if it should be otherwise, at the worst, our men will rescue you."

"I neither can nor will run the risk," said the parson doggedly.

These words produced a magical effect upon the Captain. His eyes blazed. His writhing lips parted. His sharp teeth opened like those of some wild beast, in the act of pouncing on its prey; but nevertheless he spoke in a voice awfully calm; "I am the chief whom you have sworn to obey. I order it; and you shall go, or I will pistol you like a wolf!" and he leisurely drew out a deringer, and cocked it at the other's heart.

"Oh, do not shoot me, captain! I will do anything you say. For God's sake, put up your pistol! the hammer might fall by accident. I'll go—I'll go," cried the parson, dropping on his knees, half dead with terror.

Carlyle replaced his weapon, remarking as he did so, "It is well. I am obliged, under the life-penalty, to enforce my own commands, as all the subordinates are bound to execute them; and now be off to work among the saints. It will occupy the greater part of the day to reach your destination."

Cole hurried away, with a strange menacing gleam in his pale blue eyes. As soon as he left the room, the captain said to himself, aloud, "I do not like the looks of that man; I fear that he means mischief. Perhaps he himself is the very traitor who is to furnish the catalogue of names. I must see for myself. Yes; I will brave the peril of the enterprise. It is better to be shot like a soldier, than to be hung like a dog." And he instantly rang the bell, and ordered his horse. Having armed himself with two heavy revolvers and a long, double-edged dagger, he was about to take his departure, when he met the tearful face of Lucy at the door.

"Where are you going now, dearest?" the girl inquired, with a countenance of mingled fondness and fear.

"On pressing business, Lucy," replied the captain, in kinder tones; "and I shall not be back till to-morrow evening. There, do not pout, like a little jealous fool as you are; for I shall not be near the residence of Colonel Miles."

"A farewell kiss," murmured the enamored woman, throwing her arms around his neck, and clinging to his mouth with lips of fire, as if that burning embrace were to be the last, and she would rather die than loosen her clasp.

"There, that will do," he said, impatiently, releasing himself from caresses that he had not returned, and springing into the saddle, he galloped off, without casting a glance behind, on that

pale girl who gazed after him, weeping as if her very heart would break.

Oh, say, ye viewless spirits of the air, who preside over the dark dominions of human pain ; ye, who have watched the revolutions of the wheel of torture, and have seen the warm heart-strings, one by one, break with silent grief, or burned suddenly asunder at the martyr's stake ; ye, who know all the pangs of life and of death, that can rend the brain or thrill the bosom ; ye, who keep a record of all the shrieks of frenzy, of all the moans that man's voice can make—say, is there aught in the realms of sorrow to be compared with the immortal agony, the undying heartbreak of jealous love ?

No such thoughts occurred to the mind of Captain Carlyle, as he spurred his horse to the utmost speed, and devoured space by miles and minutes. He paused, however, on approaching the prairie, and dismounting, applied his ear to the ground, and listening carefully, arose and pursued his journey at a less rapid rate. When he gained the edge of the forest, he halted again, and with an aspect of much surprise, scrutinized, through a small telescope, two horsemen, some half a mile before him, and bound in the same direction with himself. After satisfying his senses as to their identity, he soliloquized : "That is very strange, and even ominous ; one is Parson Cole and the other Bob Bennet, my first lieutenant, who ought now to be at Soda Lake. Can it be possible that he is treacherous—this man, whom I have ever treated as my own brother ?"

He then turned aside from the main road, and sought a dim trail, through the deep woods bordering on the banks of the Tanaha, renewing again his headlong velocity, so that he entered the neighborhood of Major Morrow, by the middle of the afternoon. He tied up his horse in the heart of a cane-brake, and proceeded on foot to the point designated for the meeting by Parson Cole. Upon examination, however, he could find no

the place for concealment, near enough to witness the expected transactions of the lynchers. At last, he thought of the sycamore, and looking up, perceived a hole about fifteen feet from the earth, through which he could safely both see and hear, provided he could find within, any certain support for his feet. Upon ascending with great difficulty, he could scarcely suppress a cry of joy at the discovery of a large internal knotty projection, where he might not only stand but sit, as on a secure platform ; and here he determined to remain.

A little after dark, the lynchers commenced collecting in swarms, until they amounted to at least three hundred. They built an enormous fire of dry, pine branches, and having stationed sentinels to prevent the intrusion of strangers or spies, opened their proceedings by a solemn prayer from Parson Johnson, a massive-formed, trumpet-tongued Methodist, somewhat ignorant and coarse in his language, but with an honest, well-meaning face. Major Morrow was then unanimously called to the chair—the trunk of a fallen tree—and after stating the object of the meeting, in about the same terms as those used by Cole in his communication to the captain, as before related, he remarked that there were two men present who would furnish the names of the thieves.

Looking from his hiding-place, Carlyle ground his teeth with rage, when he saw Bob Bennet and Parson Cole advance to the light immediately in front of the hollow sycamore. His second in command, a tall, bony, red-haired youth, detailed at length the plans and operations of the robbers, but did not state correctly any of their haunts, probably with a view to the future sale of his secret.

He next presented a catalogue of the leaders and members, but from motives of private malice and the persuasion of his new confidants, he added to the list many citizens of stainless reputation, who had no sort of connection with the bandits, and among them the name of the hunter, Sol Tuttle. This incredible false-

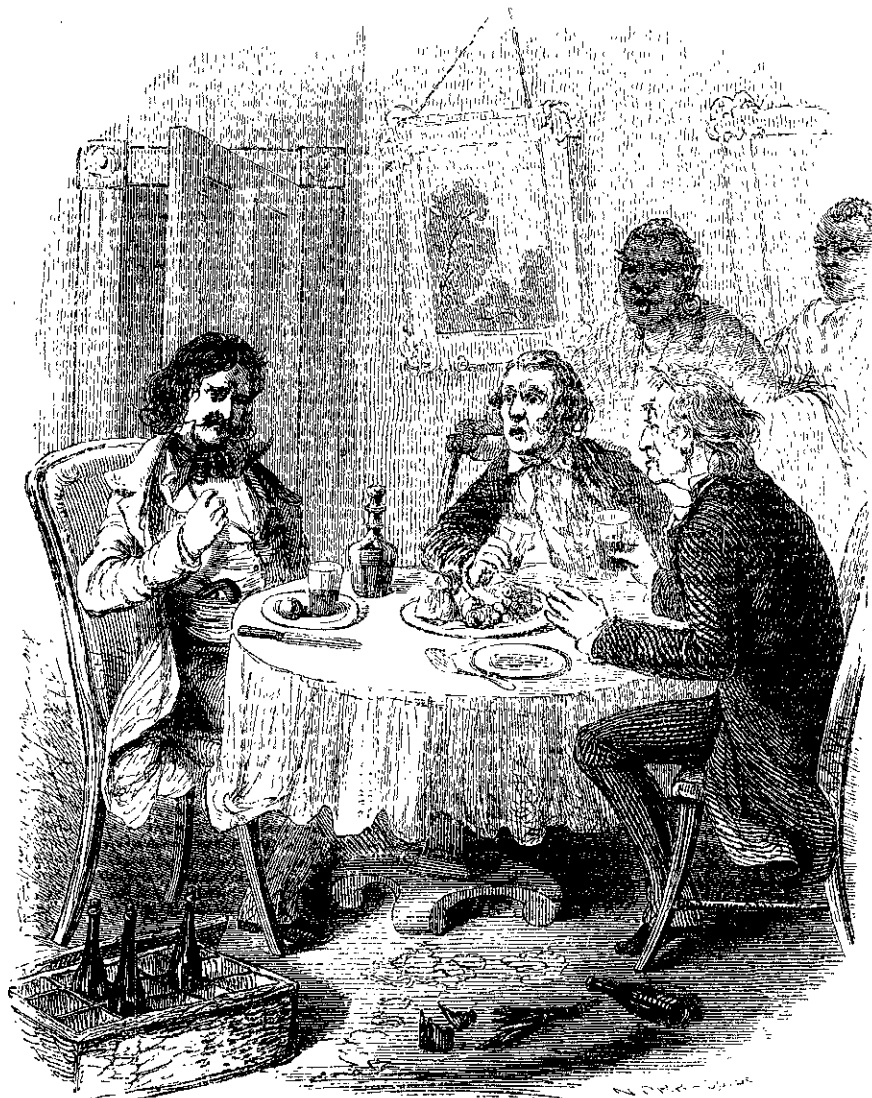
hood excited a murmur of surprise and disapprobation from a portion of the crowd, and subsequently, as will be shown, caused bitter dissensions among the lynchers, and favored the side of the robbers. "If you doubt my word," said the lieutenant, "here is another witness for all I have asserted."

Parson Cole then mounted a pine log, and began: "My dear brethren, Mr. Bennet has told you nothing but the truth. About twelve months ago, I became acquainted, by mere accident, with the existence of this dangerous organization, and resolving to unravel all its hidden mysteries, at the peril of my own life, as well as hoping to rescue some of these brands from everlasting flame, I sought the occasion to serve the public good and save souls at the same time, and was received into their sinful society. I have been so fortunate as to prove the humble means of converting brother Bennet, and can fully vouch for the correctness of his statements."

It is but right to render the parson justice, by remarking that he had never meditated his present treachery until after the captain's harshness in the morning, when, to shield himself, he determined to turn evidence for the prosecution, and meeting by chance with the lieutenant, they suspected each other's intention, and agreed to act together.

A stormy debate followed, and the lynchers, after swearing themselves to inviolable secrecy, adjourned to assemble again on the second night subsequently. They, however, adopted one resolution unanimously, which gave Carlyle the greatest pleasure—that Parson Cole and Bob Bennet should both hasten back at once to the captain's, and endeavor to purloin his private correspondence, so as to insure the most unequivocal proofs in demonstration of the conspiracy.

"I have them now," whispered Carlyle to himself, as he descended from his concealment, and finding his horse, flew homewards. He reached his residence early the next day, and about noon the two traitors also made their appearance, the lieutenant



"Ah captain you treat us like princes," exclaimed the parson, much intoxicated, as they seated themselves at the table, while two athletic negro men stationed themselves behind their chairs, in the attitude of waiters.—PAGE 83.

pretending that he had just come from Soda Lake, and the parson brimming over with the simulated results of his mission.

The captain received them with apparently extraordinary cordiality, feasted them profusely with all the delicacies of the table, and abundance of sparkling liquors, but never let them out of his sight until supper, which was spread a little after dark.

"Ah, captain, you treat us like princes," exclaimed the parson, much intoxicated, as they seated themselves at the table, while two athletic negro men stationed themselves behind each chair, in the attitude of waiters.

"If I treat you like princes," said the captain, smiling, "it is because I intend that you shall be exalted."

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," observed Cole, with ludicrous solemnity, repeating one of his favorite texts.

"I should not be astonished," remarked Carlyle, mimicking the other's serious tones, "if you had merely joined the wicked bandits for the public good, and to save some poor brands from eternal burnings. Is it not so, parson?"

Cole looked at him with a face of speechless horror, while Bennet turned white as a snow-drift. At the instant, the loud blast of a bugle was heard across the Sabine, which tended to increase the tremulous agitation of the guests.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" inquired the captain, in accents of feigned surprise. "One might almost imagine, from your ghostlike visages, that you had never heard the sound of Comanche Ben's trumpet before."

Neither of the terror-stricken wretches answered a word. They inferred from the captain's repetition of so singular a passage in Cole's speech at the meeting of the lynchers, that he must be in possession of their fatal secret, and besides, they discovered a terribly wild light in his dark eyes, which seemed to bode them no good.

"Take some wine," urged Carlyle, "it will steady your nerves," and he pushed the bottle towards his guests. Bennet,

recovered from his recent fright, drank an enormous draught, as if to strengthen his resolution for some desperate deed ; but the parson's fingers shook so violently that he spilled half his glass on the linen table-cloth.

"I am glad that Judge More and Sol Tuttle have joined our band," observed the captain, watching the others intently.

"Have they, indeed?" gasped Cole.

"Have they not, indeed?" repeated Carlyle, in a thundering voice ; "you said so last night, and preachers ought not to lie."

"There, take that !" shouted Bob Bennet, snatching a pistol from his bosom, and firing at the captain. But the barrel at the moment flew up, and the ball pierced the ceiling ; and instantly both the traitors were thrown upon their backs, bound and gagged by the waiters behind their chairs. The captain then leading the way, the negroes carried their prisoners down to the bank of the Sabine, rowed them over the river, where their graves were already hollowed out, and a hundred members of the band stood waiting to judge, hang, and bury them—all in the course of an hour.

"Boys, we have happily escaped a great peril," said Carlyle, at the conclusion ; "the community, incredulous even at first of their strange story, will now believe that they have run away."

CHAPTER VII.

SOL TUTTLE—THE UNEXPECTED MEETING.

WILLIAM BOLLING lingered at Major Morrow's residence, during several days, after the meeting of the lynchers previously mentioned. His host, although apparently restless and often absent, especially during the night, treated his guest with the utmost kind affection, and without detailing particulars, spoke of a general scheme to regulate the country by an armed organization, with many obvious hints to enlist the other as a member. The young man, however, waived all discussion on the subject, remarking, that as a mere stranger, and until he concluded to establish himself permanently in the community, it would not become him to intermeddle with either private or public affairs, farther than what might concern his own immediate interests. He sought an opportunity in vain to solve the singular enigma connected with the Major's lady. He could not imagine how a woman of her high intelligence, of such a wild, almost poetical fancy, could have thrown herself away into the arms of such a great hairy monster as this husband. He attempted by indirect questions, to draw something from the latter by way of explanation, but the old lyncher responded briefly, and with evident tokens of some painful memory, attached to the period of their courtship and union. And the wife after their strange conversation, on the first night of Bolling's visit, studiously avoided his society, as if she had conjectured he already possessed her secret

Thus excited by eager curiosity, which he found it impossible to satisfy, and being in that wavering state of inquietude, that always attends the birth of a new passion, as yet uncertain of its object, the youth did not experience one moment's rest. Ten thousand hopes brilliant as rainbows, and more beautiful than stars, gleamed around him in the sunny air, but alas! these had to wrestle with the spectres of darkest doubt, equal in number, and not unfrequently far more imposing in strength; and if he sought solace in dewy slumber, the conflict of angels and demons was again repeated in his troubled dreams. His soul was frenzied by that sweet mysterious madness, which has power to infatuate the wisest of human sages, and warm the most icy hearts. His thoughts wandered in an unknown wilderness, an imaginary world, without guides or waymarks, for all the old loadstars of his life had set forever in the eclipse of a lovelier light, which had suddenly dawned on the earth and sky. The splendor of his former purposes, the dearest memories of his mind, the fondest affections of his bosom, faded and melted away like morning mist before this fresh fire, which the love beams of two dark eyes, the magnetic rays of two rosy lips, had kindled in all his veins until the blood seemed alive with lightning.

The force of this all-absorbing emotion appeared to have the wil, as much as the imagination, exclusively under its control. He wavered like the pendulum, amidst the alternatives of different impossible plans. Now he determined to go at once boldly to the house of Colonel Miles, and there seek an interview with the beautiful Mary, at all hazards. But then he would recollect that she had never given him sufficient signs of encouragement to warrant such a step; indeed, his fears suggested, she might be unaware of his passion, and without one spark of reciprocal feeling in her own heart. Next he would pass by the place, and thus, perhaps, obtain a glimpse of that angelic form through the door, or catch her starry eyes at the window. But the probability was too remote to serve as the foundation of definite action. Again,

he would resolve to hunt up Captain Carlyle, to insult and defy him, and by this means provoke a duel. But his lofty sense of honor repelled this suggestion as unworthy, and nearly akin to murder, as the other, notwithstanding his disdainful air and demeanor at the ball, had not offered such a positive insult as to become the recognized ground for a challenge to deadly combat.

At length the young man came to the conclusion that in order to while away the heavy hours of torturing time, he would pay the promised visit to Sol. Tuttle, and, perchance, in a few days, as the hunter had hinted, Mary might arrive at her uncle's in the neighborhood. But singular as it may seem, he determined to leave the faithful Cæsar at Major Morrow's. For notwithstanding all his affection for the slave who had been the playmate of his happy childhood, and even his constant companion from the cradle, he now wished to be alone. He would not have any rude voice to mar the music of his divine dreams. He pined for the solitude of his own wild thoughts. He needed no sympathy from creatures of coarse clay. He would commune with the crimson lustre of golden clouds, and talk to beings of beauty in the air brighter than a thousand suns. He would find fresh acquaintances in the roses of the prairie, and sing love-songs to every flower of the forest. He would syllable the celestial name, till the winds in all the pine-tops should whisper "Mary," and the blood in the veins of the violet should stir at the sound!

A little before sunset he reached his destination, just as the hunter was coming in, with an enormous deer on his shoulders, and a great black dog at his heels. Bolling thought that he had never witnessed a more picturesque scene. The bony, athletic form of Sol Tuttle had such amazing strength, that he scarcely bent beneath his heavy load. His dark features, though rude and angular, beamed with that smile of satisfaction which is kindled in the countenance of the poor man, when the successful toils of the day are done, and he draws near home. His dress entirely of leather, was stained with the blood of the fat doe,

which he had recently slain, and some red drops crimsoned the grotesque tail of the panther skin, the natural ornament of his singular cap. A stout round-faced woman with rosy cheeks, expressing kindness and good humor, came to the door, with fond looks of welcome; and half a dozen happy children, with ringing shouts and clamorous questions, ran to greet their father.

At that moment, Bolling rode up. The family had been so busily engaged in examining the spoils of the chase, and congratulating each other, that they did not notice the approach of the stranger, until he was only a few paces distant, and the black dog uttering a sonorous bark, rushed angrily towards him.

"Back, Nigger," exclaimed Sol, to the ebon-haired animal. "How are you, Mr. Bolling? you come quicker than I 'spected; but I guessed as how I'd dropped a honey-bait that would fetch you." And he wrung his guest's hands with a will and heartiness that brought the blood to his finger-ends.

"Here, Susy, little folks, all of you," cried the hunter, "this is the fine fellow I found at the shootin'-match, the great, great, grandson of old Pocahontas, or thereabouts; so you see he's kin' to us."

"I'm glad to see you," said the wife, with earnest, though coarse cordiality; "Sol thar, has talked of nuthen' but you, since he were at the ball."

"Step inside, and take a seat, while I tend to yer hoss," urged Tuttle; "and Susy, darlin', stir yer stumps and git supper. Mr. Bolling must be hungry as a crippled wolf, arter sich a ride. Cook some buffalo marrow, and bar meat; and roast the ribs of the der; that 'll make him lick his chops."

The log cabin consisted of a large room, where the household remained during the day, and which answered the very different purposes of parlor, kitchen, and dining-saloon, as well as nursery and workshop; while a boarded partition divided off a small space for a sleeping apartment. There was no floor, save the earth, which had been first pounded very hard, and then covered

with the hairy skins of wild beasts. No furniture could be seen, except a few fragmentary utensils for preparing bread and meat, several home-made stools, and a long table of pine planks, obviously intended to seat the whole family at once. The walls, however, on all sides were adorned with horns of the buck, and bison, and with the fur of every animal of the forest or prairie. Wooden pins in the logs, supported half a score of guns, and as many pistols, while, at suitable intervals, appeared gaping port-holes ready for defence in case of attack. The location of the building also had been selected with a view to such a possible contingency. It was situated nearly half a mile from the grove, and the yard disclosed a fine well of water almost at the door-sill.

As soon as Sol had put away the young man's horse in some brush-framed apology for a stable, he returned, and with all a father's pride and fondness, more formally presented his various children, embracing two sons and four daughters.

"This is Mr. Jack Randolph of Roanoke," said Sol, pointing to the eldest, a bright and naturally intelligent boy of ten summers, with dark eyes and hair, resembling his father. "Tell the gentleman, how you can shoot with the pistol," ordered Tuttle.

"Oh," exclaimed Jack, with sudden animation, "I can drive the centre every other pop, at ten paces, and smash squirrels' heads, if they're on the lower sort of trees, just like fun; and arter while I'll learn to snuff out candles, as well as daddy. I wish I were a man, so I mout tote big guns too."

Sol then introduced his girls without much vain comment; and walking to a piece of hollow oak that lay on the floor, with the skin of a wild-cat spread over it, produced, as the final exhibition, a boy-baby some six months old, and held it up with an air of such infinite tenderness and proud delight, that no one could fail to recognize this as the favorite jewel of the circle. Indeed the child's appearance fully justified the parental vanity. It had a strange, wild, almost unearthly, beauty in its deep black eyes; its hair was long, and dark as jet, and its face beamed with a

sweet spiritual smile, lovely as the sinless visage of an angel, as it was.

Bolling could hardly suppress the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips on beholding the tiny being, possessed of indescribable charms, to think that its parentage had been so rude and homely. But so it frequently happens: in families of even proverbial and hereditary coarseness, there will come occasionally, a little stranger among them, with no lineaments of likeness to its race; with an expression of features so purely ethereal and heavenly, that one might imagine it had fallen down into the mother's lap, from the stars, a gift from the fairies, to make amends for the native ugliness of its ancestry; and the withered beldams always look wise, and shaking their hoary locks, mutter, "Alas! it cannot remain; the angels take their own!"

"Wife says," remarked Sol, with a laugh, "that I likes my boys better nor the gals."

Susy, with a meaning smile on her ruddy cheeks, gave him a sly poke in the ribs, and cried, "Sol Tuttle, y' know y' do!"

"O, no, not nohowsumever," protested the impartial father, earnestly; "I'm unly prouder of the hemales because they seem to 'semble old Pocahontas more nor the shemales."

What distinguishing traits of the famous Indian beauty, Sol alluded to as bearing a similitude to his son, Bolling could not imagine, unless he meant the dark eyes and hair, and upon inspection he perceived that Tuttle's daughters were yellow-haired and blue-eyed like their mother.

In a short space, they sat down to supper, and for the first time in his life, young Bolling was enabled to realize the astonishing variety and richness of a hunter's feast. The juicy and delicate marrow of the bison melted on the tongue like celestial ambrosia, at the table of the gods. The turkeys, done to a charm, and swimming in their own gravy, and the warm ribs of roasted venison, surpassed according to his taste, any morsels

that ever previously had touched his palate; while the hot corn cakes, browned before the fire, seemed sweeter than all condiments known in the arts of the *cuisine*. He no longer wondered that men contracted a passionate love for the wild fare and adventures of the frontier.

After the meal was ended, Sol prepared himself for conversation. A spark of mischief gleamed in his twinkling black eye, as he winked slyly at his wife, and asked; "Susy, have you heard the news?"

"What is it?" she asked, smiling at the expected fun.

"Mary Miles is to be married to Captain Carlyle."

Bolling's limbs trembled, till the very legs of the stool seemed to rattle under him, but the hunter feigned not to notice his agitation; and continued, "it's all fixed to come off next month; so old uncle Jack told me this morning; we'll all be axed to the weddin'."

A dark cloud passed before the eyes of the youth, and his part in the subsequent discourse was vague, rambling, and often so ludicrously inappropriate, that Sol and Susy could not suppress their laughter. At an early hour, to his infinite relief, the family retired; and he stretched himself on a layer of Buffalo robes upon the floor.

As may well be imagined, however, he wooed in vain the unconscious quiet of lethean slumber. The wing of the angel "that lights on lids unsullied by a tear," fanned not those fiery eyeballs, which despair held open with iron fingers, and which burned with so fierce a fever as to exhale any moisture of emotional dew. He arose and walked out beneath the tranquil glow of the eternal night-heavens, to cool if possible the hot lightning in his veins. But alas! the vision which a thousand times before had filled him with philosophic thought and poetic fervor, with nameless longings to pierce the azure depths of space, and wander through those endless fields, sowed so thickly with radiant worlds, now only tended to depress and torture his

spirit by painful comparisons, the suggestions of his hopeless love ! He looked upon the everlasting stars, so calm, so high, so holy, which no storm disturbs, and no tear-drops stain, and his heart said in a thrilling, throb-like sound, "not one among them all is beautiful like her !" He saw red meteors shooting down the air, with dazzling yet brief brilliancy, and then dying out in darkness. "Ah, see !" murmured the voice of his despair, "these are like me, the pale exiles of heaven, driven away with scorn, by the proud beauties of the firmament !" And thus passed the slow silent night-watches.

A little before daylight Bolling returned to his couch, in order not to attract observation to his restlessness, and shortly afterwards the hunter arose, and leaving the house without speaking, was absent some hours.

After breakfast the young man observed the same cunning, merry twinkle in Sol's black eye, which had preceded his torturing communication of the evening before, as he remarked, "Susy, darlin', it seems as how I were wrong about that weddin', arter all. I've just been to uncle Jack's, and they've got a letter from Mary what tells another story."

Bolling could scarcely suppress a wild cry of joy, and his nerves shook with uncontrollable tremors but this time the agitation was one of boundless, beatific rapture.

"S'pose we go over and see uncle Jack's family," said Sol to the delighted youth ; "you mout as well git acquainted, because I guess they'll be relations of yourn some day."

With a crimson cheek Bolling assented, and the two walked off together. They soon came to a beautiful little grove, some half a mile in diameter, that lay like an island of the greenest emerald in the grassy bosom of the great prairie. The path before them ran straight through the forest, and at the distance of two hundred yards, they perceived a female form coming towards them.

Suddenly the hunter paused, and observing that he had for-

gotten something for which he must hurry back, he added, "you go on slowly, and I'll soon overtake you."

The youth proceeded alone, while the woman still came onwards, so that they could not avoid meeting, had either been so disposed. All at once when they were about fifty paces apart, both halted simultaneously ; the female quivering with ungovernable emotions, while the other uttered a wild exclamation of surprise and delight.

Recovering somewhat from their astonishment, again they both advanced ; the young man with eager but agitated steps, and the young girl with a tremulous gliding motion, like one walking in a dream. They met.

"Why, Miss Miles, I am lost in wonder to see you here," was all the trivial greeting which William Bolling, at the first, either could, or dared offer, the idol of his thousand dreams.

"I came with my father, to visit my uncle's family," faltered Mary, with pallid lips and a timid voice.

"Is the Colonel in the neighborhood now ?" asked the youth in accents of intense anxiety.

"No, he went home yesterday, and will return to conduct me back again next week," said the maiden with more calmness.

"Has any thing new happened in your neighborhood ?" he inquired, scarcely knowing what to say, and fearful of taking a single false step, which might hurl him down from his heaven of wavering hope into a gulf of measureless despair.

"I have not heard of anything in particular," she answered, in tones of still greater tranquillity.

He determined on a bold assault. "It is generally rumored that there is going to be a wedding in your family."

"It is false !" she said in a faint whisper, while her nerves vibrated more violently than ever, and she drew her breath with difficulty as if in the agony of suffocation.

"Does that bold bad man continue to persecute you with his hateful attentions ?"

"Alas! that it is so!" she sighed with unutterable anguish.

"May not his importunities and the persuasions of your father at length prevail to make you his bride?" inquired the young man with a countenance of inexpressible emotion.

"Never!" she exclaimed, in tones of startling energy, never! I would rather die!" and she reeled, as if about to fall upon the earth.

The youth caught her hand for the purpose of support, but the thrilling contact produced other far more magical effects. All the blood before apparently freezing at the young girl's heart, suddenly flowed back to her face in streams of burning crimson. Her rosy lips parted slightly, and the tears gathered in her dark brilliant eyes, like luminous mist before the stars.

The result was equally powerful, and as immediate with her lover. A bright flash of amethystine flame passed before his sight, as on the day of their first meeting in the tumult of the tempest. A torrent of magnetic fire seemed to issue from her trembling fingers, and electrified all his nerves. It tingled in his ears, throbbed in his heart, thrilled through his brain, and found utterance in his tongue: "O, Mary, I love you!"

And then he poured forth that everlasting language of passion and youth, which no pen needs repeat, because the whole world has it already by heart, burning breath coined into music, sighs of pain sweeter than all other pleasure, wild, winged words that shall roll their echoes in the memory forever, figures of fire, sparkling images that glitter like stars.

He paused for an answer, and a faint dying whisper from the fragrant breath, through the ringlets of raven hair on his bosom answered "Yes."

And thus was their young love plighted there, in that isle of evergreens, in the great prairie, on the farthest verge of civilization. The wild winds sung above them in the pinetops. The



And thus was their young love plighted there, in that isle of evergreens, in the great prairie, on the farthest verge of civilization. The wild winds sung above them in the pinetops. The gay birds warbled their morning melodies. The vines overhead dropped flowers of delicate perfume upon their hair. The red deer glanced at them from leafy bowers with timid eyes, and all nature seemed to promise a happy bridal!—PAGE 94.

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CHAPTER VIII.

UNCLE JACK

AFTER the tempestuous tumult of the storm in summer, when the roar of the wind, the rush of the waters, the rattle of the hurtling hail, the reverberating peals from the trumpet of thunder have died away among the distant mountains, there comes a delicious calm, the rarest mixture of light and music, combining all that is most bewitching to the eye in the one, with all that can enchant the ear in the other ; as the rainbow-tinted rays of the sun, soft as the lustre of evening clouds, smile through the trees, shedding their large drops of liquid pearl-like tears, and the forest murmurs, once more, with the glad voices of bees, and birds, and fluttering insects.

Thus when the tempest of purest passion had passed, the throbbing rupture of hearts breaking with their own excess of bliss, the lightning flashes of feeling that shook every nerve, and thrilled to the burning ends of their fingers, the lovers experienced a holy tranquillity, a consciousness of perfect and perpetual joy that appeared to realize the beatitude of heaven on earth, and then followed the brief question, answered by the eyes more than by the lips, the murmured protestation, the ardent and oft-repeated vow of eternal fidelity, the term of endearment breathed in quivering sighs, and the nameless nothings of voice, look and gesture, which are yet everything to the sense and imagination of the soul, in this its new world, awakened to delights and perceptions

of bright analogy, of which, it had never before even so much as dreamed.

Mary was the first to rouse herself from the overpowering trance, and withdrawing her fairy form from the young man's involuntary embrace, she gazed upon his visage with timid modesty, it is true, but with a countenance of unwavering assurance in his faith and infinite fondness, while he returned the look with boundless ardor. That would have been the moment for a painter to have sketched their likeness. The contrast of figure and features intensified the beauty of both ; and the soft sunlight of the morning, streaming on their animated faces, through the whispering leaves and purple vine-blossoms, above their heads, transfigured them till they looked like beings of another world, angels of immortal youth and endless charms, or gay creatures of the upper air, such as in the lustre of the starlight live, or " play among the plighted clouds."

The form of the young girl, now on the verge of her sixteenth summer, though apparently taller than it was in reality, from the slenderness of her waist, presented only the medial height of womanhood, and seemed animated in every finely chiselled limb with the spirit of life and health. Her small exquisitely shaped head was crowned with hair, softer than silk and black as midnight ; but although dark-eyed with long raven lashes, as if to veil the light of those large dreamy orbs, her complexion seen on the neck, bosom, and even little lovely hands, looked white as driven snow, while the moist divine tints of the red rose appeared on her full round lips and faultless cheek. It is impossible to imagine the effect of such a combination ; the dark eyes, dark hair, the dazzling whiteness of the skin, and the rosy hue of the sweet mouth and cheeks. While standing silent in an attitude of thought, she might have been mistaken for some inimitable piece of Grecian statuary, carved in snowy alabaster, with the cheek and lips tinged by soft vermilion.

The youth was tall, elegantly shaped, with an appearance of

much strength, and still greater activity. His forehead at once, broad, massive, and soaring, denoted a well balanced intellect; while his features beaming with the ruddy hues of health, expressed honor, sincerity and iron firmness of purpose. His brave blue eyes, vivid and penetrating, indicated, perhaps, too much pride, but their haughty fires, of which I have just spoken, were softened by the love-light, that radiated from their flashing pupils.

"We must end this lengthy interview, it will cause surprise and observation," remarked Mary blushing, as her mind slowly came back from the fairy realms of love and imagination, to the cold dull earth of angular forms and ugly shadows.

"Shall I walk on with you, to the hunter's cabin, or will we return to you uncle's residence?" inquired the youth in tones that seemed to deny the possibility of separate locomotion to either of them if parted.

"We had better go on to the hunter's," murmured Mary; "as that was the point of my destination when I met you."

On reaching the cabin, Sol hailed them cordially, observing with the old twinkle of mischief in his black eye, "Mr. Bolling I ax yer pardon, but I could not find the article what I wanted and whurfore I jist mout as well wait fur you. Ah! Mary, you don't know what a curious chap this here young fellow is. I spect he must be a gastronemer, fur he gazed all last night at the stars, like mad, and I think he called one of them by yer name too. That beat me all holler. I had heerd myself of some tarnal fine old gentleman and ladies up thar in the sky, such as Jupiter, Mars, and Saturday, perfec' fire-eaters. I could tell the sweet wench Venus by sight, and I had larned from the almanac, thar war a heap of wild varmints runnin' in the range somewhar in heaven, sich as the scorpion, the lion, the dog-star, the big bar and her cub, and lots of fish in the milky-way; but I wish I may be chewed up by catamounts, if I knowed thar war one called Mary!"

The girl turned red as a southern sunset, and Bolling gave the hunter a look of mingled wrath and entreaty. The latter with a half suppressed titter, desisted from his intended torture, and the conversation rambled over a wide field of indifferent subjects.

Finally, the young girl remarked that she must not protract her visit longer, as she had promised to be back at her uncle's before dinner, and the family would be uneasy, if she did not keep her word. "I should like to cumpaninate you home," remarked Sol, with affected seriousness, "as thar is a big painter about; I seed his track this mornin', and they say as how the critter is powerful fond of gal-meat, but I've pressin' business, and so you'll have to put up with the protection of Mr. Bolling, and perhaps he'll tell you whar to look for the new star, he seed last night, though he seemed to be mighty 'fraid he couldn't get it."

To cover the scene of blushes and confusion, caused by the hunter's ill-timed drollery, his wife brought forwards the bright-eyed baby, observing with an air of immeasurable vanity, "O, Mary, you haven't noticed how it grows, and gits prittier every day, as if it were bran new each mornin'! thar darlin' sweet, go to the lady, bless its little soul, see as how it knows you!"

The beautiful child did, indeed, appear to recognize the young girl. A smile like starlight, such as comes only from innocent hearts, before they have caught one stain of contagion from this world of sin, beamed on its angelic features, and it stretched forth its small hands as if to greet an old acquaintance.

Mary received it fondly into her arms, smoothed its raven curls, and baptized its little velvet lips with a rain of affectionate kisses, and then handed the lovely boy back to its mother. William Bolling took the child from her bosom, and repeated the process with equal fervor.

"You won't leave one of Mary's kisses on his mouth," said the hunter in a tone of much solemnity. The youth restored the babe to the maternal arms feeling at the same time a strong

temptation to knock the jester down, but when he turned to Sol, his tongue was thrust out into the left cheek with an expression so irresistibly comical, and the funny twinkle danced so merrily in his eye, that even Bolling, notwithstanding his rage and mortification, could not keep from smiling.

The lovers then proceeded on their way. They repassed in silence, but with wildly throbbing hearts, the scene of their morning's interview. Should they linger on earth a thousand ages, neither of them would ever forget that spot, while memory might hold even the faintest trace of departed years. Henceforth, and for evermore, it was consecrated ground, a holy shrine for the pilgrimage of thought, an immortal Mecca of the mind, a purple paradise, where the angel of earliest Love had made its advent in their young and yearning souls; and never more, no never more, on earth, would another tree of the forest or garden, for their eyes, bear such golden blossoms, as that wild vine of the deep Texan woods, which flung down its dew-dropping flowers on the luxuriant masses of their mingled hair. No more might the sky be so blue, or the bright heaven so near them. For the painful fires of passion may be rekindled a hundred times as ardently as ever, but the saint-like raptures of first love can be felt only once, and may never be renewed.

The dwelling of old Jack Miles was situated half a mile eastward from the grove, previously mentioned, as that of Sol Tuttle stood, at an equal distance from the same forest-island, towards the west. When the lovers reached the place, it was the hour of dinner, and Bolling had an opportunity of seeing the whole family at once.

The circle, besides the parents, consisted of half-a-dozen sons, ranging in their separate ages, from twenty to thirty years, great brawny specimens of backwoods' health and strength, brave as bull-dogs and hardy as pine-knots, rude, yet honest, ignorant, but still endowed with the shrewdness of common sense; and two daughters, one eighteen, and the other about the same

bright season of virginity as her cousin Mary, and resembling her very much in features and complexion; while the first sister had grey eyes, brown hair, and the common visage of her brothers.

The father himself, was at the least, sixty, and his locks looked white as wool; but from the ruddy glow on his large warm cheeks, and the manly, supple erectness and mighty force of his enormous frame, he might have passed muster easily for forty-five. His countenance revealed candor and honesty, and although, it was whispered that he had been a little wild in his youth, and somewhat dangerously addicted to the phrenological sport of sounding the strength of other men's skulls with his fists, he had long since reformed, and was now a most exemplary Methodist.

The mother was a jovial, though pious, old lady of fifty, in spectacles and snowy cap, with a kind, well-meaning face, usually veiled in blue smoke-wreaths, from a short-stemmed pipe with an enormous bowl.

"Uncle Jack," said Mary, with a slight tremor in her voice, and a heightened color; "this is Mr. William Bolling, of whom you have heard me speak. He is now staying for a short time, at Sol Tuttle's;" and she continued the presentation to the other members of the family circle. They all greeted him kindly, but scrutinized his countenance with careful attention, as if specially interested to ascertain his true character. If the fact must be told, although it may give an indifferent idea of the young girl's art of concealment, they had previously, from her discourse, guessed at the secret of her attachment, and sought now to satisfy themselves as to the worthiness of its object. The result appeared to be highly pleasing, and before he left the house, Bolling was a general favorite.

"Mary," remarked old Jack, "what has gone with that dark-eyed feller, that come here last time with you and your daddy?"

"He still lives somewhere in the country, I believe," answered the girl, turning mortally pale.

"Your daddy thought a mighty heap of him," continued the uncle, not noticing her confusion, "but I didn't like him at all. When he opened his mouth, he looked, for all the world like a wildcat, and then he was so handy with his pistols, shootin' off bird-heads. I hate a bloody jewellist worse nor rattlesnakes. It's cowardly for a man to fight with anything but his fists, onless it be agin Injins."

Old Jack paused a moment, and the shuddering niece hoped that he would not resume the painful subject, but suddenly he went on again, at a more perilous pace than ever; "I thought that my brother wanted to hitch you on to that wagon, Mary, but with all his niggers I'd rather see you the wife of the poorest Texan ranger, what owns nuthin' but his rifle and an honest heart; fur I'm certain that that fellow's a rogue as well as a jewellist. I know the beasts by the cut of their eye, jist as I can tell the age of a hoss by lookin' in his mouth. What did they call him? Captain Sumthin'."

Mary attempted to answer, but if her life had depended on the utterance, her tremulous organs of speech could not have articulated the syllables of that hateful name.

"Captain Carlyle," suggested her youngest cousin, the dark-eyed Flora.

"Aye, that's it," said the father; "captain of robbers I reckon; if he ever shows his fop's face in these diggins, I'll wring his neck like a rooster's. That is, I would if I wur not in the church," he added correcting himself.

"And I'll do it," thundered the oldest son, Bill, "church or no church, if he pesters Mary agin."

In order to relieve the maiden from her embarrassment, which increased every moment, Bolling took his leave, with the promise that he would visit the family as frequently as possible, while he remained in the neighborhood, in accordance with their general and urgent solicitation.

As soon as he had gone, the circle resounded with warm eulo-

gies on his beauty, his frank countenance, and pleasing manners. "Eh! Mary, this chap will do," said old Jack, his red face beaming with a glow of enthusiasm; "he's worth a dozen sich proud puppies as the tother."

"What brave eyes!" exclaimed Bill; "he looks as if he mout undertake battle with an old he-wolf without weapons!"

"What a fine form!" cried the mother, "and what a handsome face!" added Margaret. As for the pretty Flora she made no remark at the time, but steadily watched with her eager black eyes the delighted and blushing features of her cousin. A few minutes afterwards, these went out of the door as if they mutually desired a private interview.

"Is that the young man who saved you from the robbers?" inquired Flora. For those two cousins had never yet had any secrets which they did not share in common.

"The same," replied Mary.

"Oh! cousin, how you must love him."

"I do! I do! I love him better than my own life, more than words can express, more than music might sing in its divinest songs," murmured Mary, throwing herself into her sweet friend's arms, and shedding tears of passionate love more precious than Indian pearls.

O delightful confidence of the young trustful heart! that knows not how to doubt, and in its guileless inexperience fears no treachery. That can pour out all, even the maddest mysteries of the bosom, into the sympathising ear of equal innocence and friendship, and divide its dearest bliss and darkest sorrow with another, that double self, which once departed, it shall never, no never, find again.

"Does he love you, Mary? I know he does," said Flora, with radiant dew drops also sparkling in her dark eyes.

"He says so, I hope so," was the whispered answer.

"But will your father consent?"

"Never, I am afraid," responded the other mournfully.

"Then I would run away with him, that I would," suggested Flora in a determined voice. "I would never speak again to that awfully odious Captain. The mean villain! to want a girl for his wife who he well knows despises the very ground he walks upon."

"I must not be undutiful to my father, if I can by any reasonable means avoid it," affirmed Mary solemnly; "since the death of my poor mother, he has no one in the world but me, and he too, is very unhappy."

"But if he loves you as a parent should, if he desires your welfare, why does he not banish from his house, that abominable bandit?" argued Flora.

"Alas, by some strange mystery, what it may be I cannot so much as imagine, his reputation and even his life are in Carlyle's power."

"Mary," asked the other earnestly, "have you really no idea what the mystery is, that you have just mentioned?"

"Not in the least."

"Have you the courage to learn?" inquired Flora, in quivering tones.

"Tell me, speak at once! do not kill me with anxiety, if you are informed on the subject," cried Mary, seizing her arm with a wild gesture, and looking down into her eyes, as if she would sound the secret depths of her soul.

"I fear that my uncle, too, belongs to the black band," said Flora in a faint whisper.

Mary started as if stunned by a blow, and then her eyes flashed with sudden anger, as she cried; "this charge from you, cousin, I never could have expected against my kind-hearted father, who has educated you with the same care that he has bestowed upon me, and has ever treated you as his own daughter. We have played together in childhood, slept in the same bed, and learned virtue, goodness, and truth, out of the same

books, and I love you as a sister; but never again speak a word against my father, if you would retain even my friendship!"

"I told you for your own good," said Flora compassionately, "and what is more, your uncle and all your cousins think exactly as I do."

This announcement staggered even the stubborn incredulity of Mary, and she exclaimed, "forgive my harsh language, dearest Flora, I am sure you would not willingly wound me; I am nearly distracted with uncertainty, and scarcely conscious of what I think or say. However, I can never believe that my father is dishonest; and if I were once fairly convinced, there would remain nothing for me to do but to die!"

"And break your true love's heart," suggested Flora.

"What, do you suppose that he, the son of a noble family, the heir of a lofty name, himself the perfect ideal of honesty and honor, would wed an outcast, a pariah, the child of a common robber?" exclaimed Mary, with alarming animation.

"Yes," answered the other, "genuine love demands neither fame nor fortune, neither respectability in friends nor stainless character in relations, it asks nothing but perfect truth and purity in its object. The rose is equally beloved in whatever soil it may grow, and the starlight of heaven loses not its divine beauty by kissing the darkest stream."

The soft voice of her cousin soothed the heart of the troubled girl, like the strains of that celestial music, which charmed away the demon that haunted the soul of the ancient Hebrew king, and the rain of gentle tears again fell, and relieved the pressure of thought on the burning brain.

"You must tell my father all," urged Flora; "he can give you far better advice than any one else, and he loves you more, if there be any difference, than even his own children. Indeed, you are the idol of us all."

"I will," assented Mary "but not till to-morrow."

They rejoined the family circle, and Mary immediately became the mark for kind raillery on the subject of her handsome gallant, Uncle Jack leading the assault, and the old lady in the spectacles and snowy cap bringing up the rear, and cheering through the smoke of her own pipe.

How strange is this universal interest felt by the old and young, by all conditions and classes in the fate of lovers. And if there can be anything on earth more beautiful than the divine passion itself, it is this mysterious and contagious sympathy, which it never fails to excite. The vision of two young and beautiful beings living alone in the lovelight of each other's eyes is sufficient to electrify the coldest hearts, and illumine the withered brows of age with gayest smiles. Love must ever be all powerful, because the whole world takes its part !

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO DUELS.

THE natural and necessary consequences of Major Morrow's effort to organize his grand company of Lynchers, developed themselves with alarming and horrible rapidity, soon after the midnight meeting previously noticed. For, although the members present had, on that occasion, pledged their honor to inviolable secrecy, it could scarcely be expected, that among so large a number, actuated by different and even opposite motives, all without exception, should keep the vow; and accordingly, before the sunset of the ensuing day, the rumor spread, with the usual exaggerations, like a sudden conflagration in the prairies, and startled the community as the unexpected shock of an earthquake. There were three classes affected by it, the black band of rogues and robbers, unfortunately too numerous: the lynchers, embracing many well-meaning persons, who saw no other method of securing their property, save this desperate resort to the furious force of the mob, and including, besides, all the inflammable elements of the frontier, men of wild passions, delighting in war from the pure love of strife and bloodshed; and lastly, that honest and intelligent portion of society, who prefer almost any evils under the form of law and order, to the terrors that march in the train of anarchy; and some of these had been already implicated with the bandits, by the pretended revelations of Bob Bennet and parson Cole.

It is impossible to paint the scenes of universal excitement, which quickly followed. The various parties in all haste prepared their arms, and held their secret assemblies, to arrange for the impending crisis. Even the most sober citizens never ventured beyond their own door-sills, without rifles on their shoulders, or a formidable supply of pistols in their pockets; while the more ardent and reckless saddled their horses, and sought the most public places, to dare and defy their foes, at once, to the worst. The agitation was more intense, and the danger to social tranquillity far greater, than at any, even the darkest, hour of the Texan Revolution. An inroad of the Comanches could not have produced half such bitter and bloody results. The first collision happened in Shelbyville, and as that was the picture of many similar affairs, I may be pardoned for detailing it at some length.

On the third morning after the first meeting of the lynchers, as mentioned in a previous chapter, the county-seat was swarming with excited masses, consisting mostly of young men, and such as had distinguished themselves by their prowess in the campaigns against the Mexicans, in battles with the Indians, or else in still more deadly and desperate combats on the miscalled field of honor. They filled the public square, they gathered in small groups around the corners of the court-house, and in the suburbs of the village, conversing in low tones, but with flashing eyes and violent gestures, while the air generally resounded with a deep, angry, ominous hum, like the noise of a bee-hive, which has been suddenly struck by a volley of stones.

The groceries, however, presented the scenes of most fearful excitement, and every second log-cabin in the place seemed to boast its altar, erected for the special worship of the jolly wine-god; and every few minutes, the different groups of interlocutors in the streets, rushed to these shrines, for the purpose of re-kindling the fires of their enthusiasm and wrath.

Among the most conspicuous of the desperadoes present, were three young brothers by the name of Minton, the nephews of the

famous Major Morrow, children of his twin-sister, and demonstrating their relationship to the chief of the lynchers, by forms of strength and souls of thoughtless daring, not at all inferior to his own. For, although, the oldest of these hopeful youths had barely numbered twenty-four summers, and the youngest but twenty, each one had already slain his man, the first, in a duel with rifles, the second with revolvers, and the third with the bowie-knife. Indeed, from their inseparable union, as they always appeared in public together, as well as from their amazing muscular force and cruel ferocity, they had become the terror of the bravest in the backwoods, and his courage must be truly astonishing, who did not shrink from an encounter with Tom, Bill, or Ben Minton; for the hero might succeed in vanquishing one, but knew very well, that even then, the battle would be only just begun, as he must, as a matter of course, still fight the other two.

Nobody was better aware of the fear which they had universally inspired, than the brothers themselves, and, accordingly, in reliance upon this, and their undaunted prowess, they marched about in every direction, with an air of scornful bravado, uttering frightful menaces against all opponents of lynch-law, and particularly against all personal foes of their uncle. Every circle of animated talkers broke up and dispersed at their approach, and the dram-shops became instantly silent when their huge, leather-dressed forms darkened the door. Thus encouraged, their friends, the regulators, assumed a threatening and boisterous demeanor, which cowed, at the same time, both the robbers and the lovers of order, who began, at length, to abandon the field, when an accident occurred to precipitate the conflict.

The Mintons were drinking in a large log grocery, which stood on the south side of the public square immediately opposite to the court-house door, when they noticed the entrance of a youth, some nineteen years of age, whose intelligent countenance, and rich fashionable cloth, denoted more respectability and mental culture than the common, coarse crowd around the bar.

The brothers exchanged a look of murderous import, and Tom addressed the new comer in language of rude irony: "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Albert Moore. Wont you take a smile? Folks ought to drink what hain't got long to live, sich as nigger thieves and land pirates!"

"Do you intend to apply either of those epithets to me?" asked the other sternly, as all the bright blood hastily left his face and temples.

"What else ar' you but the cussed cub of an old land-pirate?" thundered Tom, bringing down his fist, like the stroke of a sledge-hammer on the counter, which made the bottles and glasses ring again; "Hain't yer daddy, the judge, worse nor a robber? Hain't he bought up all the country as a spekerlator, and not satisfied with that, jined the rogues inter the bargain?"

"It is false!" muttered young Moore, between his clenched teeth.

"I never allows nobody to give me that word," vociferated the giant; "git yer friend, quick now, fur we must settle this ere matter with weepens."

"You do not surely expect me to fight such a fellow as you!" answered the other in accents of measureless scorn.

"And why not, you 'tarnal coward?" interrogated Tom, foaming with rage, and grinding his teeth like a wild boar.

"Because you are not a gentleman," said Moore disdainfully.

"Eh! you think to kiver up yer craven carkiss with a blanket of dignity!" replied Minton with a fiendish sneer; "now look, boys, how I'll ruffle the feathers of the peacock, and put him below the level of the meanest rooster in the barn-yard;" and he dashed a glass of brandy in the other's eyes, shouting, "ye'll fight now, I guess!"

The young man wiped the liquor from his face, with a silk pocket-handkerchief, and hissed through lips white as snow, but rigid as marble; "yes, I will meet you, when, where, and with what weapons you please."

"I'd like to know who would stand the second of sich a poltroon as you ar'," remarked Tom, casting a look of menace on the surrounding throng, trembling beneath his glance.

"I will," cried a ringing voice near the door, and a stranger made his way through the crowd, and with a show of extreme courtesy, saluted the parties. This individual was a man of medial stature, somewhat slender in his form, but with an appearance of wiry elasticity, indicating the most active and powerful energy. His age might be about thirty, yet he seemed much younger, from the unusual fairness of his complexion, and the bright golden lustre of his hair, as well as from the mischievous, mirthful twinkle of his vivid blue eyes. His countenance denoted reckless bravery, with cool self-possession, and would have been very beautiful, but for the sensual, animal expression of his sneering purple lips.

"Well, gallant knights of the tourney," said the stranger, smiling, so as to disclose as fine a set of ivory as ever glittered in a human mouth; "I am a romantic lover of fair play, and stand always ready to be the friend of any gentleman who needs such an article."

"Who the devil are you?" exclaimed Tom Minton, in astonishment at the other's careless audacity.

"Lieutenant Curran of the Rifle Rangers, a minion of the moon and muses, and a special favorite both of Mars and Venus, a shooter of bullets and *bon-mots*, and a devotee of poetry, as well as powder; at your humble service, sir, if you wish anything in my line."

"Shet yer fly-trap, or I'll do it fur you," retorted Tom, brutally; "are you going to be the second of Albert Moore, that's the question?"

"As, to be, or not to be, is the question," said Lieutenant Curran, with the air of a mock tragedian, "as I have the natural horror of an air-pump for the vacuum of non-existence, I answer, without hesitation, to be."

"Well, then, here is my friend, Mike Johnson. Fix up the tricks in a hurry, for I'm dyin' to git at it," urged Tom, with tokens of impatience.

The terms being speedily arranged, the parties, attended by an immense concourse, marched a short distance out of the village, and took their stations sixty yards apart, to combat with rifles. The multitude, nearly equally divided in their opposite predilections, gazed upon the scene with the utmost anxiety, as if to divine the final result of the approaching civil war, from the bloody issue of this first battle. A profound and solemn silence reigned over the field, as the duellists stood with the muzzles of their guns rested on the ground, and the other ends in their hands waiting for the awful signal.

The contrast between both the principals and their seconds was of the most striking character. Tom Minton looked like a great red-haired giant, coarse-featured and freckled-faced, with his lowering visage still more frightfully deformed by the passions of rage and revenge, which shed a fierce lurid light upon his countenance. Any one could see, at a glance, that he was determined to kill his antagonist. His friend, Mike Johnson, a large young man in leather, with a benevolent face, in vain implored him to spare the poor boy, who was well-known to be the idol of his father's family. To every suggestion and plea of pity, the brute replied, "I'll do it, or die!"

On the contrary, Albert Moore was a mere youth, with fair delicate features, entirely beardless, and beautiful as those of a woman. His bright auburn hair, falling in graceful curls around his slight, symmetrical shoulders, gleamed in the pure sunlight of spring, like fine threads of gold; but his deep, azure eyes shone with a calm, steady lustre of the most chivalrous bravery, without so much as a single ray of malice. "I have the word," whispered Curran, as he placed him in position; "aim low, and pull the trigger the moment when the sights catch any part of his form."

At length, the lieutenant called out in clear, ringing tones that startled the hearers, like the sudden blast of a trumpet:—"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Ready," replied Moore, in a voice sweetly tranquil as the chimes of a bell.

"Ready," thundered Minton, in accents deafening as the roar of a drum in battle.

"Fire—one—two—three!"

At the syllable "one," there might be seen two jets of bright red flame, and then two wreaths of blue smoke at the muzzles of the guns; there were heard two sharp peals, sounding simultaneously, and the vast throng of spectators uttered a wild cry of mingled joy and horror, in accordance with the sympathies of the respective factions. Minton escaped with a slight scratch of the skin on his breast, while young Moore dropped to the earth like a lump of lead, the bullet of his adversary having penetrated his left eye.

The victor was escorted back to the village, with boisterous plaudits, by the lynchers, while a few friends bore the dead boy to the residence of his father, some half a mile out of town. What a vision for those fond parents, and for that beautiful blue-eyed twin-sister, who loved him as her own life.

"Moore's second turned pallid as the corpse at his feet, when he witnessed the unexpected result, and muttered between his teeth, "he shall atone for this before the day is an hour older!" But at the instant, Captain Carlyle rode up, and beckoning him to one side, inquired anxiously, "Curran, what has happened? tell me quick all about it." The other briefly detailed the facts previously related.

"The thing works admirably," said the captain, with a delighted countenance. "Judge Moore and his friends will, now, all take part against the lynchers, so will Sol Tuttle, and if they dare the venture, we can give them battle in the open field. But one thing more is necessary. To encourage our followers and strike

terror into our foes, you must pick a quarrel with Tom Minton, their big bully, and pistol him like a dog.

"I am more than willing to fight him, and avenge the ashes of the pretty youth that he has murdered," answered Curran; "I can wing him, make a cripple of him for life, or administer any moderate chastisement of the sort, but I cannot kill him; such an act would be most unpoetical, and besides, you know, I have conscientious scruples against capital punishment, as jurors say when they want to get released from the panel."

"Such a course is dangerous in the extreme," argued Carlyle, "it might do in the case of a common man; but Minton is a dead shot, as you have just seen, and if you attempt the genteel game with him, you will only throw away your life, like a fool."

"*Dulce est desipere in loco*," murmured Curran, with comic earnestness.

"Well, have it as you like," said the captain, in a tone of irritation; "but be in a hurry about it, before they get too drunk. You will find them in dog Green's grocery; and I will drop in at the proper moment. Hasten the affair as much as possible."

"I'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes," answered the lieutenant, as he flew away to accomplish his perilous mission. When he entered the temple of Bacchus, the hero of the lynchers and his satellites, were in the act of touching their glasses, as a preliminary to a grand libation. Tom Minton observed the advent of Curran, and exclaimed in a rude voice: "Come and take a drink; for though we laid out yer friend nicely, that's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy yourself; becaze it may be yer turn next; who knows?"

"*Vivimus dum vivamus*," said Curran, with an air of affected anger.

"Do you mean to say, damn us?" vociferated Tom, growing livid with rage.

"Do you mean to say, damn us?" echoed the satellites, with equal fury.

"If you do not understand the language, gentlemen, you will have to swear an interpreter," replied the lieutenant, with a disdainful smile.

"Do you want me to spile yer face?" cried Tom, raising his tumbler to repeat his insult of the morning against this new foe, and thus to throw the *onus* of the challenge upon his shoulders, and thereby gain the choice of weapons. But quick as a thought, Curran snatched the glass from his hand, and tossed the contents in the giant's face. He then slipped like an eel through the crowd behind him, and passed out of the door, while howling awful curses, like an army of devils, the lynchers rushed after him.

They paused, however, with some symptoms of fear, when they perceived, not only the lieutenant, but Captain Carlyle also, confronting them, each armed with a couple of revolvers. "I demand the satisfaction of a gentleman," shouted Minton, in tones almost inarticulate with mingled mortification and fury.

"You shall have it, noble knight of the bloody hand," responded Curran, with a profound obeisance; "here is my friend."

"And here is mine," said Tom; "what is your weapons?"

"Duelling pistols, at ten paces."

"Then, let us git at it; right here in the square will do as well as any place," cried Tom, with his usual impatience.

"O, that will be beautiful," exclaimed Curran, "with the bright eyes of the ladies glancing at us through the windows, like houris from the portals of Paradise; we cannot have the heart to hurt one another!"

"I wish I may bust my biler, if I don't smash your head," shouted Tom, in a terrible voice.

"O, you unromantic savage, you wild man of the woods, you hairy demon of the desert! how can you harbor such unchristian

thoughts? *Tantane animis caelestibus iræ?*" said Curran; "as for my part, I will only clip the wings of my golden eagle, bring him down a little lower, so the sun shall no longer dazzle his eyes."

The ground was then measured off, and the parties went to their separate stations. Carlyle having won the signal, whispered in Curran's ear, "See you not the devil in Tom's eye? If you do not kill him at the first fire, I would not give a feather for your life."

"Then, let my name live in the pantheon of history," said the other, with a laugh.

Perhaps there never was a more wonderful duel witnessed, since men learned to rend each other's bleeding bosoms with sharp steel or hissing lead. All sides of the square, except the points particularly exposed to the muzzles of the pistols, literally swarmed with masculine forms, while the women and boys, somewhat more timid, stood in the rear, or peeped from the windows; and justices of the peace, constables, and sheriffs, mingled among the spectators. Numerous heavy bets were staked on the result, the lynchers backing Tom, and most of the others sustaining the lieutenant.

The antagonists also seemed much more equally matched than in the combat of the morning; and indeed, if any difference could be detected, the advantage appeared to favor Curran. His air was that of a fop dressed for a frolic. He kept his place firmly, with a smile of ineffable disdain upon his handsome features, and humming a gay tune with the utmost composure. This amazing *nonchalance* was the more singular, as the fixed ferocity of Minton's countenance looked positively appalling, and his fatal skill as a duellist had been abundantly proved in the previous conflict.

At last the word was given; and at the close of the monosyllable, "fire," before its final echo had died on the air, one sharp report thrilled the ears of the bystanders, followed by a cry of

mingled pain and rage, furious as the yell of some savage beast; and the arm of Tom Minton fell to his side, shattered horribly at the elbow. The discharge of Curran had been so quick, and his aim so true, that the bully of the lynchers had no time to pull his trigger, and the pistol remained loaded. The faction hostile to the mob shouted acclamations until they were hoarse, and no other encounters happened during the day. Indeed, the leaders of both parties soon left the village, and the subordinates and members imitated the prudence of their example.

It has been said a hundred times, by persons who never saw a pistol fired, that the duel is no test of human courage. If the remark be confined to that loftiest sort of heroism, moral bravery, which consists in defying the coalesced opinions of mankind, in obedience to the dictates of conscience, that god within the bosom, and in favor of the right cause, the fact is perfectly true. But if the term, courage, is intended to denote the mere physical quality, the attribute which we possess in common with most animals, the proposition is utterly false. The prowess is of the same specific character with that of the duellist, and often not even superior in degree, which has made the hero and the demigod since the dawn of universal history. It is this which has created the Nimrods and the Napoleons of the world, which has thundered on the land and sea, scaled the parapet, stormed the bastion, breasted billows of fire and hurricanes of leaden hail, and waded through oceans of blood and carnage, to glory or the grave!

CHAPTER X.

REVENGE.

ON the morning subsequent to the duels in Shelbyville, as related in the last chapter, Captain Carlyle was pacing back and forward in his library, with an air and attitude of profound thought not unmixed with signs of trouble and anxiety. Both his memory and imagination seemed to be unusually excited, if we might judge by the few fragments of soliloquy, that dropped occasionally from his unconscious lips.

"What a strange destiny has been mine!" he said with a sigh of unutterable sadness. "How brilliant was my boyhood, when I bathed my very feet in beauty, brushing the diamond dew from the purple broom of a hundred hills! How radiant the promise of my early and most precocious youth, where the twin-worlds of love and poetry opened their golden gates to my wondering eyes, revealing the present and the far-off future, glittering with rainbow light, and my young soul had wings to soar above the summits of the celestial mountains, and mingle in fancy with the immortal ones, the undying names in the pantheon of history! O, what a vision then was the emerald green of the earth, more glorious in its lustre than any Persian pearl, and the heavens with their burning blue, sprinkled with gems of fire, and streaming with divine auroras! But brighter than a thousand suns, and more wildly beautiful than all the stars that live in the evening air, were the day-dreams of the angel, Hope, in the

REVENGE.

depths of my innocent heart! How I flew over the radiant realms of science, finding no problems too lofty for the sweep of my imagination, and none too profound for the piercing glances of my intellect! How I threaded the labyrinthine mazes of logic, politics, and the law, and what was dreariest labor to others, seemed but pleasure and pastime to me! How I shook the forum, on my advent, with the thunders of an eloquence that made the very judges tremble on the bench, and swayed the juries with a power irresistible as the spells of magic! Until the fatal day, when the demon entered my soul, when passion replaced love, and the red light of hellish guilt threw an eclipse of blood over all the luminaries of the earth and sky!

"And what am I now?" he continued, with a look of mingled rage and horror, grinding his teeth like a madman; "an outlaw, a criminal of the deepest dye, a thing abhorred by men, and even hated by my own heart! enveloped in the meshes of sin and danger, created by my cunning, at once, the victim and avenger of the wrongs that I have inflicted upon others; for every cruel blow, rebounding, has left its dagger in my bleeding bosom. Oh woman! of wild, bewildering, fatal beauty, it was thy hand, which dashed down the gleaming cloud-castle of my golden hopes, and called up from the boiling whirlpool of unfathomable hell, this midnight spectre of measureless despair, with eyes of infernal fire to haunt me for evermore!"

He paused, and a hardened, defiant expression gained the ascendancy in his countenance, as he justified himself: "And yet I had no power to have followed a different path in life. What an idle jargon, a pale ray of metaphysical moonshine is the boasted theory of human freedom. Could I resist the enchantment of her unrivalled beauty, or quench the blaze in my blood, kindled by the fire of those fascinating eyes? Can the pine-tree repel the lightning of heaven, or the powder refuse to flash at the torch of consuming flame? Can the will act without an object? and did not every motive of my life, every thought, hope,

and feeling, vanish away before the magical light of love on her rosy lips? Can the bird break the diabolical charm in the bright eyes of the rattlesnake, or the bee forsake the honey-dew of the blossom? Can the star wander at will from its shining way in the sky, or the waves of the sea be silent when the hurricane tosses their white foam among the clouds? No, from the silver planet that is chained by immutable attraction to the fiery chariot of the sun, to the reptiles of our race, that writhe in the dust and die, all creatures are governed by the evolutions of an everlasting law, universal as space, unalterable as time, and fixed eternally on the deep foundations of a merciless destiny without beginning or end. And it was the same uncontrollable fatality, which transformed my early visions of glory into the maddening dream of passion, and that again into the horrors of unutterable hatred. Yes, I loathe her now, more than I ever loved; but yet I fear her also, the only thing that I ever found to fear on earth!"

Suddenly, a servant entered the door, and announced; "Massa Carlyle, Colonel Miles am in the parlor."

"Tell him, that I wish to see him here, in the library," answered the captain; and the moment afterwards, the visitor made his appearance. The colonel was a strong, well-proportioned man of middle age, with angular, dark-complexioned features, and brown eyes, deeply imbedded beneath broad, projecting brows, and a low, but massive forehead. His countenance indicated much intelligence, more cunning, and considerable bravery, yet without sufficient firmness. He saluted the other, with a show of cordiality, but his thin cast-iron mouth, twitching nervously, and the wandering restlessness of his small brown eyes, proved that he expected but little pleasure from the interview.

Seating himself, Colonel Miles remarked in a tone, at once, perplexed and apologetical; "You must excuse my delay, captain; I received your urgent note yesterday evening; but

there was a pressing engagement on my hands, which detained me until now."

"There can be no matter more important than the question of life in affluence, or death by the hemp of the hangman," responded Carlyle, with a look of gloomy menace, that caused the other to grow pale and tremble.

"What do you mean, captain?" gasped the colonel; "do you allude to any new danger?"

"None to me, but a very awful one to you," said Carlyle, fixing his fierce black eyes sternly upon the face of Miles, with a gleam ominous as the thrust of a dagger.

"Speak, what is it?" articulated the colonel, with quivering lips, livid as those of a corpse.

"It is simply this, that I will have your neck stretched like that of a dog, if you dare to palter any longer with your promise," declared Carlyle, in a voice of unwavering resolution.

"How, my dear captain, can you be so unreasonable?" deprecated the other, in tremulous accents; "you surely cannot expect me to accomplish impossibilities. At the present, Mary will not marry you. I have used every means to persuade her; and if I attempt force, she will certainly commit suicide."

"Then, hand her over to me; let her be mine without the formality of a wedding. That will suit me just as well as the prattled ceremony of the long-visaged priest," suggested Carlyle, without a symptom of either pity or shame.

"What!" exclaimed the colonel, stupified with astonishment and horror, "do you seriously propose to me—to her own father, this revolting deed of double-dyed damnation, this black atrocity, more diabolical than any on record, even in the history of hell itself—to plunge my only child into the bottomless gulf of everlasting infamy?" and the speaker gave a murderous glance at the hilt of his bowie-knife, but he perceived that the fingers of the other were on the pistol in his bosom, and changed his bloody purpose.

"You are pleased to be eloquent to-day," said Carlyle, with a savage sneer; "and it may be very well for you to cultivate all your talents as an orator; for so help me Heaven, you will need them all sooner than you imagine. This very hour, I will either have you hung outright, or send you back to New Orleans there to stand your trial for burglary and murder. I will be humane, however, you may choose which death you will die!"

"Oh! captain, do not talk so," implored the colonel, with an icy shudder, like an ague, in all his limbs; "I swear solemnly, that Mary shall be your wife before the end of the month!"

"Very well," answered Carlyle; "then you must go to your brother's, and bring her back to-morrow. The danger of an outbreak among the people is passed, for a while; and I want to see my affianced bride."

At the instant, a slight sound, resembling a human sigh, was heard in a small closet which opened into the library. The captain sprung to the door, but found it securely fastened. He then rung the bell hastily, and inquired of a bright mulatto girl, who responded to the summons, "Where is your mistress?"

"Gone out to walk, as she does every morning after breakfast."

"Where is the key of this closet?"

"Mistress locked up the white cat and her kittens, and took the key with her."

"That accounts for the noise," remarked Carlyle in a whisper to the colonel; "I thought it was Lucy, and then, I would have been under the disagreeable necessity of shooting her, or dying myself!"

The next moment, another incident occurred to interrupt the conversation. The clattering hoofs of a horse at full gallop, resounded in the road, ceased in the yard, and the gigantic figure of Tony rushed through the door, revealing a countenance brimming with news of evil import.

"What is the matter?" cried Miles and Carlyle together; "be quick, Tony, tell us what has brought you here?"

"You know, massa, that you sent me to the major's to keep an eye on his 'ceedens; well, who should I miscover thar, but that Mr. Bollum, and a black nigger what's name am Cæsar. Well, next day, Mr. Bollum went away, I didn't know whar, and left Cæsar at the major's. But last night a man come along, and sez that Mr. Bollum am at Sol Tuttle's."

Both the captain and colonel bounded to their feet, with an exclamation of anger and alarm. "But that am not all, nor the wust," continued Tony: "for him sez that Mr. Bollum and Miss Mary am as thick as three in a bed, and Uncle Jack wants 'em to git married right off."

"I warned you not to take her there," shouted Carlyle, annexing a horrible curse; "and now, hasten, ride for your life, and be sure that you bring her back, dead or alive! Yes, and I'll accompany you. Ho! there Jim, saddle my grey horse quickly as possible."

The agitation of the colonel equalled that of his accomplice. He raved, fulminated oaths, and wrung his hands, exclaiming: "No doubt, my pious brother has managed to obtain all her secrets, and then the very devil will be to pay, for he is as stubborn as a mustang, and my sweet nephews are brave as bull-dogs, and there will be the proud Virginian to back them!"

"Upon reflection, I cannot possibly attend you," remarked Carlyle, with an air of bitter disappointment; "I must remain, to learn the proceedings of the lynchers to-night, and I advise you to play the fox rather than the lion. If necessary, affect to acquiesce in their schemes, and invite Bolling to return with you. I will undertake to find the means of silencing his pretensions for ever!"

"But suppose, that the girl should be already his wife?" observed the other.

"That will make no difference. It will be only the easier

task to get them both back. I would as soon wed a widow as a virgin," answered Carlyle.

The colonel hurried away, and shortly afterwards, the captain also mounted his horse, and departed. The moment he had left, the key turned in the door of the closet opening into the library, and Lucy glided out. But the appearance of the jealous woman, having found her darkest fears confirmed, had undergone such a mysterious and startling change, that her own mother would have failed to recognize the daughter of her bosom, had such a fond parent been alive and present. Her visage was mortally pale, and her features worked as if in a fit of epilepsy. Her dazzling teeth were clinched upon her livid lips until the red blood flowed in drops, staining her bosom with the deepest crimson, while her dark eyes rolled wildly like those of a maniac, emitting arrows of flame, lurid and awful as lightning at midnight. Her slender form seemed to grow taller and expand in dimension, and the muscles of her neck swelled out to double their usual proportions; but all her nerves were calm and steady, as if transfigured by unutterable passion into fibres of steel. She poured out a tumbler full of wine, from a bottle on the table, carried it to her mouth, without a tremor, and drained it to the last drop.

"I deserve it all," she murmured in a sepulchral whisper; "but not from him; not from this devil in the shape of man, who seduced me from my home, and now seeks to cast me off, like a worn-out jewel! O, fool that he is, to deem after all which I have done for him, that I am but a weak wavering creature of common clay, a thing to be trampled under his feet, and treated as a slave, or worse still, as one of the women of his own country!"

"He talks of shooting me, for fear that I will kill him," she said with a burst of fiendish laughter; "fool! madman! does he imagine that I would be satisfied with such a vulgar revenge, when I can so readily command so many infernal tortures,

agonies of the heart, terrors of the mind, howling furies of the imagination, that will make him pray for death, as the traveller in burning sands begs for a drop of water. Ah! he shall die, but it must be by slow degrees. His soul's light must perish first. His fortune shall take wings, and all his friends forsake him. Every plan shall fail, every hope expire, till desolate, defeated, poor, and very humble, he shall crawl back on his knees to me for pity, and then I will spit upon him, and spurn him away like a dog; and finally deliver him over to the gripe of the hangman, and dance beneath the gallows-tree!"

A dusky form darkened the door, and a timid voice faltered: "Miss Lucy, may I come in?"

Her countenance instantly changed to one of the gayest smiles, and she answered in accents of the most bewildering sweetness; "Yes; Comanche Ben, I am, indeed, very glad to see you."

The supreme ugliness of the individual, who now entered, would defy all delineation by either language or pictorial power. His broad, low, massive frame, although denoting great strength, and really possessing much activity, was horribly misshapen with crooked bones and angles, depriving it of all comparison with any specimen of the animal kingdom, unless it might be likened to that of a lean wolf standing on its hind legs. His face was still worse, revealing the bony contour of the Indian physiognomy, increased, however, to an extreme that looked absolutely hideous. His nose had been eaten away in his childhood by the teeth of some wild beast, and perhaps this might be considered a fortunate circumstance, removing what otherwise must have been a fatal obstruction to the organs of vision, as his snake-like leering eyes crossed each other almost at right angles.

This man was, indeed, as his name denoted, a native Comanche, who had been captured when a boy by the hunters, and brought up in the white settlement; but he yet retained the

complexion, the instincts, and many of the habits characteristic of his savage origin.

The Indian gazed upon the smiling face of the beautiful woman, who had greeted him with such unwonted familiarity, and his countenance betrayed, at once, boundless admiration, surprise, and suspicion. He was at a loss to comprehend the marvellous transformation from her former insuppressible and open abhorrence, to this aspect of manifest kindness.

Lucy addressed him with her fascinating voice tuned to its most musical cadence; "I wonder, Ben, why you have never yet thought of marrying."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, the savage could not have exhibited more profound astonishment. "Me!" he exclaimed, and his form quivered, and his eyes started, as if about to fly from their sockets. "Me marry!" he repeated, as if the conjunction of such terms announced the climax of impossibilities.

"Yes," said Lucy, "why not you as well as another?"

"Me marry!" he iterated; "me, the Indian dog, the slave, that every one scorns, that even the blackest niggers turn away from in disgust!"

"My yellow girl, Betty, would make you a very pretty wife," suggested the artful woman, marching step by step stealthily to her purpose.

"I said the same thing to Betty once myself, and she nearly scalded me to death," replied the Comanche, shuddering at the painful recollection.

Lucy, with difficulty restrained a laugh, and asked in tones of simulated fondness; "Tell me the truth, Ben, have you really never loved?"

The hideous creature blushed to the very eyes, but he did not answer.

"What would you do Ben, to win the woman that you loved?"



The Indian gazed upon the smiling face of the beautiful woman, who had greeted him with such unwonted familiarity, and his countenance betrayed at once, boundless admiration, surprise, and suspicion. He was at a loss to comprehend the marvellous transformation from her former insuppressible and open abhorrence, to this aspect of manifest kindness.—PAGE 126

"What would I not do?" he cried with sudden enthusiasm; "it would be for her to give the order, and I would obey it without question; I would scalp my own father, slay my mother, or murder my best friend!"

"You love me, Ben," said Lucy, casting upon the wretch a look that set every drop of blood in his veins on fire, and deprived him of the power of speech.

"Yes," she continued, "I have long known it, and if I could be sure that you would do everything which I might command, you could at some future day, claim me for your wife."

The Comanche trembled violently in every limb, as if all his nerves were swept by a hurricane of electric flame, but he still remained silent.

"Do you not hear me, Ben? or, perhaps, you do not think me sufficiently beautiful to be loved!"

"Oh, no," he exclaimed, "you are more beautiful than the evening star."

"Well, if such be your idea, would you not be willing to serve me as a slave for a few years, in order, at last, to obtain my hand?"

"Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes; say what you wish me to do?"

"Avenge my wrongs!" she answered, in slow, solemn accents.

"Who has injured you?" he interrogated with an awful look.

"Can you not guess?"

The Indian reflected deeply for several moments, and then a certain lurid light gleamed on his deformed visage, as he replied, "I know of but one person who has wronged you, and that is the captain, by his love for another girl."

"He is the man."

"Then I will follow him, and shoot him before sunset," cried the Comanche springing to his feet, and grasping the handle of his huge revolver.

The woman smiled and said, "sit down, Ben, I do not want him killed yet, not for several years."

"Then you do not hate him," inferred the other with his barbarian logic.

"Yes, I do," she asserted in terrible tones; "I loathe him more than words can express, or imagination paint in its most dreadful dreams of blood and carnage."

"But yet would have him live?" interposed the savage with an air of incredulity.

"Yes, I would have him live," she answered, "but live alone to suffer; for all physical pain ceases with the convulsions of the last agony. I must see him writhe like a worm in the embers, through the long torture of years, I would protract it to ages, if I had the power. His heart must break by inches as he has broken mine."

"I understand you now," said the Comanche, grinning like a devil at the conception of a cruelty, so infinitely transcending his own gross and material ideas of the most perfect revenge.

"And will you aid me?" she inquired with her syren voice.

"Yes, in everything," he responded with fearful earnestness.

"Then you must pretend to obey the captain, with greater zeal than ever, but take all your directions from me, and communicate in return all the secrets of the band. You must meet me both in public and in private with the same reserve as formerly, and never betray our engagement by one word or look. I shall allow no sort of liberty, save a kiss of my hand at parting, and remember, that if you fail in one single particular, I will never speak to you again. Now leave me until to-morrow."

She extended her beautiful hand, and the savage raised it to his lips, and dropping it suddenly, fled from the library.

How various are the modes adopted by the rigid impartiality of infinite justice for the punishment of human crime. But still most commonly the instruments of sin are used as the chosen and

favorite means of vengeance against the actors. The demons who have so long and faithfully served our guilty passions, the compact of hell being at last broken, turn round in fury, and rend their wicked masters.

CHAPTER XI.

PLOTS AND COUNTER-PLOTS.

ON the night of the day that witnessed the events just recorded, the lynchers mustered an immense force at their former rendezvous beneath the great sycamore on the lake, in the neighborhood of Major Morrow's residence. An event had happened the evening before, which had swelled their numbers beyond their most sanguine expectations, and promised to give them supreme control of the community. A family by the name of Marks, consisting of the parents and six children, had been murdered, and their bodies consumed in the flames of their own dwelling, which had been fired by the robbers after the consummation of the infernal crime; a deed of such atrocious barbarity as might have brought a blush to the darkest cheek of savages, or even devils.

The rumor flew on the wings of the wind, startling the country like the unexpected shock of an earthquake; every eye flashed with indignation, every face grew white with horror, and every heart boiled like a crater, with the fiercest emotions of mingled rage and revenge. Nor could this extraordinary agitation of the populace be regarded as a matter of wonder, since the horrible tragedy was the first in which an entire household had been massacred, apparently without any other motive than the object of plunder and the innate love of cruelty and bloodshed. Life and property, indeed, had long been fearfully inse-

cure. Men had fallen by the dozen, mostly, however, in duels, or sudden rencontres, with more or less appearance of fair combat. Slaves and horses, it is true, had been stolen, and travelers had been robbed on the road, yet usually without unnecessary violence; but in this revolting case, all humanity had been openly outraged, in such a manner as to convince the people that they lived in the presence of fiends as well as felons, and this turned the wavering scale in hundreds of honest minds, and determined them to unite at once with the regulators. And it must be confessed, that they seemed to have no choice left, but a resort to the physical force of the mob, or utter ruin and exile from their homes and country.

Thus favored by the general feeling and opinion, the lynchers resolved to throw off all disguise, invited the public to attend their deliberations, and thus drew together a mighty mass of more than half a thousand men. The most powerful pen would fail to describe the excitement of this heterogeneous multitude. Writers frequently exhaust the superlatives of the language, in the vain attempt to paint the fury of the storm, the roar of the army of ocean billows, and the crash of the dread artillery of Heaven: but how feeble, how ineffectual seem all the collisions of adverse elements, whether of fire, water or wind—mere material agitation, however awful, compared with the terrible rage of the populace, mutually inflaming each other to frenzy, and drowning the faint voice of reason in the deafening tumult of angry passion; when every brain burns with the epidemic fever of temporary madness; and every bosom holds a bursting volcano. All prudence, pity, and generous sympathy abandon such a crowd, and the animal instincts, the native red tigers of the human heart, break loose from the chains of habit, religion, and education, and rule as merciless tyrants, where they had previously served as slaves. Society becomes a menagerie of wild beasts, without a cage and without a master.

Parson Johnson being called to the chair, assisted by half a

dozen vice-presidents, all either ministers or sworn conservators of peace, explained the object of the meeting, enumerating, with much natural eloquence, the enormities and various outrages, which had lately been perpetrated in different parts of the country.

One, Benjamin Parker, a preacher of the Cumberland Presbyterian sect, then arose, and moved the appointment of a secret committee, for the government of their organization, and the trial of all criminal charges. The speaker was a lean, long, slender man, with the form and limbs of a skeleton; but, as if to make amends for the meagreness of his breath, nature had drawn him out wonderfully in length, to the measure of six feet and five inches. His features, however, were all in perfect harmony with this gigantic figure, sharing in most brotherly union, at once, its slimness and longitude. He had a forehead tall and narrow; a face long and narrow, so that he had no occasion to draw down the corners of his mouth in order to look sanctimonious; a nasal organ, with which Sterne might have capped the climax of his promontory of noses, and a long peaked chin, that seemed like a second nose, which had grown, by accident, too low down. Add a pair of large white eyes, white hair, and a ghostly complexion, with the ideal of a puritanic, acid countenance, and you have the parson's portrait.

With a voice hoarse as the rattle of a drum, that pealed through the woods like the bellowing of thunder, he aroused every prejudice and passion in support of his motion, and was finally forced to take his seat, by the whirlwind of popular applause that hailed his sentiments.

He was followed by Joel Dodson, a Millenarian minister, who affected some vague pretensions to the gift of prophecy. He was a small, sour-visaged man, whose very looks belied his favorite doctrine, and ignored even the possibility of such a fabulous myth as human happiness. His bald head glistened with reverence, unobscured by a single hair, but his yellowish-

brown eyes twinkled with a gleaming lustre that very much resembled the cunning of the quack and impostor. He supported, by numerous scriptural quotations, the views of brother Parker, and boldly avowed that universal lynching would herald the Millenium. His own disciples greeted this prediction with boisterous acclamations; and many called out impatiently for the vote.

Suddenly, Major Morrow sprung to his feet, and declared his opposition to the measure. He wanted no committee, no tedious investigations, no examination of evidence. "Let us elect our commander, fix our shootin'-irons, and march to the death of every rogue in the county, before the rest of our families are butchered in their beds, like that of poor Marks!"

This ruthless proposition was received with still more clamorous plaudits, and appeared about to be carried, when John Carter a methodist preacher gained a hearing. He was a massive, well-developed person, with a fine head, and pleasing face, expressing in the bright blue eyes, and florid countenance, the purest intentions, combined with great humor and even mirthfulness. He advocated, by the most convincing practical arguments, the first motion, and showed the dangerous consequences of the course urged by the last speaker.

"You wish to slaughter all the thieves," he said, addressing himself to the major, whose long, red beard moved with ire, like the whiskers of an infuriated wildcat; "very well, we all desire the same thing; but how will you discover who they are, without a regular inquiry by positive and methodical proofs?"

"We can take them jist as they stand on the list furnished by Parson Cole, and Bob Bennet," answered Morrow.

"Where are the witnesses that you have named?" inquired Carter.

"The robbers have doubtless assassinated them out of revenge for their disclosure," explained the major.

"It is far more probable, that their tale was a fiction,"

replied Carter ; " and that fearing to be detected, they have fled the country. I hold in my hand a letter from the presiding elder of south-western Missouri, representing the character of Cole as most infamous."

A lawyer Rider, from Shelbyville, next arose to back the reasons of the Methodist minister. He was a lean, withered specimen of humanity, with keen black eyes ; a nose like the beak of a bird, as if specially formed to pick holes in cases and things in general ; a complexion of dirty yellow, similar to the soiled sheep-skin of his own legal folios, and a voice disagreeable as the tones of a cracked bell. He expatiated freely on the necessity of order and method in their proceedings, and suggested the importance of having a prosecuting attorney, to sift the testimony by the tortures of cross-examination, and lastly, to propitiate his chief opponent, he closed by remarking, that there was but one man in the community equal to the task of general commander of the forces, and he pointed with his finger at Major Morrow. This adroit manœuvre settled the controversy, as the latter immediately withdrew his opposition, and the motion was carried by acclamation.

The names of all the citizens willing to join the organization, were then enrolled, amounting in the aggregate to some four hundred and fifty ; and the election of officers was made by ballot. The Rev. Benjamin Parker was chosen president, and parsons Johnson, Carter, and Dodson, with eight others, formed the judicial committee. Major Morrow was chief of the company, and counsellor Rider, prosecutor general of all accusations. It was also unanimously resolved, that all other civil jurisdiction should cease during the reign of the lynchers, that they would, in fact, neither pay taxes, nor submit to the service of civil process, and they despatched a delegation to inform the judge and sheriff of their determination. Then after solemnly swearing all their members to faithful allegiance, the assembly adjourned to meet early the next morning. And thus was the

civil war organized, that soon drenched the virgin forests with blood, and clothed a hundred families in mourning. Many fearful scenes of mob-law have followed the frontier from Carolina to California, but none to parallel this, in the number of its victims, the force and ferocity of the factions, or in the open and outrageous defiance of all constitutional authority, which won for the region, so disgraced by its violence, the name of "the free state of Tanaha," a title it still wears, although the state of society, at the present day, will compare favorably with any beyond the Alleghany mountains.

As soon as the multitude dispersed, Captain Carlyle descended from his hiding-place in the hollow sycamore, and giving a shrill peculiar whistle, was quickly joined by one of his band.

"I have them now," murmured the robber, with a smile of satisfaction ; "they have avowed a scheme of positive rebellion. I must hurry home, and forward a message to the president of the Republic, who will order out the militia, and crush them like a nest of vipers ! In the meantime, you must take my place in that tree, and watch their proceedings to-morrow, and be sure, they do not discover you."

The subordinate promised compliance, and the principal, seeking his horse, hurried off home, where he arrived a little before daylight. He found Comanche Ben sleeping on the porch, and arousing him hastily, ordered the Indian to fly across the river to their camp, and summon one of his most trusty followers to attend at the house immediately. He then walked into the library, where to his surprise, a lamp was burning, and the lovely form of Lucy lay reclined in a seemingly profound slumber on the sofa. She awakened, however, at the sound of his footsteps, and saluted him with a show of greater pleasure and more tranquil confidence, than she had exhibited since the inception of her jealousy.

"I have remained here without undressing, all the night," she remarked, with beaming looks of love fond as in the hours of their

earliest bliss ; "I have heard such rumors concerning the fatal intentions of the lynchers, and was so uneasy on your account. What a misfortune it would be if they should break up your plans now, when one more successful speculation will realize all our wildest dreams of wealth."

The captain gazed at her with those piercing black eyes, touched with a slight suspicion, as he answered, "I thought, Lucy, that you cared little whether my schemes prospered or not."

"Oh, my dearest," she replied, in tones of the most intense passion ; "I have been very foolish, and perverse as a spoiled child. I did not reflect that men demand more variety for their ample affections, than we poor women either desire or expect. But I will be jealous no longer ; you may marry even whom you please, so that you keep me as the queen idol of your bosom."

Nevertheless, Carlyle felt disposed to doubt this earnest asseveration, so different from his experience of the woman's character ; but the burning ardor of her embraces, and infinite tenderness of her voice and manner, caused his incredulity to waver, and he resolved to simulate entire belief, and watch her closely afterwards.

"Now you talk like a girl of sense," he declared, returning her warm caresses ; "I love none but you, but in order to retain my power over Colonel Miles, it is necessary to wed his daughter, and as soon as our object in this country shall be achieved, we shall leave our dupes, and fly away to enjoy our love alone, in the gay luxuries of some European capital."

"O, I ought to have known," cried the artful woman, feigning to credit every word of falsehood he uttered ; "nay, I might have sworn that you would never prove false in your heart to me ; and now I will never more harbor one suspicion of your fidelity."

Of these two souls thus pretending fondness, but feeling immortal hate, and bent on each other's destruction, by all the base means of guile and cunning, which will conquer ? The match appears nearly equal, the chances are well balanced, by his

shrewdness and bravery on one side, and by her hypocrisy and bewitching beauty on the other. Time alone, the everlasting Sphinx, must read her own riddles, written on this crime-polluted page.

"There now, Lucy, let me go," said Carlyle, releasing himself from her arms ; "I must pen a dispatch to the president of the republic, and have the militia called out to suppress the lynchers ; they will resist I am sure, and be massacred like wolves as they are."

"Then, I will retire to my room, until you shall have finished your correspondence," answered the woman, and she hurried to the parlor, and lighting a candle wrote rapidly a few lines, and folding up the sheet, addressed it to General Houston. At the moment, she heard a heavy step enter the library, which she correctly inferred to be that of the messenger who was to bear the communication of the captain to the government. She then stole softly out of the house and finding the Indian, said in a whisper ; "the man who has just gone in to see your master, will depart very soon with a letter. You must follow him and manage to get it away, and place this in its stead," and handing him the epistle which she had just prepared, she returned to the parlor.

The instant afterwards the messenger appeared in the door, to start on his mission. The captain exclaimed, as the other sprung into the saddle, "see that you do not lose it, and spare neither whip nor spur, for it is a matter of the utmost importance."

"Yes, it is a matter of the utmost importance," echoed Lucy, with a strange smile. The captain then came in and seated himself by her side ; but he had not time to utter a syllable, before an event occurred to end the interview. The huge form of Tony suddenly entered without ceremony, and his hideous visage announced that he was the bearer of news uncommonly interesting. He had even opened his monkey-looking mouth to

discharge his message outright, when observing the presence of Lucy, he hesitated stammering, "Massa Carlyle, I ax yer pardon as how I 'spected you wur alone."

"It is no difference, Tony, speak out what you have got to say," answered the Captain, fixing his eyes with a stealthy side-long glance upon the changeless countenance of his mistress.

"Ha! we've got 'em now, bofe of 'em, too, safe as possums up a gum stump," cried the African, grinning from ear to ear, like the animal, from which he had just taken the liberty of borrowing his comparison.

"Whom have you got?" inquired Carlyle.

"Wy, Mr. Bollum, and Mary, just as they were gwin' to be married."

"Are they married?" screamed the agitated robber, pallid as a ghost.

"No, Massa Miles fotch up thar in the nick of time, and toted 'em back home arter him, tellin' 'em twur more polite to be haltered in thur own stable, and they follered like colts."

"Are they married now?" asked Carlyle, somewhat relieved, but not fully assured.

"No, but they are gwin' to be the day arter to-morrow."

"The dawn of that day, one of them shall never witness," remarked the bandit, with a look of murderous malice; "I must make sure of him this time!" and he rang the bell furiously.

Several servants rushed in to obey the hasty summons, and the master inquired, anxiously, "Where is Comanche Ben?"

"He galloped off a minute arter Rovin' Dick left," was the reply.

"That is strange," muttered Carlyle, in a tone of vexation; "I told him to remain near the house, and I never knew him to violate my orders before."

"You ought to punish him severely," suggested Lucy, in a low whisper; "for of late, I think he has grown somewhat saucy."

"Oh no, you are mistaken," affirmed the captain, confidently;

"he is by far the most reliable member of my band. He has probably forgotten something which he wished to learn from Roving Dick. He belongs to me, soul and body, and I would trust him with my very life."

A wild gleam of revenge shone for an instant in the dark eyes of the woman, as she answered carelessly, "Dearest, you are the best judge."

"I cannot wait for him, however," he whispered; "when he returns, tell him to summon twenty of my men to meet me to-day, about noon, at our old rendezvous, in Tanaha bottom, behind the farm of Colonel Miles." And kissing her with apparent fondness, he left the house, and rode rapidly away.

Immediately, Lucy flew into the library and penned a brief note, addressed to Mary Miles. As she finished it, the Indian came back, and she communicated the mandate of Carlyle, remarking, "you must do as he has directed, be in the greatest possible haste, and then, afterwards, go to the residence of Colonel Miles, and contrive some means of delivering this letter into the hands of Mary, if you can effect it without being observed."

"I will do it or die," murmured the Comanche, as he received the message and hurried off at a gallop.

In the meantime the captain had gone to Shelbyville, where he met the father of Mary, and the two arranged their plan for the assassination of William Bolling, to be consummated that night. The colonel, it is true, endeavored to dissuade Carlyle from committing the horrible deed, but all his arguments proved unavailing, to alter the obstinate purpose of the more ruthless villain, who answered him in his usual vein, with taunts and menaces.

Let me now turn, for a brief space, from these repulsive pictures of crime and guilty passion, and seek relief in the glowing beauty of a brighter scene, a vision for the admiration, and almost envy, of the angels. The destined but unsuspecting

victim of the bandits, passed the day in the sweet society of his promised bride. The rosy-winged hours glided swiftly, like all happiness, away, in that soft-murmured converse, which has formed, since the beginning of time, the delicious theme for the lips of lovers. As the cloudless sun approached his golden setting, the youth proposed a stroll; and the two walked forth to enjoy the balmy beauty of the mild evening air. And, perhaps, neither of them had ever before appeared so lovely in all their lives.

Their beauty of so very different orders, heightened by contrast the respective charms of each, so that no one could have affirmed which looked the more enchanting. This seemed especially the case, when they paused on the verge of the forest, beneath a tree covered with a snow of radiant blossoms, yielding the most intoxicating perfume, as if all its flowers were fresh from paradise. They gazed with infinite fondness into each other's eyes, and the blue depths of his mirrored the dark light from hers, until their very souls seemed to mingle in the sacrament of an immortal union. Indeed, they were already wedded in that pure bridal of the heart, which never can know divorce, and defies separation. Their very voices sounded like one, his coarse tones having unconsciously caught the notes of her musical whisper; and the divine carnation, the celestial tint of love on their mutual cheeks, seemed borrowed from the sun-dyed wing of the same rainbow.

"O, this is truly, almost too great a burden of bliss!" said the youth in accents gentle as the evening wind, that scarcely stirred the silken petals of the snow-flowers pendant above their heads.

"And how grateful I feel for this unexpected change in the sentiments of my dear father," murmured Mary, with her starlight smile.

"Yes, and I will never forget it, but always reverence him as my own," added the youth; "I cannot but love any relative of

yours, dearest one, when I adore the very dust that has been sainted by your feet."

"And I will love your parents also," sighed the maiden; "I will have two fathers now, and find a new mother on earth to replace the angel one in heaven!"

"And they will both love you as well," he affirmed; "your magical beauty must bring love in every heart, as the stars give glory to the evening air."

"I am not so beautiful, my William," she said, with a blush of rich vermilion, that belied her own modest words; "but you, O, you are more beautiful than a dream of the heart."

"No, my Mary, it is not as you say; but I can make amends in love for all I may want in personal graces, and you, my charmer, are beautiful enough for us both."

"I protest not," she smiled more sweetly than ever; "you see me through the rainbow medium of your over-bright fancy; but I really feel, that I have fondness sufficient to fill a hundred hearts."

And so they continued discoursing of love, only love, until the burning gold of the dying day turned to silver, and then that changed into the soft azure of the beautiful black-mantled, blue-eyed virgin night, and a thousand stars walked out on the empyreal heights of heaven, to witness the innocent embrace of the young lovers, who still whispered love, only love!

And is there, indeed, anything on earth, or even in the sky like it? That miraculous power of transformation, which creates all things new—that burning baptism of the youthful heart, which admits it as an immortal member into the bright communion of passion, poetry, and the ideal of all beauty and art—that comes like the echoes of some divine voice, from the distant spheres, which live in light for evermore, and arousing us from the death-like sleep of selfishness, calls us away to higher and holier aims, and teaches us the first sweet lesson of sacrificing our habits, hopes, desires, our all, for the bliss of another

being, to lose our very life, and find it again purified, exalted, sainted, as it were, in another soul, a second self, the complement to the circle of our true existence, in a boundless beatitude of which we never before had even dreamed—to love !

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEGRO MEETING.

On the night of the same day mentioned in the foregoing chapter, a very different kind of meeting, from that of the lynchers, assembled some half dozen miles from the other, in the Tanah bottom, about midway between the residences of Major Morrow and Colonel Miles. In the purple twilight of the evening, two individuals might have been seen, urging their course through the dense and tangled forest, towards the point above specified. One of these was an extremely tall, slender, skin of a man, well stuffed, however, with long, loose bones, all of which seemed to be out of joint, giving to his gait and gestures an appearance indescribably ludicrous and awkward. His face was so full of adverse angles, both plane and spherical, as to defy all the calculations of trigonometry to furnish their measurement or relative dimensions. His nose, long and remarkably beaked, nearly consummated a wedding with his projecting crooked chin, that turned its sharp point upwards, as if anxious for the proposed union. His forehead, low and narrow, presented two enormous knots immediately above the visual orbs, showing that however deficient this person might be in the higher mental and

moral faculties, he did not want keen perception for the practical realities of mere material life. Add hair the color of tow, a swarthy complexion, and small, shrewd, deep-set eyes, of a yellowish brown, similar in size and look to those of a bear, and the picture of Jonathan Hutson is complete. The other man was an old acquaintance, Lieutenant Curran, of "the rifle rangers," as he had dubbed himself, with so much truth and some little wit.

The two companions made their way among the mazy undergrowth, with great difficulty; for, indeed, it seemed nearly as impossible for the lofty length of Jonathan to pierce the jungles of interwoven cane, as for a camel to creep through the eye of a needle, or for Cræsus or Rothschild to enter the narrow gate of Paradise. The vines overhead were almost continually inserting their snake-like tendrils into the towy tangles of his hair, and if he adopted the stooping posture, to avoid the fate of Absalom, the roots, in serpentine coils, always managed to trip up his heels. But to every mishap, he replied, with the innocent imprecation, "Consarn it." What precise import he attached to the words, his comrade could not imagine, but his wofully ludicrous visage amused the other to frequent and uncontrollable laughter.

At length, shortly after dark, they reached a small, mound-like elevation of dry soil in the centre of a large swamp, which exhibited several indications of having been previously used as a place of rendezvous; for the tall cane and festooned vine had been carefully removed, and an enormous pile of pine-knots lay in the vicinity of an ash-heap that still contained some live coals. Hutson hastened to kindle a bright blaze, and threw on fuel,

until it roared like a conflagration; then seating himself, and pulling off his moccasins, he remarked, in tones of vexation: "Consarn it, my feet are as wet as a dead rat in a rainy day, and my legs as muddy as a poor cow in a bog."

"Ah! the captain deals out to us all the hard and dirty work," said Curran, with an air of affected commiseration.

"And all the dangerous work, too, for that matter," added Jonathan, with a sigh.

"There cannot be a doubt as to the truth of your last observation," affirmed the other, seriously; "I should not be astonished if some of your black brethren should inform their masters what sort of gospel you give them at midnight."

"Yes, it may happen any day, and then my hide wouldn't hold shucks!" ejaculated Jonathan, with a doleful shudder.

"I am afraid they would take greater liberties with your neck than with any other appendage of your body," suggested Curran.

"I wish that I wur back again in Vermont, they have no such doin's there," sighed the Yankee, mournfully.

"They have no niggers there to be stolen," said the lieutenant.

"They're all too honest to steal."

"I should think so, from one specimen of the natives now before me."

"O, I never took to roguery until I met with the captain," apologized Jonathan; "and his oily tongue could make the apostle Paul himself an apostate. Indeed, he gave me no other alternative; with the rope round my neck, the gallows-limb

above my head, and the hands of three stout fellows at the loose end of the halter, I had to choose between instantly becoming a thief, or—

"Going to Heaven an honest man," interposed Curran, laughing.

"No, I did not feel myself fit for the latter predicament," protested Hutson; "and so I bawled out, 'wait a bit, captain, and I'll jine yer band.' Then they swore me in, and I've served them faithfully ever since."

"Your life must have been one of strange adventure," remarked the other, thoughtfully.

"Consarn it, yes; you may well say that," replied Jonathan; first a clock-pedler, till my partner ran off with all the capital as well as profits; then an old-field school-master, till I made love to a pretty pupil, and her daddy thrashed me as if I had been a snake; next a Methodist circuit-riding, till they turned me out."

"Upon what pretext did the church dispense with such a model of piety and talents?"

"They accused me of some small offence, a mere peccadillo, in fact, that I was more devoted in my attentions to the sweet sisters, than to the masculine members of the communion, but I can assure you on my honor, as a man and gentleman, that the charge was utterly without foundation."

"I should judge differently from your handsome visage," answered Curran ironically, "to see a beautiful woman drooping her bright ringlets on your bosom, would realize the old fable of Venus and Vulcan."

In a brief space, the sable sons of Africa commenced drop-

ping in, at first one or two at a time, but towards the noon of night they came in large dusky swarms, from every corn-field and cotton-farm within a dozen miles. Even the wildest imagination could not paint to itself the picturesque and almost diabolical appearance of the scene. The white eyes, ivory teeth, and apish ebon features of the negroes, gleaming with extraordinary excitement, revealed in the crimson light of the immense fire of pine-knots, resembled the ghostly grinning visages of thick crowded imps in pandemonium, far more than human countenances of living flesh and blood; while the enormous gnarled oaks, and huge cone-shaped trunks of the cypress and black pine, with their Titanic limbs, standing on the verge of the circular wall of surrounding darkness, where gigantic spectral shadows frowned and flickered as the central lurid illumination increased or decayed, looked like a host of devils, each with a hundred arms, placed as gloomy sentinels to guard the infernal crew; and the festoons of long moss, quivering in the red torch-light lustre, might well have been mistaken for the wild hair of some great grey wizzard, that had been recently bathed in blood. The wind murmured a low mourning song in the pine-tops, like the sighs of a fiend in pain, while the hoarse bellowing of the bull-frog, and the mingled cries of innumerable insects, and the wailing shrieks of night birds, all combined to produce a picture of superstitious horror, and utter unrelieved desolation. It was a spot for wandering ghosts to gather at midnight, for witches to revel around hell's own caldron boiling over with human blood, for enchanters to sign the infernal compact, which sends the soul forever to the prince of evil.

Among the slaves in attendance were our former acquaintances, Hannibal from Major Morrow's, and Tony from the plantation of Major Miles. Both were in wide grinning glee, and seemed to consider themselves as officers of some sort in the new movement; they had also managed to persuade the servant of William Bolling to turn out with them, but Cæsar appeared to be ill at ease and gazed in stupified amazement upon every thing that he saw, as if he regarded it all as a bewildering dream, or the infernal imagery of some weird and wicked phantasmagoria, rather than actual present reality.

At last, the meeting was organized by calling an athletic grey-headed negro to the chair, or more properly, stool, and one-legged at that, for it consisted of a single large pine-knot, with the sharp end stuck in the ground. The president was the slave of John Minton, the brother-in-law of Major Morrow, and had won by the superior blackness of his skin, and venerable aspect, the honorary title of "Uncle Buck." He opened the proceedings, by a speech of great brevity but very much to the purpose. "My dear brevren," he said, throwing back his head, and scratching it with both hands to get out the ideas, while he turned up the whites of his eyes, as if gazing at certain supposititious auditors in the air. "My dear brevren," he repeated; "this am a 'casion, of most misural entrust, it am one neber to be dismembered, and allers to be forgotten. We are fotch up here to unwise means fur the condemnation of our freedom, at all hazards. Am thar any a sun of a gun among ye, what don't want freedom? He ought to be transfuglified into a bob-tailed mule in fly-time, and made to walk till hims hind legs wur crooked

as a scythe-handle, without con or fodder, and be laithered all day, through thorn thickets! If thar am any one here, what am such a coward and cussed fool, as not to suppine for freedom, he can't show his sneekin' black phiz in my church, I'll be horn-snaggled if he shall! He's wuss nor an old coon dog what won't bark at nuffen but cats, and if he wur born agin, as the Bible sez, he'd be sure to come out a gal. But I won't curtain darkies any fudder, I'm sorter misusenfied to jabberatin, 'cept on speckerlogical subjects, so I'll let the white brevren colluminate yer ignorance!"

"Lor! what big words!" ejaculated the astonished Cæsar, with his eyes rolling in his head like plates on the finger of a juggler, "I never seed a nigger before what could speak Latin!"

"Horumtory am the marrow-bone of freedom," replied Hannibal; "and that am the reason the white folks have such a dose ob it eberv fourth of July.

"Ha!" said the other with a staring look of wonder.

Jonathan Hutson next arose to attempt the fulfilment of Uncle Buck's mysterious promise. The long, lean, bony appearance of the ex-clock pedler, as revealed in the deep crimson rays of the pine-fire, gave him the exact likeness of a skeleton, with two carbuncles set in the eye-sockets. However, he modulated his eloquence to the right tone for the intelligence of his hearers, and touched all their passions and prejudices with admirable adroitness, and in this his former experience as a preacher served him excellently, for the southern negroes are superstitiously fond of scriptural imagery, to which they not unfrequently attach a magical virtue, like forms of incantation.

"Brethren, gentlemen, and fellow-citizens," began Jonathan, with a wry face, as if the terms stung him, or stuck in his throat, "my dear brother and esteemed friend, who has just taken his seat, remarked truly, that this is an ever-memorable occasion. It is like the hour of ancient glory, when the children of Israel started to fly from their task-masters in the land of Egypt, with the pillar of cloud to guide them by day, and the pillar of fire to guide them by night. They were slaves, as you now are; but Heaven sent them a Moses to lead them out of bondage, away to the fair fields of Canaan, flowing with milk and honey: and so I have been sent to break your chains of captivity, and conduct you to the soil of equality and freedom, in the happy region of the bright Yankee-land, that lies near the nose of the north star!"

He paused, and deafening acclamations shook the old woods like thunder.

The speaker snuffed up the whirlwind of applause with a self-satisfied air, and continued, "Yes, my well-beloved brethren, Heaven has commanded it, you must be free. The Bible says emphatically, that the bird which can sing, and won't sing, shall be made sing! Be ye, therefore, ready, and a week from to-night I will lead you out of Egypt to the happy Canaan of the free States."

"We will—we will! no more massas! no more wuk! nuffen but play and kick up our heels, and saw de fiddle!" shouted five hundred voices.

"But what shall we do fur suthen to wuk in our jaws?" inquired some one, blessed with a too practical turn of mind.

"Oh, y' goose, can't you cotch possums?" interrupted Tony with a look of superiority.

"But I want bread, too, fur my corn-crackers," urged the other.

"That am a fac," echoed many more persons in the crowd, in dubious accents.

"Yes, and bread ye shall have," vociferated Jonathan, as he noticed the ebb in the springtide of popular feeling. "Your good friends, the Abolitionists, have stowed away magazines of provisions all along the road that you will travel. Ye shall live on the fat of the land, fish, fowl, flesh, hot cakes, butter, honey, everything ye can ask."

"Lor! how rich them Bobolitions must be," muttered Cæsar

"Yes, and how fillumcroppic," added Han.

"But what will we do, when we get to Canaan?" asked a voice.

"Hev all the week for Sunday, and make the fillisterine folks do the wuk," suggested Uncle Buck.

"But ain't you a gwin' to let us tote our women and children with us?" interrogated another, in faltering tones, and a loud murmur revealed the deep anxiety that prevailed as to the response.

"We can git lots of white gals thar," cried the gallant Hannibal; "they must lub darkies a mighty heap up 'mong the free States, if they make sich a fuss 'bout 'em."

"But we don't want any white gals," shouted the majority; "we'd rather have our own wives and children."

"And ye shall have them, my dear brethren," protested Jonathan; "but the men must go first, and travel very fast, so the ladies and little ones could not keep up, none but young girls, who can walk rapidly, and will not be easily tired."

"How, then, will we git the balance ov 'em arterwards?" exclaimed the dubious, shaking their heads.

"I will tell you, my friends," answered the ready-witted Jonathan; "the Abolitionists are building a rail-road to run all over the world. They have already got it more than half done, and the rest will be finished next year; and then they will send a big steam-car to bring on your women and children."

"A steam-car! what sort of a fixin' is that?" inquired the multitude, in one general breath of amazement.

"O," said the ex-clock-peddler, "it is an immense wagon, more than a mile long, drawn by a black iron horse, stronger than all the teams on the earth, running faster than the wind, and roaring louder than the thunder. He breathes lightning at every snort, and will not feed on anything but fire!"

"Oh! Lordy, may be him am the devil!" exclaimed the wonder-struck auditors.

"Not at all; he is only an iron horse, that the Yankees have learned to make; and more than that, they are now creating an iron man, who will do all the work!"

"The fools!" complained Tony; "they ort to have fixed the iron feller fust, and then he mout have done the wuk on the hoss, and the raillum-road to boot!"

"But why don't 'em send on thar iron hoss, and carry off our gals and us all togedder?" asked another sceptic.

"I told you that they had not yet completed the road," explained Jonathan; "the new animal is very particular about the path he travels. He refuses to walk upon any substance meaner than his own metal, and if you try his temper, or differ

from his taste, he kicks up his heels, and smashes the waggon and passengers into pieces no bigger than your thumb, or pitches, out of spite, into the first lake or river that he comes to, and all sink to the bottom. But if you humor him, and treat him kindly, he goes gently as a lamb."

Every body appeared to be thoroughly satisfied with this explication, and after dealing with a variety of practical details, the assembly adjourned, to meet again at the end of a week.

It is in a similar manner, that thousands of slaves are annually enticed away from their masters, all over the southern States, under the delusive promises of freedom. Villains, using various pretexts, and often assuming the garb of the gospel, as pretended ministers of mercy, wander about the country, and the instant when they find a disaffected or maltreated servant, they present the tempting lure, and proffer assistance for a flight to the northern States or Canada. If the ignorant African accept the proposition, they aid him to run off, but to neither of the promised lands. He is carried farther south, and sold to some unscrupulous planter, who never criticises the title, provided he can purchase the article at a fair discount. Indeed, the thief frequently effects the bargain with the negro's own consent, who is made to believe that he will share the profits of the speculation, and that the rogue will steal him back again. O when shall mankind learn the great lesson taught by all history and human experience, and which has all the logical force of an *a priori* axiom, that no being of mortal mould, ever was, or will be free, with a soul the slave of ignorance, or servile habit?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NARROW ESCAPE.

ON the same evening, as I have previously mentioned, William Bolling and his beautiful bride, that was to be on the following day, still lingered in the balmy air, repeating over and over again, the burning vows and terms of tender endearment, which both so well knew already by heart. The sun himself had long sunk beneath the glowing glories of the western horizon, but the radiant snow-blossoms of the flowering tree above their heads still seemed to keep the woods in sunlight, and the bright-eyed stars, the everlasting poetry of love, as well as heaven, smiled so sweetly, and shed such living lustre, that they forgot the absence of the gaudy day, and remembered not even the presence of the soft and silent sister night, in their deep and dreamy unconsciousness of all other existence but their own. What had they to fear, these pure young souls, in that first purple prime of their innocent love, which, in chaste unhackneyed hearts, with all their dews of the morning fresh on the flower-cups of life, always precedes the hour of fiery and more selfish passion? They could certainly dread no danger

from each other, when they would rather have died, by the most cruel of physical tortures, than to harbor a doubt of their mutual and stainless purity. Nevertheless, they were in the very presence of deadly peril. The frowning Fates hovered around them, and the very atmosphere they breathed was full of mortal poison, as the dark shade of that Indian tree, whose piercing odor is prompt and powerful to kill as the lightning of heaven!

Suddenly they heard a rustling in the green boughs behind them, and an anxious voice cried out:

"Here, Miss Mary, is a letter for you; let your lover fly instantly, if you would not see him fall a bloody corpse at your feet!"

The strange invisible speaker hurled a small note through the air, which dropped within a yard of where they stood, and the crash of tangled brush in the vicinity told that he was hurrying away.

"Stop! stop! and tell us the danger!" exclaimed the youth in the utmost agitation, while the maiden stooped, and with quivering fingers, picked up the mysterious letter.

"Fly! fly! or you will not have an hour to live!" answered the ominous voice, growing fainter and more far-off in the darkness, while a hundred dying echoes, from all the whispering woods, seemed to repeat the wild warning, "fly! fly, for your life!"

"Let us hasten to the house, and read it," said the young man, recovering from the shock of the astounding announcement, and leading away the trembling girl.

"Do not relate the circumstance to my father," murmured Mary, as they drew near the dwelling; "my heart is haunted by a terrible foreboding! Oh, God! can it be, that he would yet deceive us, as uncle Jack feared!"

They gained the parlor, where the colonel welcomed them with apparent kindness, but the quick perception of Bolling detected unusual emotion and terror in his countenance and manner. His features looked livid, almost corpse-like, and his fingers shook, as if charged with electricity.

Mary flew to the lamp, and broke open the note, while the youth advanced to her side, and glanced over the contents; and well might they both shudder with feelings of unmingled horror and alarm, at the frightful facts, which the brief words revealed.

"Let your lover fly instantly to Major Morrow's," urged the letter; "the bandits have sworn to have his blood, to-night. Nothing can save him, but immediate flight, as hundreds will surround the house, and the slaves of the plantation will assist, if necessary, in the deed of murder! Trust not your own father, for he is privy to the plan, and dares not oppose the wishes of Carlyle! Do not attempt to go now with your lover, for the forest is swarming with his foes, and you would only embarrass his efforts to escape. Keep this communication an inviolable secret, and burn the paper that bears it, if you would not endanger the life of an unknown friend, a woman beautiful as yourself, and once as innocent, until betrayed by the man-devil, whom you hate, as I do. But fear not, sweet Mary, he shall wed the hangman's halter, sooner than you!"

The maiden whispered, "I know the writer; every syllable is true. Delay not a moment. Fly to Major Morrow's?"

Bolling's eyes flashed with that strange wild light which beams on the face of the brave in the hour of greatest peril. He instantly formed his resolution. First, he snatched the note out of Mary's hand, and thrust it into the flame of the lamp; then he rushed to his room for his weapons, but to his bitter dismay, found that these faithful friends had been secretly removed. He ran back into the parlor, exclaiming in terrible tones, "Colonel, I must leave on business of the utmost importance, this very minute; my pistols have been stolen, all save the two small deringers, that I always carry about my person. Lend me your large revolver."

"I cannot spare it," faltered Miles; "but why this hurry? why run away to-night?"

"I will explain it all to-morrow," said Bolling, sternly; "but you must spare your revolver!" and he snatched the weapon from the colonel's belt, and cried, "now, be quick, let me have my horse!"

"I'll git him fur ye, massa," remarked a great mulatto, who had been watching the scene, with a countenance denoting deep and sinister interest.

"Then, be in haste, if you would not have a bullet through your brain! and I'll go with you to the stable," shouted the young man, and both he and the slave ran out of the room.

In a few seconds, the mulatto led his horse out of the stall, and observed, "massa, I can't find the saddle; I must blow for Bill, as him knows whar 'tis." Then he drew from his pocket a

small whistle, and gave a loud shrill blast, which was immediately answered by the ringing tones of a bugle from the bridge above the Tanaha, followed by the thunder of flying hoofs, as of a whole troop of cavalry charging towards the stable.

"Ha ! traitor !" cried Bolling, as he felled the mulatto to the earth with one blow of his pistol, and seizing the bridle-reins, sprung upon Selim's naked back, and fled in a different direction from the point where the bugle had sounded. His course lay through an immense field, nearly a mile long. If he could only gain the dense thickets of the bottom beyond the fence, he felt he would be safe; but hope in his heart almost expired, as he made the discovery that his horse was lame, and the wild yells of his pursuers came fiercer and faster behind him. In a brief space they were close enough to begin the discharge of shots, and bullets whistled their death-notes around his ears, while a stinging sensation in his side, told that he had been already touched.

"On, Selim !" he cried, bravely ; "a hundred yards more, and we'll foil the devils yet !" and he plied the whip and spur with the energy of desperation.

He had nearly reached the fence, and the noble animal gathered up all his muscular force to take the dangerous leap, and, bounding high in the air, his head struck an overhanging limb, and he fell back upon his rider. The latter was, however, only partially stunned by the fall, but the dying horse in his struggles had rolled upon his leg, rendering it impossible for him to rise without assistance. His doom appeared sealed. There remained not a semblance of a hope. The triumphant shout of

a hundred bandits, mixed with bursts of fiend-like laughter, rung around him, as the trumpet-tongue of Captain Carlyle exclaimed, "Now, boys, give him a shower of cold lead ! let him die easily !"

But hardly had the word left the robber's lips, when a brilliant sheet of flame wrapped the topmost rail of the fence in a red wreath, like lightning, while an appalling peal, as of thunder, roared in the night-air, and shook the very earth.

"What ! are they outside in the forest, as well as in the field ?" thought the youth, but he immediately perceived that the company in the bushes were mortal foes to the black band ; for they instantly dealt them another volley, that emptied several saddles and caused many more to wheel their horses, and gallop away from the deadly flash of that unexpected fire, as if it had been the smoking crater of the infernal deep, instead of a discharge from a platoon of musketry.

However, the captain, and a majority of his men, although taken so much by surprise, did not recoil, but returned the leaden hail with their revolvers.

"What can it mean ? who are these unknown friends, that now do battle, perhaps unconsciously, to save my life ?" said Bolling.

At the moment, the hoarse voice of Major Morrow fulminated behind the fence, "Boys, load your barrels with buck-shot, that's the right sort of dose to make the rogues puke blood ! never mind the measure ! ram down a handful of powder, and it don't matter how much lead !"

The effect of this savage order soon became manifest, as vol-

ley after volley rolled in swift succession, and, at last, the bandits, in spite of the threats and curses of their commander, broke and fled in the wildest disorder, and he himself was forced to follow them.

The lynchers then rushed over the fence, and released the young man from his painful situation. "Who are you?" inquired the major, failing, at first, to recognize his former guest in the darkness, rendered all the deeper from its contrast with the previous red light of battle.

"William Bolling," was the immediate response ; "and I have to thank you, as I do most heartily, for my rescue from otherwise inevitable death."

"You may well say that," replied the delighted major ; "for if we hadn't been in the brush, and popped them jist when we did, your body would have been buzzard-meat in less than half a minute. But how did you happen here ? I thought you wur at Sol Tuttles."

"I returned yesterday."

"Eh ! jist so ; followed back that gal ! I heerd you wur arter her, and I said then, that Carlyle would be arter you."

The chief lyncher then turned to his company with the ferocious order : "Boys, them fellers thar on the ground keep an awful groanin' ; put them out of their pain, by a ball in each of their heads." The mandate was instantly obeyed. A dozen pistols exploded, and the wounded men never moaned again.

"Were you hurt in the affair, Mr. Bolling ?" interrogated the Major kindly.

"Very little," was the reply, "I received a scratch in the

side, and my ankle is somewhat bruised, but not so as to lame me."

"Is the colonel at the house ?" asked Morrow eagerly.

"He was when I left."

"Then let us march on, and capture him. What do you say to it, boys ?"

"It would be madness to attempt it with our present force," answered Parson Johnson, "the rogues are doubtless all there now, numbering at least a hundred, and the dwelling is itself a block house, while we have no more than twenty-five men. Most of the party concurred in this rational view of the subject, and it was resolved to leave five trusty members of the company as spies around the plantation, while the rest returned to their head-quarters at the major's, and debated ulterior measures in a full meeting. Accordingly the youth was mounted on another horse, the property of one who remained with the secret guard, and the main body proceeded as fast as they could to their destination.

It would be utterly impossible to describe the emotions of William Bolling during the silence of that rapid midnight march. All in a moment, by an event unexpected as the coming of a comet, and awful as the world rocking crash of an earthquake, he had been snatched, as it were, from the very arms of his beautiful bride, the night before their intended union. From the ethereal heights, the golden portals of his promised paradise, on the verge of the blissful bowers, within view of the elysian fields, he had been suddenly hurled down into the depths of unutterable darkness, while the bottomless gulf of despair, rayless, endless,

everlasting, seemed to open like the fiery fissure of a volcano, between his bosom and that of his beloved, the forlorn, the lost, the miserable, yet pure and sinless Mary.

He pictured her to his breaking heart, as struggling in the hateful embraces of the brutal bandit, or weeping at the feet of her obdurate, unrelenting father, or wringing her hands in the terrible anguish of love and terror, at the imaginary idea of his own bloody doom, until he groaned with unendurable agony. Then his feverish fancy would represent her, as being led a pale and trembling sacrifice to the altar, where she had hoped to stand, blushing and bright with joy on the morrow by his side, but in his stead to be urged and overpowered to bestow all the virgin sweetness of her celestial star-like beauty, upon the diabolical lust of an outlaw and felon.

Under any circumstances, and always, the imagination forms the fiery climax of accursed torture, to conceive the woman that we love as life itself, in the actual, tangible possession of another, yes, even when we are conscious that his caresses cause no pain, or perchance may be returned with equal fervor. But when we know that every kiss impressed upon her shuddering lips, embodies the piercing pangs of a crucifixion, and that the touch of his very finger, however light, on her trembling flesh, will sear it like a branding iron, that his breath on her cheek is hateful as the hot blast from a furnace, and that his whispers in her horrified ears, sting her brain as scorpions—then, oh ! then, we feel the poverty of human language to express our nameless emotion, this raving and madness of the mind, this frenzy of fire in the heart, this bewildering hell of all the passions.

But occasionally the young lover indulged in more practical but not, on that account, less gloomy reflections. He could no longer doubt that Colonel Miles was a member of the black band, and as hardened a villain as the worst among them, but although the fact could not change his own infinite tenderness for the robber's daughter, and would not shake his purpose to receive her as a bride, still he could not but feel that his parent would view the matter in a very different light, and would never forgive the disgrace of such a marriage. His attachment to all his relations and friends, was deep, devoted, and ardent, as might well be inferred from his profoundly earnest character ; and hence, he could not look forward without extreme agitation and grief to the inevitable estrangement of his family, and all the consequences of a breach that never could be healed. And if he turned for relief from this harrowing thought, it was only to plunge again into the sunless depths of that seemingly eternal gulf of separation, which now yawned like a grave, between his hopes and that dear one, the dark-eyed and dark-haired, the divine angel of his dreams, all-beautiful as all-beloved, without the radiance of whose celestial smiles the earth would be but a perpetual prison-house, and all the bright stars mere flakes of infernal fire, bubbles on the dark sea of measureless night, which despair had hung as in immortal mockery in the firmament of heaven, now heaven no more forever.

In the meantime, a scene of still wilder and more violent, if not deeper sorrow, was enacted at the residence of Colonel Miles. The foiled and defeated bandits flew back to that strong position, expecting the lynchers would pursue and attack them.

But as hours passed by, without any signs of such an assault, the probability diminished, and they abandoned the conclusion. However, they determined to remain in the block-house during the rest of the night, and stationed their sentinels, and took all other necessary precautions to prevent surprise.

The rage of Captain Carlyle at the result surpassed all bounds. Pale as the snowy linen of his own shirt-bosom, he rushed into the parlor, and searched the four corners with a glance like lightning, for the figure that was not there.

"Have you killed him?" inquired Colonel Miles, in a hoarse whisper, as he crept softly as a cat to the assassin's side.

"Where is Mary?" exclaimed Carlyle in a voice of thunder, not deigning any answer to the other's question. In the terrible concentration of his mind, perhaps, he did not even hear it.

"In her room," responded the father.

"Go, and bring her."

"Oh, captain, she is unwell—she is in convulsions!" faltered the colonel, awed into an ague himself, by Carlyle's look and manner.

"Do you hear me?" shouted the arch-robber, in still more furious tones; "I say, go and bring her dead or alive; or I will go and bring her myself!" and he made three steps towards the door.

"Stay!" cried the frightened father; "I am going; she shall come immediately;" and he ran to his daughter's apartment.

A vision met his eyes such as might have exorcised the foul fiend from his heart, had it not been bound by fetters of steel

from the infernal forge. Mary had recovered from the effects of mere physical agitation. All the agony was henceforth in the mind. For this is the deepest, the most insoluble mystery of grief in this wide world of woe, the chief problem of mysteries where all is mysterious, that the greatest sorrow manifests itself by few outward signs. The brook bubbles and brawls; the dark river, that drains the valleys and mountains of a continent, rolls its deep-volumed waters to the sea in the sublime might of sullen silence. Petty vexation raves and rends its loose ringlets; infinite despair is awfully calm, still as Eternity!

Mary was bowed on her knees, with clasped hands, pallid face, earnest eyes, and white, unwavering prayer-murmuring lips, raised with a mournful, appealing look towards heaven. She seemed some divine *Madonna* incarnated, an embodied dream of unutterable sadness, the idealized image of a soul all sorrow, but no sin!

"Mary!" said the awed father in a low voice. "Mary!" he repeated louder. The young girl arose and approaching him slowly, with her earnest, melancholy eyes fixed on his face, asked in a faint whisper, "Where is my William?"

"I know not," gasped the colonel; "but you are wanted in the parlor."

"I will go," she answered eagerly, and hurried down the stairs. Her father was astonished at this striking change in her demeanor, and especially at her ready acquiescence in the proposed interview with the bandit, when he had anticipated such a stormy scene, and even the necessity of employing force.

As soon as she entered the room her dark eyes flashed lighting, and she demanded sternly ; " Robber, assassin, where is my William, my idol, the husband of my heart ?"

" Dead, and in hell !" roared the villain, gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth, in a convulsion of rage ; " I shot him with my own hand ; his flesh will feed the wolves to-night, and the ravens to-morrow ! but you may have his white bones for toys, if you like. It will be all that you evermore shall see of your dainty lover !"

Her beautiful face recovered its glow, and beamed with its old starlight smile, as she answered in joyous accents ; " It is false, as your own black heart ! If he were, indeed, dead, you would laugh and sing, instead of storming like a madman. He is alive ! I may thank your countenance for telling the truth, notwithstanding the lie on your foul-foamed lips ! And you fled from his honorable arm, like a coward, as you are !"

" Speak another word, and I will murder you !" exclaimed the raving wretch, grasping the hilt of his bowie-knife.

" That would be in perfect keeping with your character," remarked Mary, scornfully.

The captain made a powerful effort, and mastered his passion. He spoke in sneering tones, and with a cruel smile ; " Well, it matters not, Mary ; for you must wed me to-night."

" Never, never !" cried the young girl ; " I would rather die by my own act !" and she thrust her hand into her bosom, and something gleamed between her fingers like polished silver.

" Shall it not be as I say, colonel ?" interrogated Carlyle, with a threatening frown.

" Yes," answered the faltering father, quivering as a storm-swept leaf.

" Men, do you hear this ?" exclaimed Mary, turning to the crowd of robbers at the door, with the grand air of a queen ; " did you imagine that any soul in the human form could be so mean, as to marry a woman, who loathes him as a black spider, who would commit a thousand suicides rather than touch his blood-polluted bosom. Remember your own mothers and sweet sisters in other lands, and rebuke this brute, as he deserves !"

" It is a burning shame !" cried fifty voices, while an angry murmur told of still deeper indignation.

Suddenly, a horseman galloped into the yard, crying, " Hasten, captain, a hundred men have surrounded your house, a dozen of ours are endeavoring to defend it. Be quick, before the lynch-ers burn it to the ground !"

Not an instant was to be lost, and the robbers hurried away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE AT THE BLOCK HOUSE—JUDGE MOORE.

THE key of explanation to the events which I have just related, as well as to those about to be described, may be furnished in a few words. The secret committee of the lynchers, aware that they could no longer conceal their purposes, determined to take their enemies by surprise, before any adequate preparations had been arranged for resistance, and with this view they dispatched strong parties to arrest all suspected persons on the same night, hoping thus to prevent an organization of the robbers, and to strike the friends of law and order with such dismay and consternation as would effectually deter them from opposing the movements of the mob. We have witnessed the unsuccessful result of their attempt to capture Colonel Miles, an achievement which they had expected to accomplish with little difficulty. Their greatest apprehension concerned Captain Carlyle, and accordingly they had sent against his block-house, a select force of more than a hundred men, commanded by Pete Whetstone, one of the most terrible desperadoes, belonging to their company.

As it happened, however, fortunately for the robbers, a small troop of some twenty bandits, from their camp at Soda Lake,

THE BATTLE AT THE BLOCK HOUSE—JUDGE MOORE. 169

arrived at the stronghold a few minutes before the appearance of the lynchers, and the alarm being given by the sentinels, who had been stationed around the farm, the out laws flew to the port-holes, and made a desperate defence. In this they were aided by the beautiful Lucy, whose coolness, courage, and astonishing presence of mind, excited the wonder and admiration of the bravest among the band. With glowing cheeks and flashing eyes, and seemingly reckless of her own safety, she rushed to every point where the rifles roared loudest, and the danger menaced most, inspiring the defenders with her enthusiastic ardor, and even discharging the weapons of death with her delicate, yet daring hands. In short, she resembled an infernal fury more than a woman, and the ruffians awed by her unparalleled and almost preternatural energy, suffered her to assume the leadership, and obeyed every mandate of her stern unwavering voice, without a murmur.

Four times had they already repelled the fierce assaults of their foes, when the thundering tones of Pete Whetstone rung in the night-air, "Be quick, boys, set fire to the nigger cabins, we'll burn them out, like possums in a holler tree!"

In a few minutes the effect of this ruthless order became apparent. Half a hundred huts, combustible as tinder, at the distance of twenty paces from the house, were all at once kindled, and shot up as many tall pyramids of crimson flame, which soon mingled into a hot roaring hurricane, shedding over the scene a horrible illumination, and revealing the fierce visages of the combatants in the awful strife, like raging devils in the red light of purgatory.

The wind, however, suddenly sprung up, and carried the billows of the blazing sea in a different direction from the dwelling. Only once the roof ignited, and the lynchers uttered a deafening shout of ferocious triumph, considering the issue of the battle as inevitably decided. "Fly up the stairs, open the trap-door, and quench the boards which have caught fire, with a wet blanket," exclaimed Lucy

"No man can show his head there, without a rifle ball through his brains!" was the unanimous reply.

"Then, a woman will dare do it," cried the undaunted heroine, and rushing out upon the roof, she instantly extinguished the flame.

"Shoot her down!" shouted Pete Whetstone, and a volley of bullets whistled about her ears, but not a single shot touched her, for, doubtless, those wild backwoodsmen were moved by her bravery and beauty, as well as by the novelty of the spectacle, to spare their fair enemy, and therefore aimed their guns so as to miss so lovely a mark.

Nevertheless, if such was the fact, Lucy did not seem to appreciate the generosity of their forbearance, for with a disdainful smile, she snatched a small deringer from her bosom, and returning the fire, brought one of the lynchers to the ground, and immediately disappeared within the block-house. The company raised a maddened yell, and the savage voice of the desperate leader fulminated, "Charge again, boys! break into the door, at all hazards, and the coward who retreats this time, I will pistol with my own hands!"

The party rushed forward in a body, and attacked the solid

shutters with axes and sledge hammers. Several of them fell, but others took their place, while the port-holes blazed incessantly with adverse rifles, muzzle to muzzle, and shouts, shrieks, moans, and mingled curses rent the air.

At last the door began to give way, before the hail of heavy blows. The wood opened in deep fissures, the iron bands bent, and all the hinges started. The doom of the little garrison could be delayed no longer, and even the heroic Lucy called out for a parley.

"Pound away, men, we'll be at them in a moment. Show the robbers no quarter! they have killed half a dozen of our boys!" exclaimed Pete Whetstone, in merciless accents.

"And let me shoot the she-wolf, who has slain my poor brother!" cried a more youthful voice.

But at the instant, when all hope seemed to abandon the side of the defence, the bugle-blast of Comanche Ben sounded within a hundred yards, and Captain Carlyle, with his whole troop, charged through the ranks of the astonished and panic-stricken lynchers. This unexpected and most timely relief, determined the fortune of the fight. For notwithstanding all the efforts of their commander, the regulators broke and fled in the utmost confusion, leaving half a score of their company dead, or wounded, in the yard.

The slender garrison issued from the door, crying, "Welcome, noble captain, we owe our safety to the courage of this brave woman!" and they pointed with gestures of boundless admiration to the slight form of Lucy, who leaped into the arms of her former lover, with a shout of simulated joy and tenderness, her black

eyes gleaming with a strange unearthly lustre, and her fine features begrimed with the smoke of gunpowder.

The pair hastened into the library, where the heroine enumerated all the details of the affair. Even Carlyle betrayed, by his countenance, some tokens of his old affection, as he said to himself, "I can never more doubt her fidelity to my interests, and may securely trust her with the secrets of my soul."

"Did you succeed in ridding yourself of that rival for the hand of Mary?" inquired the artful woman, in the most loving accents.

"No, unfortunately the bird got frightened somehow, and managed to escape," replied the other, in tones of irritation.

"I have thought of a plan by which you might, perhaps, win the proud beauty sooner than by any other means," suggested Lucy, embracing him with apparently unusual fondness.

"What is it?" he inquired, with eagerness and amazement.

"Let me be introduced to her as your sister, and if I cannot effect anything by argument or persuasion, I can, at least, act as a spy upon her actions."

A shadow of suspicion flitted across the brow of the bandit, but Lucy's dark eyes seemed so free from guile, and full of infinite tenderness, that the doubt vanished almost as quickly as it came, and he murmured, "that is a most excellent idea, my dear; I will put it into execution in the morning, and remember you for your trusting confidence, as long as I have life."

"And not even forget it in death!" she said in her heart; but her syren lips whispered in his ear, "I am so anxious to

realize our fortune, and leave this odious country, that I could even endure banishment from your bosom, in order to attain this most cherished hope of my soul, since an age of enjoyment would afterwards compensate me for a few years of self-denial."

"Oh! Lucy, what a treasure I have found in you!" exclaimed the deluded man, as he pressed her to his heart.

"You will learn more of my true character, the longer you know me," she answered, returning his caresses.

Let us turn from this scene of hypocrisy, where these criminal souls, like two cunning spiders, were essaying to weave around each other their artful toils, to note the progress of a third party of regulators, who had been deputed to arrest one of their most abhorred enemies.

It was the hour of midnight, but the mansion of Judge Moore, chief justice of the county court, was still illuminated, and all the inmates, with many relatives and friends, remained awake in the parlor. The band of a dozen lynchers approached the door and windows, with stealthy steps, as the wolf glides to the sheepfold, and gazed into the hall. One might have imagined that the vision which met their eyes, would have changed their pitiless purpose, even if their hearts had been hard as fragments of the mountain granite. For although the apartment revealed at least fifty forms, old and young, of both sexes, no music or merry dancing, no jest or jovial conversation, no witty remark, or light ringing laugh might be heard. Even the occasional whispers, uttered, at distant intervals, were hushed, and inaudible at three inches from the sad listener's ear. Now and then, only, a low heart-breaking sob disturbed the awful, grave-like silence, the

oppressive and mournful calmness of the place. Hold yom breath ; tread softly ; for this is the dreary chamber where pale death reigns without a rival !

Lo ! an elderly lady, in sable robes, sits near the head of the corpse, with her wrinkled visage bowed upon her withered hands, and her wan lips trembling with speechless prayer. That is the grandmother, who mourns in vain for her murdered idol, and refuses even the consolations of the divine faith, which never before has failed her in the life-battle of fifty long years !

But where is the nearer and dearer bosom, which once bore this beautiful boy, now beautiful no more, but a cold, clammy, horrible thing, feared by the living, who loved him most—an object so utterly loathsome, than even the entreaties of his weeping twin-sister can no longer prevent the irrevocable doom, and to-morrow he must be hidden away out of human sight, in the eternal gloom of the hideous, hollow earth ? Say, where is she, who watched his infancy, and smiled with glowing fondness and pride upon his youth, she to whose eyes his own smile seemed brighter than the lustre of any star in the firmament ? Can the mother abandon her child, although it has become but a mass of disgusting clay ? Alas ! hear ye not the faint moans in the adjacent room, from that bed of torture, whither they carried her after the fearful swoon, when the bloody body was brought home, and from which it is doubtful whether she will ever rise again ?

A man of middle size, with a large bald head, high full forehead, and penetrating eyes of the purest azure, with a countenance still stern in all its solemn sadness, paces back and for-

ward, the length of the room, with his thin lips compressed, and all his features rigid as a man of marble, and entirely without gestures, save when he lifts his right hand to his brow with a convulsive grasp, as if to repress some burning pang in the brain. That is the father, the great land-speculator, the proud, wealthy, and ambitious Judge Moore, and of all the suffering souls in that habitation of sorrow, perhaps he suffers most. In stubborn, haughty natures, the agony within, is all the more terrible, because through the iron crust of habit, it can find no outlet for the discharge of its immense emotions. It is like the central fires of the earth, when all their old volcanic craters have been stopped up, when the burning billows roll beneath the deep foundations of the Alps and Andes, and the rock-ribbed world trembles, as if in the throes of final dissolution. When tears flow, they are a sweet medicine to the "mind diseased." As the melting of snows in the mild months of spring, they bear away the icy burden from the heart, and the flowers of our life renew their perfume and verdure, while heavenly hope, like a singing bird, comes back again, with its old forgotten music. But all the moisture of the eye, too stern to weep, changes to eternal frost, and lies upon the overlaid brain and bosom, like sunless snow drifts at the frozen pole ! Thus felt that worldly father, and he would have willingly bartered half his enormous fortune, the fruits of long laborious seasons, and of subtle scheming, for the luxury of delicious tears.

A more youthful form stood near the chimney, with his left elbow resting on the mantel, and his right hand thrust into his bosom, as if clutching the hilt of a dagger, while his piercing

blue eyes never ceased to stare, with a terrible look, upon the livid features of the dead. The young man was about twenty-five years of age, with a fierce, yet handsome face, a low massive forehead, and a figure of the ordinary height, but large limbed and muscular, denoting vast power and activity. His florid complexion showed signs of early dissipation, and his common plebeian countenance evinced the predominance of animal passion over the nobler faculties of the intellect. This was the elder son, Alfred Moore, who had just arrived from San Antonio, after a year's absence. He had listened to the horrible details in gloomy silence, and had not even so much as spoken since he had entered the house, while his gaze remained fixed upon the corpse, as if he were endeavoring to read in the pale lines of that appalling visage, the awful secrets of life and death.

Suddenly the door of an adjoining room opens, and a young girl glides in, and kneeling down beside the dead, cries in heart-rending tones; "Oh, my brother! Oh, my poor murdered brother! would to God that I could sleep in the same cold grave, as I once slept in the same warm cradle, with thee, my playmate, my idol, my dearest Albert!" She bathes the face of the corpse with tears, she smoothes its golden hair with her hands, she seeks to renew the warmth of those icy lips with countless kisses! She folds her arms around that sheeted bosom which shall beat with a love-throbbing heart never more till the final fire. She murmurs words of fond endearment in those deaf and stony ears, which even thunder shall never startle again, until the world-waking reverberations of the archangel's trump shall split the crystalline vault of heaven, and shake the highest stars



Suddenly the door of an adjoining room opens, and a young girl glides in, and kneeling down beside the dead, cries in heart-rending tones! "Oh, my brother! Oh, my poor murdered brother! would to God that I could sleep in the same cold grave, as I once slept in the same warm cradle, with thee, my playmate, my idol, my dearest Albert!"—PAGE 176.

from their orbits ! Her grief affected the most frigid among the spectators, and tears fell upon the floor like rain. The father, however, did not weep, but groaned aloud, and struck his lofty forehead with both his hands. The eldest son at the fireplace frowned till his eyebrows met, and half unsheathing his bowie-knife muttered some inaudible vow of vengeance.

To the veriest stranger, the relationship of the young girl to the deceased must have been apparent. She was, indeed, his twin-sister, the most famous belle of the republic, the rumor of whose charms had been circulated by travellers to the remotest confines of Texas. Her full yet graceful figure, and fair regular, rosy, features, had their rivals, it is true. The golden ringlets of her sunny hair might, perhaps, be equalled. A hundred voices might be found with liquid cadences as bewitching as hers. There were other lips as rich in lustre, and other limbs as round and tapering. But you might wander over the world in vain without meeting such a pair of eyes, so large, so luminous, so celestially blue, as if formed out of a fresh piece of heaven's own summer azure, and filled with starlight from the evening sky. You might watch her in sleep without the danger of emotion. The view of her profile would, perhaps, leave your heart unscathed, but the instant that she turned upon you those beaming cerulean orbs, with that matchless, soul-melting smile, your heart like a trembling eastern slave, in spite of the reason, would bow down and adore at the feet of the queen of beauty, the starry-eyed goddess of irresistible love. Such was the paragon of Texas, Jenny Moore. But the living lustre of that faultless face was now dimmed with tears, and pale with sorrow.

ful vigils ; and during two terrible nights of bereavement and woe, those two eyes had seen nothing save the ghastly visage of the dead ; and still she wept and implored that they would not bury him away from her sight and tender caresses.

All at once, a loud knocking was heard at the door. One of the guests opened the shutter, and a dozen armed men rushed into the room, headed by the huge form of Bill Minton, brother to the murderer of that darling son, the corpse over which the family and their friends were now mourning. Every person present arose, except the twin-sister, who was so absorbed in her grief, that she did not seem to notice the ominous intrusion.

The leader of the lynchers first broke the awful silence, with a thundering, harsh voice, as brutal as his phraseology :

"Old land-pirate, you are wanted !"

Judge Moore gazed at the speaker sternly, and then pointed his long unwavering fore-finger, without uttering a word, at the corpse of his son ! His haughty, yet unutterably sad countenance looked sublime. The unmoving mute finger appeared to say, "There is my answer ! Assassins, behold your work !" But all the while, the eldest son stood with his left elbow on the mantel-piece, and his right hand played with the hilt of his dagger.

"Do you not hear us, old cuss ?" vociferated Bill Minton ; "I say, you're wanted !"

"By whom ?" asked the judge in calm, severe accents.

"By the committee of regulators."

"Where is your process ?"

Minton touched his double-barrelled shot-gun, with a savage smile.

"But, suppose, that I do not see proper to obey such an unusual summons, what then ?" inquired the judge.

"Why, we'll jist hang you up thar to the jiste of your own house !" answered Minton with a burst of diabolical laughter.

The menace, with that ferocious accompaniment of fiendish mirth, effectually aroused the young girl, and casting herself at the feet of the ruffians, she entreated, "Oh ! for the love of Heaven, do not murder my dear father ! You have killed my poor brother. Will not one victim suffice ? For God's sake, leave us to bury our dear dead !" The elder son removed his left elbow from its position on the mantel, but his right hand played more busily with the hilt of his knife, and he eyed the lynchers with sidelong glances.

"Git out, gal !" exclaimed Bill, in impatient accents ; "if yer daddy don't go with us, we'll hang him, that's all ! Them ar' our orders, and by thunder, it shall be done !"

"Very well," said the judge, "in order to spare the feelings of my family, and to prevent you from disgracing yourselves more than devils, not from any personal fear, I will attend you ! Let us be off at once."

"Oh, do not go, dearest father. They will butcher you as they did my poor brother Albert !" and the daughter clung to his knees with the strength of desperation.

"Git out, gal !" shouted Bill Minton again, still more furiously, and he gave her a push with his foot, that sent her rolling over on the floor.

"Ha !" ejaculated the elder son, and making a spring, like a tiger, he plunged the dagger up to the hilt in the lyncher's side,

and bounding through the door, effected his escape, amidst a hail of hissing buckshot.

Minton staggered an instant, took two steps forward, and fell dead across the corpse, staining the snowy winding-sheet, and even the wan visage of the dead, with the crimson flow from his heart. What a terrible retribution! And it is always thus in purple lands, where law protects not life. Homicide never escapes long unpunished. Sooner or later, some friend of the slain avenges his ashes, and then another relative of the last one fallen, takes up the gory knife to perish in his turn, and so the horrid legacy of mutual murder is bequeathed from father to son, upon two families, for unborn, and sometimes distant, generations!

CHAPTER XV.

SOL TUTTLE AND BROTHER DAVE—THE BROTHERS BARTON AND THE SISTERS EWING.

On the same night previously mentioned, when so many similar scenes of violence were occurring in different sections of the country, at an early hour, the fire-side of Sol Tuttle presented an appearance unusually cheerful and interesting. The cause of this additional happiness, in a family always satisfied with their humble fortune, might be perceived at a glance, in the presence of a guest, bearing many traits of resemblance to the head of the house, but modelled, as it were, after a still coarser and more Titanic pattern. He was indeed a vast frame of bones, without an ounce of supernumerary flesh, with a small bullet-shaped head, supported by a very short neck, showing enormous volumes of muscular fibres, indicating at once great strength and equal animal passions. His locks had the same dark hue as the hunter's, but seemed rolled in endless tangles, and rough as the mane of a mustang. His low, broad forehead was knotted and gnarled about the brows, like the roots of a forest oak. His diminutive eyes of a dark-drawn tint, glittering and restless, looked keen as

daggers, but wanted that twinkle of merry good humor, which constituted the principal charm of the other's countenance. These features, with a nose extremely long and slightly aquiline, and a mighty massive chin, combined to give him the aspect of a great grim savage, at once, powerful, passionate, revengeful, immutable in his attachments, as well as his antipathies.

This was an elder brother of Sol, the celebrated Dave Tuttle, known by the super-added epithet of "dare devil," all over Missouri and Arkansas, and to every hunter and trapper in the Rocky Mountains. He had just arrived that evening from the Rio Grande, where he had been, for more than eighteen months, entrusted with some secret mission under the order of General Houston. He did not appear to share the hilarious emotions, which his advent had produced among his friends, but sat in the chimney-corner, with the grave, gloomy countenance of an Indian, busily engaged in whittling a pine stick, with the blade of an immense bowie-knife, nearly two feet in length.

"How do you like the yaller-faced Mexicans?" inquired Sol, essaying, by some means, to stir up conversation.

"Wuss nor pisen," answered Dave, with a frown.

"'Aint the gals purty?"

"Uglier nor pole-cats."

"It seems, then, you don't fancy 'em, so much as the Black-feet," suggested Sol, with a sly wink at Susy

"No, becaze the mountain Indians ar' brave as thur own grizzly bars, and thur squaws have some vartue."

"I 'spose you tried 'em well on both pints," said Sol, laughing.

"I had my own wife, Big Thunder's darter," answered Dave, seriously; "and I stuck to her like the bark to a pine-tree."

The discourse flagged for a few minutes, when Dave suddenly aroused himself, and asked with a look of terrible animation; "Sol, is old Morrow alive yit?"

"Yes," replied the other, dropping his glance to the floor, and fidgeting uneasily upon his stool.

"Sol, ar' you a coward?" interrogated the elder brother, in bitter, sneering accents.

"No," answered the hunter, with a blush of shame and indignation; "I'm as brave as you any day, and you know it; but, somehow, I don't want the smell of a human critter's blood on my hands. I'm afeerd of the judgment hereafter, and I think, as how, I would be haunted by the dead man's sperit."

"Sol, you're a fool," retorted Dave, contemptuously; "I've shot lots of Indians, and white villains too, and I never seed any ghost yit. I 'spect when folks ar' once ferried over the black water, they don't cross back agin in a hurry, 'specially if thur landin' is in the hot country."

"Yes, but I believe we all had the same Maker," urged the other; "and the Bible says, as how, He ain't pleased, when we poor feller-critters cut each other's throats."

"One mout as well be hung fur stealin' a sheep as a lamb," retorted Dave, and immediately added with an awful oath; "I'd have the old sinner's life, if I had to burn in brimstone fur ever! Didn't he kill our poor brother Mose, like a hog, givin' him no sort of show, any more nor a snake? Didn't he have a hundred fellers to help him? Did the infarnal Injin say, fair fight, so

much as once? I'll send him a challenge to-morrow, if I knowed, that I should be in hell before night!"

"You hain't heern, as how, he's at the head of a new lynchin' company, bigger nor the last one in Missouri," said the hunter, in agitated tones.

"I don't care a cuss fur that," exclaimed Dave furiously; "I'll hev' his scalp, at long taw, if I can't find any other way. I'm sartan, if me or you had been killed instead of Mose, the brave feller never would have slept, until he got blood fur blood!"

"And I'm sure if anybody wur' to shoot daddy or you, uncle Dave, I'd pop 'em over, like squirrels," interposed the boy.

"That's the right talk for the old Pocahontas breed," cried Dave, slapping Jack Randolph on the shoulder, with an air of proud delight.

Suddenly, the great black dog, which had been stretched at his hairy length before the fire, bounded up, and barking wrathfully, rushed into the yard. "Hush up, Nig," exclaimed Sol, stepping to the door, when he perceived half-a-dozen strange horsemen approaching. They halted at the distance of a few paces, and one of them spoke in a pleasant voice; "We wish to trespass on your hospitality, to-night, if you would be so obliging as to accommodate us."

"Sartanly, gentlemen, I'm not a savage to turn away any traveller from my shed, if he can put up with the fare of a hunter. Git off, and let's hopple out yer hosses."

"No, we'll tie them up, thank you," remarked the first speaker, and this being done, the whole party entered the house

and seated themselves on different stools. They were truly a wild, rough-looking set, dressed in soiled time-worn buckskin, with unshaven visages, and fierce, ferocious eyes, and all, without exception, presented forms of great power, as if they had been selected for some dangerous service, requiring the utmost strength and daring. The man, who appeared to be the leader, showed enormous masses of muscles, swelling out in volumes near the joints, while the expression of his large coarse features, and cruel grey eyes, betokened a disposition to rely more on the principle of his own undoubted might, than upon questionable rules of abstract right.

"If I mout be so bold, stranger," said Sol, in friendly tones; "I'd like to ax, whur' ar' you travellin' to?"

"The Tripity, on a buffalo hunt."

"What mout be your name?"

"Mose Miller," answered the giant.

"Whur ar' you frum jist now?"

"Louisiana."

"I have half a mind to saddle up in the mornin', and go with you," remarked Sol, musing.

"We shall be most proud of yer company," affirmed Mose Miller, with a singular smile, while the other ruffians uttered a low titter.

"I'll do it," declared the hunter; "thar's no sort of fun like a chase arter buffalo."

"The more the merrier," observed Miller; "we have fifty in our party already."

"Whur ar' the balance of yer boys?"

"They'll be along presently ; there, I hear them coming now," said Mose, with a sinister look, as the sound of hoofs, like the gallop of a large troop came thundering over the prairie, and in a moment, the horsemen paused at the door.

Sol advanced a step, when Mose Miller and two others of the gang suddenly threw themselves upon him, while the rest assaulted the elder brother in the same unexpected manner. A horrible combat ensued. It lasted, however, but a few seconds ; for twenty more of the regulators rushed through the door, and after a brief but bloody struggle, overpowered their victims, and bound them securely with strong cords.

Just as the *mêlée* ended, Mose Miller exclaimed, in a voice of astonishment and horror, "My God ! look there, boys, the dog is killing Jake Johnson !" All eyes turned towards the corner, and never did a more hideous vision greet the human gaze. While the general, boisterous combat had been proceeding, a silent, but still more deadly strife had been going on unobserved. For at the instant, when the struggle commenced, Nigger had sprung and seized the throat of the assailant nearest to him, dragged the young man to the floor, as easily as if he had been a cat, and shook and throttled him with those awful, sharp teeth, until his blood-shot eyes protruded from their sockets, then grew vacant and glassy, and finally became fixed in that fearful stony stare, which never might beam again with one ray from the sweet light of life ! The favorite son of parson Johnson was no more !

"Shoot the dog !" shouted the leader of the lynchers, and a score of guns emptied their contents into the mass of hair and bloody foam. The limbs of the animal quivered in the last con-

vulsion, which agonizes alike the man and brute. He fell upon the corpse of the human dead, that he had just slain ; but those massive iron jaws still retained their hold on the suffocated throat of his antagonist, and had to be broken open with a chisel !

All at once, as this revolting tragedy closed, the bloody curtain of death rose upon another equally terrible. Among the captors of the two brothers, was Morton Morrow, the major's second son. Actuated by a spirit of barbarous revenge, this savage dealt Sol Tuttle a stunning blow in the face, after his hands had been tied, exclaiming as he did so ; "Thar now, that's the fust payment fur yer puttin' father's shoulder out of jinte, and the last will be to-morrow, when we unjinte yer neck !"

Scarcely had the word left his lips, when the loud report of a pistol sounded in the room, and the speaker dropped upon the floor like a lump of lead. The bullet had pierced the centre of his forehead !

The lynchers uttered a simultaneous cry of infernal fury, not unmixed with emotions of fear, and the deafening shout, "Who did it ? who did it ?" rent the air.

"This little boy," answered a voice near the fire-place, and the amazed spectators beheld the slight form of Jack Randolph, with a deringer in his hand, still smoking at the muzzle, while his dark eyes blazed with lurid light, and his features glowed with burning passion, like those of some mighty hero, facing the fire of a bastion about to be stormed, in the crisis of victorious battle.

"Kill the young rattle-snake ! Down with the devil's

imp!" cried a majority of the throng, and several guns were presented to execute the menace, when the boy's mother, who had previously remained motionless near the chimney, as if utterly paralyzed with fright, suddenly threw herself between her son and his intended assassins, covering him with her own body, and begging piteously for his life; "Oh! men, have mercy! do not murder my child, my first born, my darling! Mercy! mercy! I pray, for the love of yer mothers!"

"Boys, don't shoot him," commanded the leader; "it's agin our orders; becaze the major says, as how, it will disgrace our company, to kill anybody 'cept by hangin'! So fasten his fists together, and we'll carry him along with us."

"Oh, I'm so glad of it!" cried Jack; "I'll now be with my dear daddy!"

The party immediately prepared for their march to the headquarters of the committee, leaving a small force to procure a wagon and follow with their dead. At the moment of their departure, Susy Tuttle approached the commander of the troop, and faltered; "For God's sake, let my poor husband and boy bid us all farewell! it may be a great while before we see each other agin!"

"Well, I don't care," answered Miller, in a mild voice, touched in spite of his habitual brutality, by the artless, unutterable grief of that weeping woman. She hastily mustered the blue-eyed little girls, and the father and brother kissed them all tenderly with many a lingering "good-by," sad and solemn, it is true, yet still firm and dignified, for they both feared to betray any tokens of weakness in the presence of their unrelenting foes.

But when the mother ran to the cradle, and producing the idol of the household, the flower and the pride of the family, their beautiful bright-eyed babe, and held up its angel face and smiling velvet lips for a last caress of love, Sol, unable to play the stoic any longer, fairly broke down. His stern mouth quivered nervously, his breath came in heart-breaking sobs, and nature gaining, more and more, the mastery over the man, all the fond father's soul rushed into his eyes, and found vent in a great flood of tears.

"Come, let's be off," ordered the leader of the lynchers, and the prisoners were hurried out of the door, and mounted on different horses, led by members of the gang, while two others rode by each captive holding the loose ends of the rope, by which their hands had been fastened, and the whole troop surrounded them, to preclude every hope of escape.

It was a beautiful, cloudless night, and the old divine starlight smiled over the waving green of the prairie, with a lustre lovely as the dawn of day. The regulators, notwithstanding the late horrible incidents, jested, laughed, and sang wild songs, or tortured the minds of their captives, by drawing hideous word-pictures of the death they must endure on the morrow. The latter made no reply, but maintained unbroken silence.

At length, they reached the forest, just as the first faint streaks of pale morning light began to dapple the great, grey orient. There the road being comparatively narrow, forced the party to lengthen their column, and Dave Tuttle determined to attempt an escape. Suddenly bending far forwards in the saddle, and grasping the horn of the pommel firmly with both his

hands, and at the same instant, kicking his horse violently in the flanks, he uttered a terrible cry. The frightened animal leaping onwards through the air, jerked the ends of the cord out of the fingers of Tuttle's guard, and the prisoner throwing himself upon the earth, fled away into the dark thicket : a volley of buckshot and bullets whistled around him, and many started in pursuit, but after a laborious and protracted search, they were compelled to give it up without success ; and the gang, once more, marched towards Major Morrow's residence, where they arrived early the next day, with Sol and his little son.

Let us now describe another scene, presented on that eventful night. About the hour of one in the morning, four persons were seated in the principal room of a double log cabin, which stood on the left bank of the Tanaha, some ten miles from Shelbyville. The party, just mentioned, consisted of two handsome youths, fashionably dressed, and a couple of young girls, in their Sunday robes, and wearing their best looks and sweetest smiles. A single glance sufficed to show the relation of these individuals. They were evidently lovers, sitting up, for the purpose of tender courtship, according to the delightful custom prevalent in the backwoods. Each fond pair had taken a position in different corners, as far apart as possible and employed their time, conversing in those delicious murmuring whispers, which form the chosen language for the revelation of the divine mysteries of love.

I have already said, that the youths might be pronounced handsome, and I will add that they bore a striking family resemblance to each other. Both had slender forms, fair feat-

ures, with yellow hair, and light blue eyes. They were, in fact, the brothers, John and William Barton, the nephews of Judge Moore, and sons of his favorite sister. The heirs of considerable wealth, their prospects in life seemed brilliant enough, but their appearance did not indicate the right sort of metal for the frontier ; for with much intelligence and more vanity, their visages betokened a want of firmness, and the courage to face unusual perils.

The young girls, also sisters, Eliza and Alice Ewing, belonged obviously to a lower rank in life than their lovers, if one might judge from their home-spun clothing, and that certain nameless deficiency in the countenance, which, even on faces the most faultless, betrays the lack of education. They both, however, possessed striking charms, in their full, round figures, their fair rosy cheeks, in their rich brown hair, and especially in the laughing lustre of their dark blue eyes, that looked brimming over with love and happiness, as if no tears had ever yet stained their sunny azure. But of the two couples, William and Alice seemed more beautiful than John and Eliza, as they were certainly the more youthful. And the graces of all appeared heightened by the fond affection, which beamed on their features, and by the crimson illumination of the pine-fire, resembling in itself a love-blush as it increased or decayed, and at times, nearly died out in the darkness. On such occasions, the young men seized the golden opportunity to snatch a furtive kiss, or to measure the waists of the girls, with their folded arms.

The situation, nevertheless, was by no means, dangerous ; for at such moments, the widow in the adjoining apartment, how-

ever loud she might be snoring, never failed to wake up suddenly, with the prudent order ; " There, Eliza, throw another pine-knot on the fire !"

Such a cruel command had just been given, as the clock struck one. " Your mother sleeps with one eye open," whispered William, and the remark excited Alice to a merry titter, and all four united in the laugh ; when, the minute afterwards, as the fire blazed up, with its broad red light, the nasal organs of the good matron renewed their mellow music, as if she were dreaming at the rate of twenty knots to the hour.

The unfilial merriment soon subsided, and John Barton addressed the couple in the opposite corner ; " Eliza and myself have concluded to be married to-morrow evening, what do you say, William and Alice, cannot you two be ready at the same time ?"

" Certainly," answered the younger brother, with eager joy ; " we had just formed the same praiseworthy resolution."

The widow Ewing ceased to snore, and then started again, at a gentle pace, as it may be supposed, in order not to interrupt the conversation, and still to catch the tenor of its substance, but at the instant, an event happened which prevented all further discourse, and changed the whispers of elysian love into exclamations of grief and terror. A loud knocking, like the blows of some iron instrument, was heard at the door, and all the wooers turned pale and trembled, as if summoned to sudden death.

As no one moved, a rude voice thundered outside, " Open the shutter, or we'll break it down !"

Still the young men were too agitated to obey the order, and

immediately the door flew from its hinges with a loud crash, and half a score of armed ruffians, headed by a desperate bully, one Levi Powers, rushed into the room, while the maidens clung to the bosoms of their lovers, uttering the wildest shrieks, and the youths themselves actually seemed too much panic-stricken even to articulate any species of sound.

" Shet up yer cussed squallin', yer wuss nor wilcats a court-in'," exclaimed the brutal commander ; " we're come arter yer sweethearts, and we must take 'em."

" What do you want with them ?" inquired Eliza, who first recovered the use of her tongue.

" The lynchin' committee have sent us fur 'em, and that's all we know about it," replied Powers, with a black frown.

At the mention of the awful word, " lynching committee," the young men tottered as if in the act of falling ; but the ruffians instantly seized them, tied their hands, and hurried away into the dark night, without heeding the prayers and wailing entreaties of their affianced brides. For no lion of the Lybian desert, no snake of the burning south, no monster on earth, or in hell, was ever half so pitiless, in the fierce frenzy of passion, as the maddened and murder-breathing mob !

CHAPTER XVI.

CARLYLE AND CURRAN.

ON the next morning after the startling events, narrated in the previous chapter, the residence of the chief robber presented the appearance of a strong military position, in the anxious expectation of an immediate assault. Sentinels were stationed around the place in every direction, while powerful guards had been thrown out to defend the approaches, and three hundred men, thoroughly armed, stood prepared for the battle, about the block-house, and at the port-holes.* Indeed, the situation itself, in the sharp angle, formed by the junction of the Tanaha and Sabine, with their crumbling precipitous banks, and deep, muddy currents, was exposed to attack only on a single side, and that being a smooth, level field, any storming party would be subject, without the least shelter, to a murderous hail of bullets and buckshot, the moment when they should come within range of the guns.

Captain Carlyle sat alone in his library, buried in gloomy reflections, and at times, glancing uneasily towards the door, as if anticipating some unusual arrival. Suddenly, the slender form

CARLYLE AND CURRAN.

195

of Lieutenant Curran rushed in, without ceremony; his countenance bearing evident tokens of agitation, with his long golden hair floating dishevelled on his shoulders, and his clothing soiled, torn, and blood-stained, as if he had been recently engaged in mortal conflict.

"Eh! Curran, what has happened?" exclaimed Carlyle, springing to his feet, in alarm and astonishment.

"Nothing of much consequence," answered the other, with the old mischievous twinkle, kindling afresh in his bright blue eyes; "only I have made a narrow escape, and the lynchers have caught our dear brother Jonathan."

The captain turned pale as a dead man, with vexation and rage, and swearing a horrible oath, added, "Now they will get all our secrets, for the cowardly Yankee, in order to save his own worthless life, will be sure to betray us, and varnish his disclosures, besides, with a hundred lies."

"*Multum mentitur, qui multum vidit,*" said Curran with a smile.

"It is terrible!" continued the chief of the bandits, striding up and down the apartment, with a lowering brow; "it is too dreadful to be thus foiled in our plans, when on the golden verge of princely fortunes! to be hurled back from the radiant heights of hope and boundless wealth into the abyss of poverty—aye, to become beggars as well as outlaws; beggars, that is the term!"

"*Tout est pris,*" suggested the lieutenant; "but then we'll have nothing more to fear; for as the great poet sings, *Vacuus cantat coram latrone viator.*"

"Fool!" shouted Carlyle, furiously; "how can you jest, at

such a moment? I tell you, that our very necks will be in jeopardy; for Hutson's inevitable revelations will arouse the whole country against us."

"I think," said Curran in a more serious tone, "that the case is not half so desperate as your imagination would make it. I learned this morning, that General Houston is at Nacogdoches with a large force of rangers, and from the brave hero's well-known hatred of mob-law, he will doubtless march, at the instant when he hears of the insurrection, and suppress the organization of the lynchers forever."

The features of the captain brightened immediately, as he exclaimed in joyfully triumphant accents; "We are saved! I thought it strange, that the devil should desert me in this very crisis of my destiny! in one more month, if we play our cards cunningly, we will be rich as the Rothschilds!" and he seated himself, at his ease, on the sofa.

After deliberating silently, for a few minutes, the arch-robber looked up, and fixing his dark eyes, with a cruelly determined expression on the other's face, he remarked; "Curran, one thing is necessary to insure both our success and safety. That man must die!"

"What man must die?" inquired the lieutenant, in careless tones.

"The man from whom we have most to fear; the craven confidant of all our schemes; the man who holds our very lives in his slippery hand—Jonathan Hutson!"

"I do not perceive any present, or even future prospect of his dying, unless the lynchers should accommodate you by killing him."

"Could not you manage to conceal yourself among the bushes, near their head-quarters, and send a rifle ball through his brain?" asked Carlyle calmly.

"I have never yet committed a cool premeditated murder, and by Heaven, I never will," responded Curran, with a grave resolute countenance.

"You would rather, then, lose the fruits of all our toil and trouble!" exclaimed the more unscrupulous bandit, with a bitter sneer. "You have, all at once, grown distressfully conscientious, when a trivial, but bold crime would place us beyond the reach of peril. You will turn religious next, and be whining with the mourners in some Methodist altar! but an ocean of hypocritical tears could scarcely wash away the blood already on your red right hand!"

The handsome features of the lieutenant became pale as he answered in a serious voice; "You ought to remember, cousin, that your crafty persuasions tempted me to adopt this wicked course of life. I was not originally depraved or dishonest; but a mere romantic dreamer, fond of the marvellous in idea and action, and impatient of the fettering thralldom of custom and habit. From my earliest childhood, your ambitious nature and will of iron exercised a despotic sway over all my own passions and plans. Your influence controlled me, like a species of fascination; a wizard's spell, which I had no power to resist if I would. Your finger was the magnet, and my heart the tremulous needle, that followed its direction, wherever you chose to point your hand.

"Again, and again, did my sainted mother warn me of this

fatal infatuation, and predict its consequences. All her prayers, arguments, and tears, proved unavailing to break the irresistible chain, which bound me as a weak and wavering slave to your all-conquering volitions. I entered into all your aims, hopes, studies, pastimes, and changed even my mother's creed for your scepticism and scoffing. In the depth of my degradation and folly, I did not desire any heaven, unless I could share it with you."

"At first, fortune smiled propitiously on all our prospects, and riches and honorable fame seemed within our mutual grasp; when you madly dashed them all away for the gratification of an animal passion, and ingloriously fled from your country, as a refugee and outlaw. Even then, I did not hesitate to accompany you; and to consummate the climax of sins and absurdities, your infernal logic and rhetoric converted me into a common robber. Only one thing your satanic cunning and my own stupidity could not render me—a cold-blooded merciless murderer!"

"And so, it appears that your enemies are all safe in the enjoyment of the sweet sunlight! the earth has no white bones, no crimson-bosomed bodies, planted beneath its green sward by your hand?" said Carlyle, smiling disdainfully.

The other retorted with a slight shudder; "It is true, cousin, that I have slain my victims, alas! too many; but the deed has always been done, in the burning heat of battle, in the fierce freedom of fair fight, and where the odds were usually against me; when my veins throbbed with the red fluid of lightning, and the foe gave me no time for deliberation, and no shadow of a choice; when necessity compelled me to kill; but never, from prudential

calculations, never when the dire alternative did not force itself upon me."

"This is news to me," remarked Carlyle, in tones of more withering sarcasm; "I had vainly imagined that, of all the black band, you took the most unalloyed delight in the noble profession of robbery!"

"I confess," replied Curran, and the cloud on his variable countenance changed to sudden sunshine; "that this wild life has unspeakable charms for both my senses and imagination. Its hourly perils, its never-ceasing activity, its thrilling adventures, and startling events, present the very pictures of my early day-dreams, and embody the romance of the boy. I utterly abhor its crimes and cruelties; but I love its fetterless freedom, its wanderings among the glorious old woods, its stormy rides and starlight vigils, its visions of the gleaming dawn, and golden sunset, its music of singing bullets and sounding steel, the wild cries of strife, and sonorous shouts of victory. These, and these only enchant me, and keep me in the company."

"I fear, that you will soon have more than enough of such spicy novelties, unless you learn to be guided by reason, rather than fancy," suggested the captain.

"Well, the irrevocable day must come, at last," said the lieutenant, thoughtfully; "for none may enjoy the pleasures of sin, without, sooner or later, suffering its punishment."

"Sin and punishment!" echoed Carlyle, in musing, melancholy accents; "what are these but idle words? terms without meaning, invented by hypocrisy for the profit of the politician and of the priest. Fables to grind the poor into dust, and glorify

the proud. Does not the viewless hand of an unknown and unimaginable Destiny shape all our actions as much as the lineaments of our visages, or the limbs of our living clay? Do not all our thoughts, and the currents of our inmost feelings, ebb and flow, according to the eternal and unalterable laws, governing the association of human ideas, with the same uniform irreversible regularity, which guides the pulsations of the heart, and the circulation of the blood through the veins and arteries, and which presides over the ocean billows from the flaming equinox to the ice of the frozen zones!"

"Can the fire at will change itself to frost, or the drifts of everlasting snow dissolve themselves in genial dew-drops, and descend from their Alpine summits, in the music of silver-singing rain? Can the lordly lion, whose heart is a volcano, transform his burning breath, his proud voice of thunder, and his tameless terrible nature, into the timid bleating, and gentle docility of the lamb in the farm-yard? Can a Christian be brought up under the *régime* of the Crescent, or a turbaned Turk in the nursery of the holy Cross! If man be all too impotent to alter even the hue of his hair or eyes, or the skin-deep dye of his complexion, can such a helpless creature be rationally expected to change the color of his profound, mysterious passions, or the natural tinge of his instinctive disposition? No, there is one great gloomy word, that explains all philosophy, religion, law, ethics, ideas, and actions—every problem of life, and every fact of nature—and that word is Fatality!"

"Your theory of itself is but a film of foolish abstraction," replied the other. "Besides levelling humanity with the atoms

of earth, and animals of the flood and field, it ignores an essential part of his mental and moral constitution, denying the existence of both the will and conscience. If you really believed what you so eloquently preach, you would not need to devise any precautions against impending perils, but let the iron wheels of Destiny roll on, without help or hindrance from your ineffectual fingers. For *cui bono*? What will avail the efforts of an insect's fluttering wing to stir or stay the whirlwind that tosses the world, like a feather, on its ruthless raging gyrations? If you had faith in this fantastic creed, you would never shudder and moan in your sleep, when the grim ghosts of your murdered victims come gliding with pale faces in your dreams!"

"It is all the result of the same endless all-embracing Fatality," urged Carlyle; "that has given us the imagination to manufacture spectres, and people heaven and hell with fancied forms, shadowy beings of the brain, with no more reality than sylphs of the sunbeam, or the obsolete fairies of the summer night's green, bubbles of moonshine, shapes of morning mist, which melt into air at the day-dawn of positive science."

"Your sophistry is powerless to satisfy either the head or heart," answered Curran. "It is utterly incredible that the Author of the universe in a world of such endless, unbroken, sublime harmony, should have interpolated such a startling anomaly, as your cruel hypothesis would make man. For, there is not one instinct, desire, or innate passion, either in the human, or even brute creation, which does not find its fitting sphere of objective enjoyment. Lo! the azure heights of the blue, beamy air, for the cloud-skimming wing of the golden eagle, while the forest

and flood below, teem with food for his ardent hunger, and the sun-bright plumage of his mate soothes his fierce and fiery love. Throughout all the leafy woods, and murmuring waters, populous with innumerable shapes of life, can a single bird, beast, insect or fish be found, with an appetite of useless torture, without the possibility of gratification? And does not this general rule, as immutable as the law of attraction, hold equally in the case of man? The eye delights in colors. Well, yonder, floats above us, the cerulean curtain of heaven, lined with silver clouds, and freckled with golden fires, while the earth and sea beam with tints of eternal beauty, as if an immeasurable rainbow had been shivered into fine fragments, and strewn over land and ocean!

"The ear asks for melody. Listen to the answer of benignant nature, in the warbled tones of a thousand bird-songs, in the wild whispers of the evening wind, in the solemn murmurs of the pine-tops, in the deep bass of the ocean billows, and more than all, in the divine music of the human voice, that can wander at will, like some celestial nightingale, through all the notes in the scale of harmony."

Now, the yearning soul pines for its passion-promised bride, and the hot heart throbs with nameless emotion. Nature will not deny her own inspired prophecy. Behold! there is beautiful woman, in her youthful radiance, the bright fulfillment, the embodied dream, the present angel of the former hope. And so of every other principle inherent in our mysterious organization of mingled mind and matter. All the flowers of the soul bear their proper fruit in the season of their happy harvest, unless blighted by sin, or false education. If such then be this univer-

sal law, without one single failure, whenever, we have the means of verification, is it not moon-struck madness to distrust it in the only case, where the object of the desire lies beyond the reach of the senses? For there is no passion, at once so profound, general, and all-enduring as this burning, boundless want of perpetuity of existence; and if it be, indeed, a delusion, then the Creator himself must be cruel as well as false, to break before our eyes these glimpses of immortal light, only to render the thought of darkness and annihilation the more unendurable!"

"Creator!" echoed Carlyle, with a mocking smile; "terror and imagination made the gods!"

"It would be much nearer the truth, to say, that fear forms the unbeliever," retorted the other.

"If your sentiments are so orthodox, why do you not put them into practice!" urged the captain, resorting to the final argument *ad hominem*.

"The bewildering fascination of your influence prevents me," answered Curran, with a laugh, and then added seriously; "I often shape out schemes of reformation, especially when alone at midnight, and I seem to see my old mother's saintly smile away up among the loveliest stars; but on the morrow, the sun brings back again the fierce fire into all my veins, and I think no more of my penitential vows, which vanish in the air, like the dews of the morning."

At this moment one of the band came in, with manifest signs of fear and astonishment depicted on his features:

"What is the ill news, now, Dublin Jack?" inquired Carlyle.

"O, yer honor, the bloody lynchers have nabbed Judge Moore,

the two Bartons and Sol Tuttle. The country swarms like a bee-hive with the dirty devils."

"They have captured Judge Moore!" repeated the captain in tones of amazement; "but it will work well for us. General Houston will call them to a dreadful reckoning for the daring deed, especially if they should hang him, which would not surprise me in the least."

"You may be sure, they will do it," affirmed Curran; "they will never forgive his successful speculations in land."

"Have you seen anything, Jack, of the messenger that I sent, last night, after Colonel Miles and his daughter?"

"No, yer honor," answered the robber.

"That is very strange," murmured the chief; "they ought to have been here hours ago; and it is very perilous for them to remain, unprotected where they are."

The instant afterwards, however, the colonel entered, and Carlyle hastily inquired;

"Where is Mary?"

"In the parlor," responded the father.

"Have you introduced her to my sister?"

"Certainly," was the reply, at which Curran opened his blue eyes to the full dimensions of astonishment.

"Be seated, colonel," invited the captain; "this is a strange state of things!"

"Very extraordinary," complained Miles, in a gloomy voice.

"Did you hear that the regulators have taken Judge Moore?"

"Yes, and it was a lucky move for us"

"They also caught Jonathan Hutson."

"Then it is time for us all to commit suicide!" cried the colonel, in fearful agitation; "for he will not only reveal all our plans, but conduct them to the camp where we keep the stolen negroes."

"We must arrange somehow to have him shot, before he can do it," suggested the chief.

"That will not mend the matter much, after his disclosures. No, the thing is up; the whole country will rise upon us, and massacre us like wolves."

"But General Houston, and a strong force of rangers are at Nacogdoches, and they will certainly march to quell the insurrection."

"Yes, but they may come too late to rescue our necks from the halter," said Miles, with a sigh of despair.

"I addressed a note to the President, on the very night, when the lynchers organized," remarked Carlyle.

"Then, there may be some little chance left for us yet," replied the colonel; "but for myself, I hardly entertain the shadow of a hope."

As he spoke a man rushed into the room, covered with wounds and blood, and so bewildered with terror, that at first he had not the power to articulate a sentence.

"Oh, Jim Fink, what has happened?" exclaimed the three bandits in the same breath.

"The lynchers have catch 'em all!" faltered Fink.

"Whom have they captured?" shouted Carlyle, almost in a state of phrensy.

"Bob Taylor, and twenty of yer best men."

"Great Heaven! did they storm the camp?" gasped the chief.

"We was'nt at the camp."

"Where were you, then, in the name of all that is cowardly and foolish?"

"Why, heern as how the regerlators wur guine to cotch y' all and swing y' up to dry, us thought we'd better heave to, and gin y' a lift; but when we fotch up in the dead man's grove, as them call it, and I guess as how 'twill bar a wusser name herearter, all in a twinkling, quicker nor y' could say Jack Robison, the bushes all blazed like a burnin' prairie, and the rifles roared behind every tree, and our boys dropped like pigeon-shootin'; and then the rest on 'em squalled fur mercy, and wur tooke alive. But misfortinilly I 'scaped. 'Caze when one big feller run up to grab me, 'nuther fool struck at me with his frog-sticker, and hit the hoss, who 'medately made tracks fur tall timber, and so here I is."

"The camp is without a guard, and all the niggers will get away!" exclaimed both the captain and the colonel; "who ever heard of such simpletons?"

"Oh! for the presence of Houston?" groaned Carlyle; "if he delays, all will be lost!"

Suddenly a loud acclamation rent the air in the yard; "Here, is Roaring Dick! He is worth a dozen men." And in less than half a minute, the great swarthy-faced favorite of the band entered the library, with an embarrassed, crest-fallen air, very different from his usual glorious swagger.

"Well, Dick, did you see General Houston?" inquired the chief in eager haste.

"Yes, rather too much of him," answered the ruffian, with a lowering brow.

"Did you give him the letter?"

"Yes, and I wish you could hev seed him readin' it. He ground his tushes, foamed at the mouth, and swore wus nor ever I did. His eyes, fur all the world, looked like a mad dog's!"

"He was furious at the lynchers," suggested Carlyle.

"Furious at the devil!" roared Dick; "no sich thing. He said, that wur it not fur upholdin' the law, he'd be glad, if old Morrow would hang every one of us bandits, and he'd as leave help to do it, as not, hisself."

"Perhaps, you made a mistake, and gave him another letter."

"No, sir, I gave him the one, what you give me; but I'll be sworn, the direction wur not in yer own handwriting."

"Then somebody must have effected the change in your pocket," said the chief, pale as death, while the colonel trembled in every limb.

"I ventured to tell the general that he mout be mistaken in the notions he had about people in these here diggins," added Dick; "and what do y' spose he done?"

"I cannot imagine," was the answer.

"He spit a mouthful of tobaccer juice right into my face and eyes."

"Why did you not knock him down?" asked Curran, with a laugh.

"If any pusson wishes old Sam knocked down, he's welcome to try the speriment hisself; fur, by thunder! this here chile don't want to risk it."

"We are ruined, without a hope or the possibility of deliverance!" sighed Colonel Miles, "unless we speedily escape."

"There is no other place to which we can fly," responded the captain; "the atmosphere of both Arkansas and Louisiana would be as unhealthy for you and me as that of Texas."

"What, then, shall we do?" asked the colonel, almost stupefied with fear.

"Stay, and fight it out, to the last bullet in our shot-pouches, and the final drop of blood in our veins," cried Carlyle, in a voice of thunder.

"That's the talk," exclaimed Curran, his blue eyes blazing with the red light of battle; "huzza! for an honorable death, and a soldier's grave! We will all sleep well, when the war of life is over!"

CHAPTER XVII.

LUCY.

It may well be imagined, that the beautiful Mary heard with dismay and horror, the proposal of her father, to take up their temporary residence at the block-house of Captain Carlyle; nor did the fabulous representation that Lucy was the bandit's sister, tend, in the slightest degree, to allay her apprehensions, for she gave no faith to the flimsy falsehood. But the commands of the colonel were imperative, and force compelled her to obey. Having never yet beheld the ostensible mistress of the establishment, much as she had been spoken of in her presence, the maiden gazed upon such marvellous beauty with mingled emotions of astonishment and admiration, and the surprise was still greater, if possible, at the intelligence manifested in her countenance, and the winning courtesy of her demeanor.

"Come with me to my room, dear," said Lucy, in accents of the most touching tenderness, as soon as Colonel Miles had left the parlor.

"Let me look at you standing up, a moment," requested Lucy, in the same kind voice, when they found themselves alone in her private apartment; and the two women scrutinized each

other's forms and features, with long and earnest attention. A stranger, who had witnessed this mutual examination, would have been struck, at once, with the similarity and contrast between these fascinating females, both models of their charming sex, though belonging to different orders of the beautiful. Both were raven-haired, and dark-eyed, with faultless faces and figures, with slender waists, and round tapering limbs, symmetrical in all their proportions, as if two divine dreams of some imaginative artist, in his deep longings for unearthly love, had been embodied in these bright beings of the western woods. But the bust and bosom of Lucy were fuller and richer, and the wild lustre of her burning black eyes resembled flashing fire, compared with the pure starry light that beamed in the chaste orbs of the other. Her lips were also larger and of a deeper color, while the golden hue of her complexion glowed with a warmer blush than the rose-tints of Mary's lily-white features. In fine, the former might have symbolized the ideal of the terrestrial Venus, and the latter would well have represented the celestial goddess as the virgin divinity of innocent love, chaste and changeless as the very stars in the sky, according to the myth of dual meaning invented by the poets of the young world.

As the mistress of Carlyle gazed upon the charms of the other, a shade of unutterable sadness came over her brow, and she murmured mournfully :

"I do not wonder now, at the madness of his passion ; you are, indeed, so exceedingly beautiful ; but such a sinless angel would fall fearfully to wed a devil like him ! Yet, oh ! you are transcendently beautiful !"

"But you are much the more beautiful of us two," answered Mary, touched to the heart, by the other's melancholy voice and manner.

"No, no," protested Lucy ; "come, and see ;" and she caught the young girl's arm, and drew her to a large mirror. "There," she said, with a painful sigh ; "behold the difference. Purity lives on your face, like light on the surface of a star ; but mine burns eternally with a blush of shame. Your dark eyes are loadstars of virgin love ; mine, the wandering meteors of wicked passion and the wildest hatred. Your countenance beams with blessed memories and holy thoughts ; but mine bears the fiery traces of horrible recollections, and unpardonable crimes, the footprints of sin and sorrow, which all the rains of heaven, all the waters of the sea, could never wash away !"

She paused, and a pair of bitter burning tears, like drops of molten metal, hung on her long raven lashes, while her lips writhed convulsively. At length, she remarked in firmer tones :

"Be seated, dear ; for in order to gain your confidence, I must tell you the strange story of my life, with some facts in the history of others. Let me begin, at once ; because, we know not how soon the narrative may be interrupted, since danger and death beset us on every side, and tragical events may be impending this very hour ; but whatever shall happen, trust me as your friend.

"My father," she commenced, "was a Spaniard of genuine Castilian descent, who boasted, with what truth, I am unable to affirm positively, that noble blood flowed in his veins, and certainly, he possessed sufficient pride to have endowed a dozen

peerages, and still have retained enough for the dignity of a royal line. He was, in short, a severe haughty man, immeasurably vain of his only child, but utterly destitute of tenderness, that essential element of all true affection. Unluckily for himself as well as me, his fortune, having been, for the most part, lost in some revolution of his native land, did not correspond with his vanity, and this circumstance, doubtless, increased, if it did not cause, his habitual sternness and melancholy.

"Of my mother, I know nothing, not even her name; for I never dared to question my father on the subject, save once, and I shall never forget the wild look of mingled rage and horror, and the frightful menace, with which he rebuked my curiosity. I cannot tell, at this moment, where I was born, whether in the Crescent City, which is the first place, that I remember, or in the old country, beyond the sea.

"Love is the first want of the infant heart, for which there can be no compensation. It is the natural food of the young soul as much as the milk of the mother is that of the frail body. But alas! this rich inheritance of the poorest slaves, this boon of heaven, enjoyed by the lowest brute animals, was altogether denied me.

"We had one female servant, with several small children, and I used to watch with bitter emotions and burning tears, which only the susceptible nature of a child can experience, the caresses that this African mother bestowed on her homely offspring. I would have given worlds for one such kiss, even from her swarthy lips; and employed all the means, that my mind could imagine to win her affection, without success; for somehow, she

seemed to entertain a fixed dislike for me, as if she regarded me as the rival of her own ebon progeny.

"My father's pride prompted him to anxious cares for my education; but instead of sending me to school with my equals in age, as I implored with sobs and tears, he provided me with a private teacher still more austere than himself. At last, however, the burden of my loveless solitude became lightened. I learned to read, and the parent being passionately fond of gloomy romances, the daughter was supplied with countless volumes, well suited to her tastes, it must be confessed, but poorly fitted to cultivate proper habits of either thought or feeling.

"Thenceforth, I was nevermore alone. I passed my days, and too often my nights, in that weird ideal world, created by the cunning hand of mystic imagination, and reared on pillars of mingled moonshine and midnight shadows, more enduring to my thought, than any sensible forms, even than all the old grey granite of the everlasting hills. I held grim or glorious converse with the thousand spectres, the ghosts of the immortal dead, and listened to the whispered secrets of every wild passion, that can madden the mind, or move the human breast.

"Oh! how my heart would burn with desire, or throb with nameless rapture, whenever I took up a new novel, and tearing open the leaves in hot haste, with trembling fingers, like a hungry tiger pouncing on its prey! How I wept when the same fiery language of ardent love met my eager eyes, and flashed on, leaping, as live lightning, from page to page, while I moaned a lingering farewell, as I turned each sheet, to think that my per-

fect beatitude of hours had been abridged by, at least, another minute.

"How I fluctuated, between hope and despair, with the changing fortunes of the fond youth and his maiden, rocking in fancy, like a small boat on the billows of a stormy sea, realizing their inmost thoughts, their utmost agony of emotions, as profoundly as if I had been myself the actual heroine of the story! How I blushed beneath the touch of imaginary embraces! How I raved with the frenzy of jealousy, and stabbed with the dagger of revenge! and was everything by turns, that the wild tragedy could render me! In fine, if my father had premeditated to make me the very being that I am, and have been, he could not have selected any other course of reading and culture, so exactly, so inevitably adapted to accomplish such a purpose.

"Out of all the innumerable heroes that had so deeply interested my imagination, I culled the traits which I most loved in each, and so fondly cherished them in the depths of memory, that they grew together as a harmonious whole, the image of my worship, the ideal of my heart. This was my first lover—a being of unrivalled beauty, with mystic dark eyes, and ringlets of raven hair, and with bravery stamped, as with an immortal die, on every luminous feature. I vowed again and again, that such should be my bridegroom, and I felt the fixed presentiment, that sooner or later I should find him.

"Over these fairy and fantastic realms I wandered at will, till my fourteenth summer, when a cousin of my father, bearing our family name, arrived from old Spain. My feelings of disgust will not, even now, permit me to describe this relative, embody-

ing as he did, in his single person, all the most revolting traits belonging to the most hideous monsters of romance; suffice it to say, that Juan Gordo was the ugliest man whom I had ever seen, or so much as dreamed of. He was, however, immensely rich, and this one fact, in the eyes of my parent, atoned for every other deficiency, and accordingly, he soon became his special confidant. It would be utterly impossible to paint the loathing that I felt for this mass of human deformity, and to make the matter worse, he almost immediately manifested a remarkable fondness for my society. Go where I would, into the parlor, the library, or to walk in the garden, this dragon followed me with his persevering attentions, till I fairly deemed myself haunted by some fiend in the human shape, such as we read of in the old romances.

"But the fiery cup of my torture was not yet full. One day my father ordered me to dress myself with unusual care, as he said, for a drive to the French cathedral. The order astonished me the more, as neither of us had ever attended any church since the earliest dawn of my recollection. However, I was greatly delighted also, as I would now have an opportunity of seeing something of that gay and glorious world, of which I had, as yet, only dreamed; for my seclusion hitherto had been as absolute, as if an inmate of an eastern harem. Accordingly, I put on my most beautiful dress, and crowned my dark hair with a radiant wreath of roses, and when I surveyed my features in the glass, I blushed at the sight of own loveliness. 'Oh!' I exclaimed in a burst of passion and pride; 'could I

meet with my ideal now, how soon would he throw himself at my feet, and claim me for the bride of his bosom !

" 'Come let us be off,' said my father, as I entered the parlor. 'Bonita ! bonita !' exclaimed Juan Gordo, in rapturous tones, articulating in Spanish, for the monster could not speak but a few words of broken English.

"We three rode away in the carriage, one hired for the occasion, and indeed we had never before needed such a vehicle, as even my parent scarcely ever left the house. In a short time we reached the old cathedral, but to my amazement we found no one there save a grey-headed man with sinister features, who received us with a lurid smile, and a look as of fiendish mockery. This I quickly learned, was a Spanish priest.

"Suddenly, my father commanded in his usually severe tones :
" 'Stand up, Lucy, and be married.'

"Had a thunderbolt shivered the roof above my head, my astonishment could not have been greater. A feeling of mortal sickness came over me. My heart gave a lightning-like leap, and then lay still as a lump of ice. I gasped for breath as if in the act of suffocation, and reeling, would have fallen on the floor, had not Juan Gordo caught me in his hideous embrace.

"Strange as it may seem, the contact of that abhorred creature revived me instantly. With a convulsive tremor that shook all my nerves like an earthquake, I regained sufficient strength to withdraw from those hateful arms, more dreadful to me than the coil of a rattle-snake.

" 'Lucy, stand up and be married !' repeated my father in a terrible voice.

"Then a new idea occurred to my mind. It must be a mere joke, and I seized the suggestion of fancy with the same wild hope which fills the heart of the drowning sailor, as he grasps amid the breakers, the last plank of a wreck.

" 'Whom shall I marry ?' I faltered, with ill-assumed calmness.

" 'Who, but your cousin here, the wealthy Juan Gordo, and a great deal too good for such a romantic Miss as you,' replied my father, with a cruel sneer.

" 'Me, carissima !' affirmed the dragon.

"I heard no more, but uttering a frightful shriek, attempted to fly from my doom. They caught me, and brought me back, and by some means, managed to force me through the forms. I knew it not—knew nothing for long weeks of sunless night, for my mind had wandered from its sphere in the lovely light of nature, into the gloomy void of madness, and my brain now keeps no images from that world of utter darkness, that blank abyss of being, the interregnum of both reason and imagination. How strange a state ! for the kind nurse employed to tend me, during the malady, informed me afterwards that my fancy was more busy than ever, and that I talked incessantly of my ideal, so that she, good soul, thought I was speaking of some human lover, instead of my sweet dream of the heart, born of a thousand wild romances ! and so did my father and the dragon husband.

"When I recovered the use of rational consciousness, I found myself in a fine mansion, with the monster, Juan Gordo, by my side. All the events of my past life seemed to present themselves

at once to my view, but dim, distant and glimmering, like the moonlight on some misty shore. I might have regarded the whole as the frail fabric of an unsubstantial vision, but for this terrible reality of a husband.

"My power of volition, however, had been weakened by the shock, which had unsettled my reason, and I sullenly resigned myself to my fate. My hatred for the monster gradually changed to a sort of icy indifference. My heart became a tideless sea, which no influence could move any more. My ugly consort did not happen to possess my father's instinctive attachment for home. On the contrary, he was passionately fond of appearing at public places, and as his jealousy governed him to such a degree, that he could never suffer me to be a moment out of his sight, he necessarily carried me with him to the theatre, churches, and all suitable gatherings, where swarms of people might be found. But always, the moment, when we returned, I immediately buried myself in my beloved books, and forgot alike the joys and sorrows of the weary-working world, for the beautiful beings, conjured up out of the viewless air, by those wild wizards, the old romancers.

"As my dragon-lord could not bear any sort of printed matter himself, and was a perfect bore of inane garrulity, he contracted a deadly hatred against these silent but most amusing old friends of mine, who deprived him altogether of my society. One morning, I was in my room dressing to accompany him to the court-house, for the purpose of hearing an important criminal case, which had created intense popular excitement. Suddenly, I perceived a pungent disagreeable odor, like the smell of

burning paper, or linen. Supposing that the house had taken fire, I flew into the parlor. You may imagine my agony and dismay, when I beheld all my darling volumes heaped up on the grate, consuming in a bright blaze, while the devil, dragon no longer, stood fanning the infuriate flame, grinning with infernal joy.

"I shall never forget the anguish of that moment, surpassing anything I have ever suffered, either before or since. As the pitiless fire increased, my mute favorites seemed, in their torture, to gain the power of speech, and sighed, moaned, murmured, and, at last, roared, as if for deliverance, their divine leaves quivering, like naked nerves, in the flame, or twisting and writhing like living creatures in pain. What I then did, or said, I know not, but it must have been something madly insulting, for the monster slapped me in the face.

"Instantly the dead sea of my heart stirred, as if a volcano had broken out from its sunless depths. The former hatred returned with tenfold violence, and I internally formed a fearful vow of vengeance, even while I forced the mockery of a smile upon my lips.

"We then proceeded to the court-house, filled with the beauty and fashion of New Orleans; and my wealthy husband, being a friend of the judge, secured a seat for us on the platform, in front of the bar. In the state of semi-consciousness, into which the incidents of the morning had plunged me, I saw but little of what transpired, until roused from a deep reverie by a voice that thrilled through my brain and bosom, like the sound of a silver bell. I turned my head towards the corner of the bar,

whence the mysterious music had issued, and could not altogether suppress a low cry of nameless emotion.

"There, present to all my senses, stood the incarnation of my wildest dreams—the ideal of all imagined beauty—the bridegroom, my young yearning heart had so vainly promised. He had the same dark eyes, the ringlets of raven hair, the same bravery of brow, and the identical form and features. I had no power to withdraw my eyes from his visage, during the long speech, which he pronounced as a counsellor in the cause, no, not even when he glanced, in return at me, with evident tokens of admiration. The very atmosphere around him appeared to exercise over me a sort of mystic magnetic influence, a species of fascination, as strange as it was irresistible. I felt as if a celestial window had been opened in my side, and that a stream of golden lightning was flowing from those bewitching eyes directly into my wildly-throbbing heart.

"But if my soul had been so spell-bound, entranced as it were, by the view of his mere person, his wonderful eloquence intensified the charm, and completed the conquest. His language was more beautiful than that of any novel, which I had ever read, and his words burned, flashed, flew, and sparkled like stars. In short, I loved him, at first sight, and it seemed to me as if I had always loved him. Indeed, he was the first real being that had ever interested my previously desert and solitary heart. It is, therefore, no wonder, if my love was worship, and that worship, madness!

"The passion was mutual. He sought an introduction, through the judge, to my husband, and finally managed to get

inside of our house, but never, save when the man-monster was present; for, as I said before, he never let me out of his sight. But articulate speech is not necessary for the communication of lovers. The essence of all successful courtship is generally consummated by the eye, before the voice breathes one burning vow. I loved, and knew that I was beloved, ere a whisper had been exchanged between us.

"At last, we effected a correspondence by letter, through the kind nurse, who had been my companion during the period of my derangement, and who now recognized, as she vainly fancied, in the present warm suitor, the lover of my imaginary ravings.

"After a time, however, the dragon husband, by some means, detected this secret intercourse, and his fury surpassed all the bounds of both reason and prudence. His jealous wrath was a storm, a whirlwind of blows, curses, and bruises. He covered me with blood from my own veins, and then dragging me to the door by the hair, kicked me into the street, and bade me go to my paramour, and tell him of my grievances.

"I obeyed the brutal order to the letter—went directly to my lover's office, and related the entire outrage from beginning to end. His rage exceeded even that of the man-monster, and without uttering a menace, I saw that he was determined on seeking some appalling revenge.

"That very night, when the city was wrapped in darkness, silence, and sleep, two burglars broke into the dwelling of Juan Gordo, murdered the proprietor, and carried off fabulous wealth in bank notes, gold, and jewels. The leader of the felons was Captain Carlyle."

Mary could not suppress a faint exclamation of horror at this shocking announcement.

"And the other," continued Lucy; "dear, have you the courage to learn the name of the other murderer and robber? It is necessary for your welfare that you should know it."

"Yes," answered the daughter of Colonel Miles, shuddering with the presentiment of the horrifying truth.

"Was your own father; and this is the main mystery of Carlyle's power over him!"

"Great God! what a revelation! but I feared as much," gasped Mary with white lips.

"I did not view the assassination then as I do now," said Lucy; "it seemed to me but sheer justice, and accorded too well with many a startling catastrophe in the pages of my dear old romances. But alas! I have proved by terrible experience, that there can be no lasting love between criminal hearts, especially when a spectral form with gory locks, flits above the bed of adultery. Carlyle has violated his solemn promise to make me his wife, and now wishes to cast me away for a fresher face. But his bitter bridal will be with the skeleton cross-bones of death, and the priest shall be the common hangman. Tremble not, dear Mary, at my awful words; for my vengeance will be your victory, and the blow which rids me of the false and faithless lover, shall bring the true one to your bosom for evermore!"

"And is your hatred so deadly against him now! Is it, indeed, possible, that the most ardent affection can be changed into the deepest aversion?" inquired the young girl, with a look of wonder.

"As might be inferred from your present inexperience, you cannot comprehend such an astonishing transformation, this mysterious alchemy of the human heart, and Heaven grant, that you may never be the wiser; for no one can learn this infernal mystery of the mind, without passing beyond the pale of peace and innocence, and forming a compact with the powers of hell. But never does the nature become thoroughly hardened, supremely wicked, never does the soul burn with a consuming flame, which nothing can quench but blood, until it has been melted into infinite fondness by the volcanic heat of almighty love."

"The conduct of your own father surprises me the most of all," said Mary.

"I have never been able to account for it," remarked Lucy, in sorrowful tones; "unless, indeed, he was actuated by a motive of revenge against me, for some real or imaginary wrong of my unknown mother."

"It is a terrible tale," sighed the other.

"It will be far more fearful, before it is ended," answered Lucy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRIAL BY TORTURE.

THE morning after so many arrests had been effected by the Lynchers, as detailed in previous chapters, William Bolling, accompanied by the small party that had rescued him from the robbers, arrived at Major Morrow's, and could scarcely credit his own senses, on beholding the immense gathering, the strange scenes, and stormy excitement, which he witnessed. Crowds of men, boys, and even women, swarmed in the house, yard and field, one half of them at least, raving almost wildly as maniacs, with mixed emotions of anger, grief, or terror.

To account for this extraordinary agitation, it must be remembered, that in making their captures, the regulators had lost several of their favorite men. Jake Johnson, son of the parson, had been killed by the dog at Sol Tuttle's. Mortin Morrow had fallen by the hand of the boy; and Bill Minton was stabbed to the heart by Alfred Moore. The wrath and horror of their relatives and friends knew no bounds, while every member of the organization felt that all had engaged in an enterprise attended by deadly personal peril; that the game

must be extremely bloody, and that life and death were the stakes for which they must play.

This frightful fact, for the first time fully realized, horrified the timid, but only rendered the brave more reckless. In such a state of feeling, the most desperate counsels usually prevail, and a majority of the company manifested a strong disposition to snatch the cases out of the hands of the judicial committee, and subject the prisoners to summary and indiscriminate massacre.

William Bolling heard with dismay the ominous menaces murmured by the mob, and shuddered for the consequences, when the eloquence of a single man, for the present allayed the tumult. The youth happened to be standing at the door, near two persons, one of whom seemed to be a stranger, and both of them trembled with apprehension for the anticipated tragedy now apparently inevitable.

The elder of the two, who was no other than the Methodist parson, Carter, implored the younger; "for God's sake, dear brother Baker, do speak to this infatuated people, and persuade them to act as rational beings. The assassination of the captives would ruin us irretrievably."

"Alas! what can I do?" said the other in a sad voice; "I am unacquainted with the multitude, and any advice from me would probably be considered as unpardonable presumption. A word, the faintest breath of articulated air from even the lips of a fool can raise the whirlwind of popular excitement, which the wisest statesman in the world cannot stem.

"At all events, it is your duty, as a Christian minister, to

warn the members of our own communion against the consummation of so horrible a crime," urged Carter, warmly.

"That is undeniably true," answered the stranger, "and I will not shrink from the dangerous responsibility, even if I should sacrifice my life on the sacred altar of conscience. The occasion will have a martyr, and it might as well be me as another; but how am I to gain a hearing?"

"I will show you," replied Carter, and he immediately ascended a large stump, and proclaimed: "Fellow-citizens, Brother Baker, our new circuit-rider, will address you." He then leaped down, and the travelling preacher took his place on this *unique* platform, consecrated for the service of politics by the genius of demagogues.

All eyes were now directed towards the stranger, whose striking appearance alone rivetted universal attention. He was a blooming, fair-featured young man, with large mystic blue eyes, a smooth, soaring forehead, and a countenance of deep thought, and ardent, unaffected devotion. His face glowed with rich and radiant health, and his noble form, at once large and lofty, yet unencumbered with useless flesh, presented the true model of the backwoods, combining the strength of the mountain bear, with the swift agility of the panther.

His voice, clear as a bell, yet silvery as the warbled sighs of a heavenly harp, although low at first, indeed little more than a loud whisper, thrilled through the vast audience, and filled every ear and brain with its amazing music.

He began by painting the terrible condition of the country, infested by felons, and on the verge of a servile insurrection;

and the excitement soon became so alarming, that both Carter and Bolling feared the precipitation of the very catastrophe which he had undertaken to avert. In a few minutes, however, after he had gained their confidence, and brought the multitude under the mastery of his mind, he suddenly changed his theme, and with admirable adroitness, described the necessity of order and union, and the ruinous consequences of rashness and bloodshed, until prudence prevailed with the timid, and reason over the intelligent.

But unfortunately, at this point of the discourse, the tigers, of the human *menagerie*, grew fearful lest they might lose their expected prey, and groans, hisses, and horrible threats rent the air, drowning for a brief space, the voice of the speaker. A hundred angry tongues cried: "Take him down! Away with the canting hypocrite! He belongs, himself, to the rogues!" and fifty other exclamations, too coarse for repetition. A rush was made by some desperadoes towards the preacher, which his friends resisted with great firmness, and there seemed to be imminent danger of a general *mêlée*.

At this instant, the mystic blue eyes flashed lightning, the face of the young circuit-rider beamed with the light, which burns on the visage of the brave in the hour of conflict, as he exclaimed in tones that sounded above the tempest, like the blast of a trumpet; "Let the murderers alone to accomplish their work, my brethren. They thirst, like wild beasts for human blood! let them have mine, if they will. I would rather die than disgrace my holy calling!"

The might of his words and the majesty of his manner, awed

even the ruffians themselves, and inspired all moderate and prudent persons to oppose the contemplated massacre of the prisoners. The speaker then went on to urge, with all the force of his powerful eloquence, the necessity of giving the accused an impartial trial before the committee.

For he did not dare assume the loftier ground of leaving the matter for adjudication to the regular tribunals of the country. Such a mild and merciful proposition would have deprived him of all influence, and would have prevented any good that he might hope to effect, even with the members of his own denomination.

He finally closed with a magnificent appeal, a perfect sunburst of fiery words, embodying in a small compass the whole of his previous argument, and forcing it home to the hearts of his hearers, three-fourths of whom determined to act on the preacher's counsel, some from conscientious scruples, others from humane emotions, but more still, from a cool calculation of causes and effects, as bearing on their individual interest, and the ultimate success of the mob, in their triumph over the robbers.

Young Bolling was amazed at the stilling of the foregoing storm by the oratory of a single minister, wonderful as he himself confessed and felt it to be. And, indeed, no stranger educated in more civilized lands, without beholding it, can even imagine the influence of itinerant preachers in the woods of the West. Following closely in the footsteps of the pioneer, their accents, laden with the celestial tidings of mercy and peace, may be heard ringing in the leafy depths of the old forest, almost with the first reverberating echoes of the axe and the cow-bell.

Ignorant, it cannot be denied, are many of the missionaries of the cross, men of rude appearance, and ruder speech, such as would grate harshly on polished ears. But their souls burn with the unquenchable fire of sincerity, and their fierce eyes often flash with the wild light of the mighty prophet and mystic seer, who in ancient days, came from the solitude of the desert, with divine messages for man, and breathed them in the ear, not with tones of gentle tenderness, but with lips of quivering fire, and in accents terrible as thunder.

And such truly is the travelling minister of the backwoods. Unacquainted with science, he knows the more of nature in the concrete ; and living half his time in the saddle, alone, without other society than his own thoughts, his mind acquires all the gloom and grandeur of the primeval forests, and borrows an imagery of nameless power from the voice of the elements, and the hues of the sunshine, and shadows of the stormy cloud. Innocent of literature, he learns his Bible by heart, and steeps his soul in the rich melody of those old hymns, which, like singing birds, have sailed down the air of ages from the dim shores of distant centuries, repeating the prayers and praises of ancient penitent and mystic prophet. He does not corrupt the sacred text by polite circumlocution. He does not utter the word Heaven in a dubious whisper ; nor is he too modest to name hell, except in a periphrasis. His earnestness gives him an irresistible energy ; and he kindles enthusiasm among the people, because he hurls at them his own heart on fire.

Swimming the broad river at high flood, wandering in the wild forest or ocean-like prairie, without a guide, lying alone at

midnight on the greensward, counting the stars, and dreaming of the spirit-shores beyond their golden sands, while the hiss of the rattle-snake and the wolf's long howl, re-echo in his ears, in constant peril from ferocious beasts and more savage men, such is the Methodist Itinerant of the far frontier, the path-finder in the moral desert, the wild hunter of human souls, not for prey, but for preservation ; and such was Hiram Baker.

At length, the great mass of the lynchers made their way to the forest, where the committee of twelve had opened their session ; and although the general throng of members had been debarred by their own resolution, adopted when they first organized, from being present at the deliberations of the council, nevertheless, it afforded them all some pleasure, to be within view of the scene, although they might not hear a syllable of the discussions. And accordingly, they gathered around at a distance in the woods, and gazed intently on the small body of men, who performed in their own persons, the double office of both judge and jurors.

A few individuals, however, as a matter of grace on the part of the leaders, were permitted to witness the proceedings as spectators, and among these happened to be young Bolling, by the favor of Major Morrow, who now seemed more anxious than ever to secure his accession to their band. But by mistake, he certainly adopted the worst possible method for success in his purpose ; for at first sight the youth experienced feelings of unutterable disgust for most of the committee, and their sentiments soon heightened the emotion to actual horror.

The long, lean, superlatively awkward and ugly form of the

Rev. Benjamin Parker occupied the president's chair, and his naturally white hair, with eyes of the same color, and sharp angular features, contrasted ludicrously with the tragical dignity of his air, and the affected solemnity of his voice and visage. He spoke in accents hollow as the tones of a drum, to the desperado, bristling with knives and revolvers, who acted as a sort of general sheriff to the court.

"Pete Whetstone, bring forward the prisoner, Jonathan Hutson." The huge red-faced officer hastened to obey, and piercing the screen of an adjacent thicket, soon returned with the ex-clock-peddler in chains, and guarded by a strong *posse*, with pistols cocked in their hands. It would be difficult to conceive a picture, at once, so pitiful and provocative of laughter, as that which the Yankee exhibited, on his appearance. His long towy hair, clotted with blood, hung in tangles around his crane-like neck. His enormous beaked nose, and vast chin, turned up like a hook, seemed on the point of consummating the wedding, which both had attempted in vain for so many years. His countenance worked nervously with fear, but his small, brown, bear-like eyes gleamed with a look of cunning, as if he had already thought of some means to foil his enemies.

"Jonathan Hutson," said the president, in his deep sepulchral voice ; "you stand charged with the awful crimes of robbery and murder ! What say you to the accusation, are you guilty or not guilty ? and remember, if you tell a falsehood, you shall be instantly hung for that !"

"Who says, I done it ?" inquired the culprit, endeavoring to

evade the edge of the sharp interrogatory, and raising both his fettered hands to scratch his head.

"All of us say, that you did it," replied the president sternly.

"That's a mighty heap of witnesses," answered Jonathan, forcing a dry laugh, determined to try the dodge of simplicity, and affect the fool, as far as possible, without carrying it to such an extreme, as might lead to detection. This plan in itself was both difficult and dangerous, requiring the utmost coolness and skill; but at the moment he could imagine no better, and therefore, had to risk it.

"Mr. Hutson, I advise you not to trifle with your life," admonished Parker, with an awful frown; "answer the question propounded by the court?"

"Whur, mout be the court?" asked Jonathan with a wry face; "I don't know of any court hereabouts, but Judge Moore; and you've got him back thar in the brush, in limbo; and him didn't ax me 'nuthin at all at all."

"We are the court," proclaimed the president, with an air of infinite authority.

"La! what a pile of judges, you hev in this court!" exclaimed the accused, with a countenance of well-feigned folly and amazement.

"Respond to the interrogation, or you shall be hanged, this minute," cried Parker, as his white eyes reddened with wrath.

"You say, they charge me with robbery and murder, how do I know whether to plead guilty or not, unless you tell me what feller they 'cuse me of killin'?" suggested the ex-peddler, with a blank look of innocence.

"It is alleged, and believed, that you, and several others, murdered the family of Brother Marks, and after plundering the house, set it on fire, and thus consumed the dead bodies," affirmed the president; "did you do it or not?"

"I swear," commenced Jonathan, with an incipient negation, when Parker suddenly interrupted the sentence, with an awful threat and an artful hint, which cut it off for ever, by changing the shrewd Yankee's tactics.

"Do not utter a falsehood," shouted the hoarse president; "we have the proof of your guilt, and if you dare deny it, you will not live sixty seconds." Then turning to the sheriff, he ordered; "be quick, Pete, get the rope; for I am certain the prisoner is going to lie?"

"I've got the fixins here ready," answered Whetstone, producing from his ample pocket, a huge hempen coil, and making a motion to fasten one end around the Yankee's neck.

"Oh! don't, for mercy's sake, don't?" cried Jonathan, shrinking back from the proffered noose; and then he asked in a piteous voice, "suppose, I confess, what then?"

"We will hang you for the crime," responded the president.

"Then, if I'm to be hung for sayin' no, or hung for sayin' yes, it don't seem a devil's bit of difference which I say," remarked the peddler, with a lurid look.

Lawyer Rider, now, whispered earnestly in Parker's ear, and the latter again addressed the accused:

"Mr. Hutson, if you will disclose all the facts, without disguise or equivocation, you shall be pardoned."

"Well then, I acknowledge the corn, I did it;" said Jona-

than, and the gleam in his small brown eyes made them resemble those of a bear more than ever.

"Who were your accomplices?"

"Bill Bolls, and Tom Tennison," responded the peddler promptly, naming two supposititious gentlemen, that neither himself, nor any one present, had ever heard of.

"Where were they from?"

Jonathan affirmed truly, this time; "I never heard them say."

"Where are they now?"

"They went away, that night, and I've not squinted my peepers on them since."

"You lie!" vociferated the enraged president.

"You lie!" echoed Lawyer Rider; "tell truly, who were your associates in guilt, if you would not be swung up in a twinkling."

Jonathan turned towards the officious attorney, and at the recognition, exclaimed in tones of surprise; "Ha! consarn it! as I'm alive, thar's my old partner in the clock business, what run off with the hull doings, capital, profits and all, in Carolina?"

A titter followed the announcement; but the learned counselor, although he lost every tinge of color on the yellow parchment of his complexion, while his keen black eyes quivered, like wavering points of flame, nevertheless bore up bravely, protesting loudly; "It is false; I never saw the rogue before."

"Never, mind; let us proceed with the regular investigation," interposed the president with dignity, and frowning severely at the Yankee, he continued; "now, sir, is your last chance to speak the truth, or die; for we know, that one of your confederates is named Curran."

Jonathan opened his eyes in silent wonder.

"Pete," commanded Parker, "bring Uncle Buck, and confront him with the prisoner."

The sheriff took another brief excursion into the thicket, and brought forward the white-headed president of the former Negro mass meeting, at the unexpected sight of whom, the Yankee ghook till every bone in his body seemed to rattle with uncontrollable fright.

"Uncle Buck," said the chairman, "did you ever see this man before?"

"Sartan, massa," responded the African with the grin of an ape.

"Where?"

"Tudder night, when he preach bobolition to heaps ob niggers in de swamp, and promise 'em to send arter thur wives and chillen, a big steam-injun, like a hoss, what snorted thunder."

"Who was with him?"

"A feller, what 'em called Curran."

"There, you may go now, for the present, Uncle Buck," remarked Parker, and then scowling at the Yankee, he thundered; "you perceive that we have evidence as to your accomplices, and that you have lied to us wilfully; and for this you must now die! Swing him up, boys, immediately."

"Yes, sir," assented Whetstone, and half-a-dozen powerful hands seized the trembling wretch, tied one end of the cord around his throat, and threw the other over a low but strong limb. He struggled, like a wolf in the toils, writhed as a scor-

pion in the fire, and uttered the most mournful cries, and beseeching prayers, ever articulated by a human voice ; but all in vain. His merciless executioners pulled away at the loose end of the rope, until he dangled, six feet in the air ! Even then, his agony did not cease. He still essayed to implore pity, twisting his purple lips in hideous contortions ; but the breath gurgled in his windpipe, and produced no external sound. Directly his features grew black as those of a Negro, and his bloodshot eyes rolled wildly in their sockets, and the last spark of that strange mysterious fire—life, was about to die out for ever, when the president ordered :

"Let him down, and if he is not dead, he will now disclose everything."

When Jonathan again touched the earth, he lay limber as a rag, without the least signs of life or motion ; and young Bolling concluded that all was indeed over. But the more humane among the lynchers busied themselves for his restoration, chafing his hands and temples, and bathing his face copiously with cold water until, at length, he revived.

As soon as he was able to sit upon the ground, President Parker addressed him with greater severity than ever :

"Jonathan Hutson you have been, a minute ago, on the crumbling brink of hell, from which our kindness has snatched you, and if it is not your wish to visit the infernal regions instantly, you have one final chance to escape the doom, which you so surely merit."

"I will tell all—everything, that you can ask," gasped the shuddering wretch, more dead than alive, from the effects of fear.

"Who assisted you in the murder of Brother Marks and his family?"

"Lieutenant Curran."

"Was not Captain Carlyle the leader?"

"Yes."

"Were not Sol Tuttle, Judge Moore, Colonel Miles, and the two Bartons with you?"

"Yes."

"Give us the particulars."

Jonathan pretended conformity to the mandate, and detailed all the facts with surprising speciality, considering that the whole was a pure fabrication ; for he knew nothing about either the murder, or its perpetrators, and was forced to the confession of the monstrous falsehood, by the cruel alternative of immediate death.

"What members belong to the black band of robbers?" interrogated the president.

"The Yankee enumerated all that he could remember.

"Do not Judge Moore, the two young Bartons and Sol Tuttle also act with them?"

"Jonathan scrutinized the stern countenance of Parker, and reading there, the necessity of an affirmative response, gave it promptly.

"Where do the bandits keep their stolen Negroes?"

"In the big swamp betwixt the Sabine and Red River."

"How many fighting men can they muster?"

"If they have a week's time, five hundred."

"How many in a single day?"

"A little more than half the number."

"At this answer, a murmur of astonishment, not unmixed with alarm, arose from all present; and after it became hushed, Parker went on with his examination:

"How many slaves have the robbers now in their possession?"

"If you reckon all in Texas and Arkansas, more than a thousand."

Here, the president directed Pete Whetstone to conduct Hutson back to the company of his fellow prisoners, and to guard him with the same care as previously. After he was gone a stormy debate occurred, as to what should be done next. Major Morrow proposed, that their principal force should march forthwith, and make a grand assault upon Carlyle's block house, before the numerous auxiliaries of the band should have time to gather. The same view was urged by the chairman, and by Parson Dodson, but Carter and Lawyer Rider objected to it as amounting almost to madness. Preacher Johnson spoke on this side also, and upon the motion being put it was negatived by a majority of two votes.

The next subject of discussion related to the method of proceeding with their other captives. Major Morrow insisted with his customary cruel barbarity, that they should be whipped, hung, burned, drowned, and frightened into written confessions of their guilt, and that these might then be published in the newspapers, for a complete justification of their execution before the world; and this plan received the warm support of both the president and the Millenarian minister, Dodson; while Parsons

Carter and Johnson opposed it with all the energy and eloquence of humane and honest natures.

They also found an unexpected ally in the new itinerant, Baker, who had listened with silent horror to the infamous proposition and the shameless arguments by which it had been sustained. But all his burning words and pathetic periods proved utterly unavailing to avert the calamity. The savage sentiment of self-interest was too strong, and the hope of public exculpation looked too pleasing, for moral considerations or feelings of mercy to weigh heavily with the majority of the committee. And so the motion prevailed, by four suffrages.

Of all the bloody terrors, which attend the reign of lynch-law, the method of seeking evidence by torture, is at once, the most universal and revolting. I have witnessed many cases of the kind on the far frontier, from Missouri to Texas, but never a single one without this unfailing feature. It seems, indeed, to be a natural and necessary incident to all such organizations, to extract proofs from the quiverings of naked nerves, the faint moans of agony, the horrible whispers of gasping breath, the mortal pallor of death-like faces, and the signatures of burning or bleeding hands! And even when the doubtful testimony has been obtained, when the fatal execution of the real or imaginary culprit is to be consummated, it is not performed as an act of public justice, but enjoyed as an infernal feast of private revenge—a mob-murder, ten thousand times more loathsome than midnight assassination!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRIAL—AN EXECUTION.

THE committee of regulators also determined on another rule of examination, which, although it did not by any means forward their general object, nevertheless tended to render their proceedings intensely and painfully dramatic. They resolved to question all the prisoners together, in the presence of each other, hoping, perhaps, that the terrors of the more timid, would operate to shake the firmness of the bravest, so that all, if possible, might be induced to sign a common confession. And accordingly the president ordered the sheriff, and his well-weaponed *posse*, to bring forward, at once, the whole body of captives.

When the desperadoes, acting under this imperative mandate, presented the different persons accused before the council, a more striking contrast in physical appearance, countenance and demeanor, was probably never before witnessed, and could not fully be imagined. Every deep feeling of the heart, every fierce emotion of the mind, seemed unmasked, in all the vividness and force of undisguised naked nature. Every prisoner revealed in the lines of his face, in his voice, air, and attitude, the true

staff within him. The young brothers, John and William Barton, showed all the effects of craven fear, their slender forms quivering, like two reeds in a strong wind, their complexions being literally white as the snowy linen of their own shirts, and their light blue eyes shrinking from the stern gaze of their pitiless judges. Both were dressed in costly suits of black cloth, with hats of the same tint, brushed smooth as the surface of new velvet, and they wore massive gold watch-chains, and rich rings sparkled in the sunlight on their fingers. But these ornaments, and the fashionable character of their clothing, only rendered the terror depicted on their visages, the more painfully impressive.

Nevertheless, these lovers, who had expected to lead their beloved brides to the altar, on the evening of that dreadful day, in this, their distressing and dangerous situation, received the most convincing evidence to prove the wisdom of their choice. For the two young girls, Eliza and Alice Ewing, with their widowed mother, had followed their hearts' favorites to the headquarters of the lynchers, and now stood bravely by their sides, as well for witnessess as comforters. Indeed, they manifested much higher courage than their suitors; for although their fair and comely cheeks had lost some of their radiant rose-hues, their full, round figures did not tremble, and their dark blue eyes shone with the light of tenderest, truest love, but mingled with the fiercer fire of indignation.

The uncle of the Bartons, Judge Moore, seemed the living personification of stern, uncompromising, but insulted dignity and virtue. His scrupulously precise black dress, entirely desti-

tute of ornaments, his high, prominent forehead, and large, bald head, his severe haughty cast of countenance, and those proud, penetrating eyes, contrasted with the coarse vulgar crowd of regulators around him, made him look like a king among clowns, an eagle environed by a flock of vultures, a lion in the presence of hideous wolves or jackals.

Neither was he unattended by affection as profound and ardent as any passionate love that ever beat in the human bosom. For, notwithstanding his threats, entreaties, and even commands, his beautiful daughter, the gifted and accomplished Jenny, had left the funeral of her murdered twin-brother, to share the imprisonment, and if practicable, to avert the fate of her adored parent. Her features had lost every tinge of her usually rich color, as if formed from a marvellous mixture of vermilion and unsunned snow, and now the latter hue predominated, till she appeared pale as a corpse. With her peerless blue eyes, so large, deep, and dream-like, shining through a shower of tears, and her exquisite head, sunned all over with bright golden curls, and bowed down towards her breast, in those sable robes of mourning, she might have been mistaken by a stranger for some beautiful statue of immortal grief.

Bob Taylor, one of the real bandits, offered to the view a very different aspect. His great, gigantic form, and coarse, florid features, his small twinkling eyes of reddish grey, his tiger-like countenance, and even the tangles of his fiery hair, all expressed savage ferocity, and reckless daring. One of his enormous arms had been broken by a rifle bullet, in the conflict, which effected his capture. The wounded limb bound up by a

common cotton handkerchief, and hanging loosely by his side, must have given him excruciating pain, but he betrayed no indication of the fact, by external tokens.

The picture of Sol Tuttle, may be sketched in few words. His entire countenance evinced the firmness of the genuine hero overtaken by adverse fortune; but unsubdued, and still defiant. It was the sublime stoicism of the Indian warrior, without sign of anger or fear. Only his dark eyes had been shorn of their merry twinkle, which was replaced by a nameless, gleaming fire, that seemed to pierce the beholder through, as with red-hot arrows of lightning.

A considerable change, however, had come over the hunter's brave-hearted boy. His bright black eyes were dim from recent weeping, and all his features betrayed anxiety and sorrow. The feelings of the child had resumed their sway over his mind, and sad memories of mother, sisters, and the beautiful babe in its cradle, flitted before the eye of his young imagination, mingled with pale spectres, the fear-fancies of the coming doom.

"Prisoners," said the president, clothing his voice in its most ghostly accents; "one, and all, ye stand here charged before this honorable court, with the crime of wilful murder, in fact, with the assassination of our dear brother Marks and his family! We have full proof of your guilt, and if ye add to your enormous crime, the sin of falsehood by a denial, ye shall be hung outright! What say ye? are ye guilty, or not?"

The females uttered half-suppressed cries of horror, at this appalling announcement, but none of the men responded, by a word. The two Bartons reeled, as if about to fall, and the boy

burst into tears ; but Bob Taylor scowled like a devil, Sol Tuttle pierced the chairman's soul with his keen dagger-eyes, and Judge Moore cast upon him a look of lofty disdain.

"I move that the question be propounded to each criminal separately," interposed Parson Dodson.

"I second the motion," added Lawyer Rider, and the proposition being put to the committee, became a law.

"Bob Taylor," demanded President Parker ; "are you guilty, or not guilty ?"

"Go to the devil, yer daddy, and ax him, y' ugly cuss of an old he-wolf," shouted the gigantic robber, shaking the fettered fist of his sound arm at the chairman, with the aspect of a wounded tiger, ready to spring upon its prey.

"Answer the question, or be hung in half a minute !" exclaimed Parker, in a still more awful voice.

"If I had you by yerself in the bushes, I'd poke the answer into yer cowardly gizzard, fur you've no more heart nor a gander," replied Bob Taylor, grinding his teeth.

"No more ; swing him up, boys !" said the president, lurid in the face with a passion that rivalled that of the desperado.

And the order was instantly obeyed. Pete Whetstone and his official assistants, fastened the fatal noose around the bandit's neck, and hoisted him aloft in the air. Young Bolling listened in vain for the mandate to let him down, as in the case of Jonathan Hutson. In a short time, the limbs of the culprit ceased to quiver, and he hung a hideous corpse in the sunlight, which, gleaming through intervals in the emerald foliage above his head, gave his fiery red hair the appearance of burning gold.



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"Tie the rope at the foot of the tree, and let the body remain as it is, for a warning to his wicked accomplices!" directed President Parker—which was done. And so this frightful vision of the loathsome dead, was fixed there, dangling in the air, during all the subsequent investigation.

The chairman next addressed the elder nephew of Judge Moore: "John Barton, are you guilty, or not guilty?"

"I swear before that God, who made me, that I am innocent of the charge," answered the youth, in a tolerably firm tone, but pallid as that ghostly corpse, which grinned like a skeleton, above his head.

"I move that this one be drowned;" exclaimed Major Morrow, and his cruel grey eyes glittered like those of a wild cat.

"I second the motion," said the Millenarian preacher Dodson, and the resolution prevailed.

The signal being given, Pete Whetstone and his *posse* seized the prisoner, in spite of his wild cries and entreaties, tore him from the arms of his promised bride, and bearing him into the adjacent lake, held his face under water, until he ceased to breathe or struggle. Under the direction of the president, they then brought him out, and after some time, succeeded in his resuscitation.

It would be impossible to delineate the grief and terror of the females, while this savage torture was being consummated; the deepest, and most unendurable woes, as well as the radiant raptures of the highest joy, have no adequate terms for their utterance, and must, therefore, be left entirely to the imagination. Indeed, such was the emotion of the fair Eliza Ewing, that when

they plunged her lover in the lake, she would have thrown herself into the water to drown with him, had she not been forcibly restrained by some of the lynchers themselves.

To prevent the embarrassment caused by the acts and feelings of these feminine spectators, Attorney Rider proposed that they should be removed ; but the instant, when he presented the suggestion, all the three young girls cast themselves at the feet of the frowning president, imploring with tears of unutterable anguish :

"Oh ! for pity's sake, let us stay, and we will not speak or move again !"

For such is often one of the strangest mysteries of the human heart. It can endure to behold its most beloved ones suffer the keenest pangs of torture—hang, drown, burn, and die, while every pain is repeated with equal agony in its own shuddering core, rather than feel the wilder, the utter despair, of absence and separation !

The prayers of the females were granted, under a stern admonition from the chair, that if they articulated another syllable, or interfered any further with the regularity of the proceedings, they should be immediately expelled by violence.

"John Barton," said Parker to the pallid, half-drowned youth ; we have seen proper, in mercy to offer you one more opportunity to tell the truth, and if you do so, we may spare your life.

"Are you guilty ?"

An awful tremor shook the young man's bosom, as he responded in faint, almost inaudible accents :

"Yes."

"Were not your brother William, Judge Moore, Captain Carlyle, Lieutenant Curran, and Sol Tuttle, your associates in the criminal deed ?"

Barton wrung his hands in mournful silence.

"Do you see that ?" interrogated the president, pointing his long bony finger at the corpse blackening, overhead, in the sunbeams ; "reply to my question instantly, or you shall take your place by its side !"

"The youth gasped a hissing whisper, which the chairman interpreted as a "Yes."

"Now be quick, sign this paper," commanded Parker, and he handed the other a written confession, and a pen filled with ink, from a horn bottle in his pocket.

Barton attempted vainly to read the document, for a cloud of mingled blood and fire wavered before his eyes, and his fingers trembled, like the flame of a candle in the wind, and shook the sheet till it fairly rattled.

"Sign it !" thundered the president.

The young man tottered to a fallen pine tree, and scrawled his name, in a hand, that told its own tale of unutterable horrors.

"William Barton, are you not also guilty ?" inquired Parker, turning to the younger brother.

Sol Tuttle interposed ; "Don't you let nobody hev any witnesses it this kangaroo court ?"

"Take that for your insolence," shouted Major Morrow, as he slapped the hunter's face. The latter colored deeply with shame and indignation ; but replied calmly :

"If my hands wur not chained, you would sooner attack an old he-bar with yer naked fists nor me. Howsumever, that's allers the way with cowards; they fight them what can't duffend thurselves, and fly frum a rooster, onless his spurs hev been cut off."

Judge Moore now spoke for the first time, in his usual severe voice, but with a contemptuous smile:

"I beg leave to suggest, as *amicus curia*, that Mr. Tuttle is correct in the legal point, which he has just presented to the consideration of this august tribunal. For in all courts of whatever name or grade, civilized or savage, parties are allowed to offer their proofs, if they choose, and no one is ever condemned without a hearing. What says prosecuting Attorney Rider to this view of the case?"

"The remark is perfectly true," assented the Shelbyville lawyer; "all judgments should be *secundum allegata et probata*, and I move, that we now adopt the rule, if I can get a second."

"I second the motion," exclaimed parson Carter eagerly; and a wrathful debate followed. Preacher Johnson also defended the mild and merciful proposition, and the young itinerant, Hiram Baker, literally thundered, with all his eloquence, on the same side. But the measure was opposed with ferocious energy by President Parker, Major Morrow, and his brother-in-law Minton, as well as by the Millenarian prophet.

Upon the vote being taken, the committee stood equally divided, and the members seemed on the verge of resorting for a decision to blows, when Pete Whetstone suggested a compromise:

"Jist go on, and try the cussed critters in the old way fast, and then let 'em hev thur own witnesses arterwards; and if you don't do it, I'll tell the boys what yere about, and they'll shoot all the tarnal rascals, like hogs?"

The brutal menace produced its effect, and in order to prevent a worse catastrophe, the more humane regulators modified their proposition accordingly, hoping in the end to attain their object, when the torture being over, the prisoners should be permitted to introduce their evidence in defence, although this method would exhibit the singular anomaly of allowing the plea of guilty to be subsequently controverted by the accused. Nevertheless, they might solace themselves with the reflection, that the whole trial, from beginning to end, was a monstrous mockery of all law, justice, and even common humanity!

Order being restored, the white-eyed president again interrogated:

"William Barton, are you guilty, or not?"

"Say yes," whispered Alice Ewing, in his ear; "it may save your life."

"I am guilty;" faltered the youth, with pale lips.

"Has your brother given truly the list of your accomplices?"

"Yes."

"Then sign this paper, as your free and voluntary confession," commanded Parker.

Barton took the lying document, and inscribed his name, with more firmness, than had been evinced by the other, as he had not passed through the same appalling scene of fear and physical suffering.

Parker, now turned to Sol Tuttle, with a more awful countenance than he had yet assumed, as if he anticipated a more stubborn resistance, proclaiming :

"Sir, you have heard the charge, and have witnessed the acknowledgment of your guilty confederates, what say you, guilty or not guilty?"

"You know as well as me, that I'm a darned sight more innocent than you, you infarnal, white-eyed, hooked-nosed, tow-headed, spindle-shanked, hang-dog old bag of bones. There ain't enough of meat on yer carkiss to feed a sick buzzard, nor true grit enough in yer cowardly heart to make fight at a lame gander. If my hands wur ontied, I'd whup the whole on ye!"

"I move that we burn him!" exclaimed Major Morrow, and every freckle on his face seemed transformed into a flake of fire, in the heat of his terrible wrath; and his cunning, cruel grey eyes glowed like live coals.

"Brother Dave will burn you sooner than you'll be ready fur it!" retorted the hunter, with a lurid smile; "he'll be wus nor a Comanche, and will dog yer tracks like a bloodhound!"

"I move that we burn him!" again bellowed the major; "if you don't, by Heaven! I'll shoot him, this minute!" and he snatched a pistol from his belt, and cocked it at his enemy's breast.

"Me and brother Dave both know a secret of sumthen you did in Missouri, and if you wur to kill me in sich a cowardly manner as this, he'd be sartan to tell on ye," said Sol with a mocking smile

The major turned suddenly pale, and the weapon of murder vibrated perceptibly in his hand.

"Come close to me, and I'll tell ye what it is," affirmed the hunter; "don't be skeered, I'll not bite ye, fur I'm not fond enough of old sinner's meat to try my tushes on the likes of you."

Morrow approached, and Sol whispered a single word in his ear, which operated like some infernal charm of magic. The lyncher's knees rocked under him, as if he were standing upon an earthquake. His very lips became livid; and he bit his tongue, and tore his own flesh with his nails, like one affected by the madness of hydrophobia. Even the pistol fell from his quivering fingers, with a loud explosion upon the ground.

Everybody was astonished at this singular scene; but the Millenarian Dodson, determined that the main business should proceed, exclaimed:

"I second the motion for burning!"

"Yes, and you had better git at it in a hurry," remarked Pete Whetstone, with a savage menacing grin; "fur our boys, out thar in the brush, are very oneasy, and they'll snatch the fun from yer hands, if you don't mind yer cards."

"The president put the question, and declared it carried, notwithstanding, the earnest remonstrances of all the members possessing one particle of either shame or humanity. This resolution, however much it might be regretted and condemned by the minority, did not excite any surprise; for wherever the murderous code of lynching prevails, fire is a favorite instrument of torture, as well as of death, especially in desperate cases.

Indeed, there seems to be a sort of satanic sympathy between passionate cruel natures and that mysterious element that we call fire, and which is the most vivid symbol of destroying force, and pitiless rage, whether it roars like a hurricane, in the conflagration of capitals, or sweeps with a broad burning besom, the grassy surface of the prairie, or shoots up its tall tongues of wavering flame, from the crater of the volcano, licking the lurid clouds, or breaks in the thunderbolts, that shiver the most solid cliffs into atoms. Everywhere, it still represents, ruthless, endless, all-victorious power, at once the mightiest and most merciless thing in the sphere of human experience; and it cannot be a matter of wonder, that the imagination of man in all ages, has made it the chief pillar and principle of hell itself; for there is something, indeed, truly diabolical, both in the eternity of its strength and the terror of its tortures!

Under the direction of President Parker, a blaze of dry sticks, and pine-knots, was immediately kindled, and half-a-dozen strong desperadoes seized the hunter and held his hands near the flame, until they were burned all over to a blister; but by an astonishing effort of will, the victim suppressed all indications of pain. Great drops of sweat rolled down his swarthy cheeks; but not a nerve trembled, and he uttered neither moan nor cry.

They then brought him back, and placed him again in front of the president, who demanded sternly:

"Will you now confess?"

"Never!" answered Sol, in a voice of sublime firmness; "never will I own such a damning lie; no not if you wur the devil hisself, instead of his agent, and yer fire wur yer hell!"

"We will spare your life, if you will acknowledge."

"It's a lie!" said Sol, scornfully; "you can't ketch this bird with sich chaff. You want my name to the paper of confession, to show, and then I'd be hung like the rest on 'em."

"We will all pledge ourselves to the contrary," urged Parker.

"I wouldn't give one chaw of tobacker, fur any of yer promises," said Sol, with a smile of bitter sarcasm.

"Take him and burn his feet, this time!" ordered the chairman.

Once more, the savages grasped him, drew off his moccasins, and held his ancles near the roaring flame. At the very instant, however, an event occurred to interrupt their infernal sport.

Suddenly, from the bushes beyond the lake, at the distance of two hundred yards, a sharp report emanated, a wreath of blue smoke was seen curling up lazily in the sunny air, and the desperado, Pete Whetstone, pitched head foremost into the flame, where he was about to roast the victim! A wild cry of alarm and horror arose from all the spectators of the shocking tragedy, and the *posse* of the fallen sheriff broke and fled into the thicket, as if a thousand guns had been cocked at their heads.

So great was the general consternation, that a minute elapsed before anybody thought of dragging the prostrate lyncher out of the fire, and when they did so, it was found, that a rifle ball had perforated his heart!

"That is Uncle Dave!" exclaimed the boy, Jack Randolph, as soon as he perceived the roar; and the declaration of Sol himself confirmed his son's statement, as he cried:

"I told you, Major, that my brother wur wuss nor a Comanche!"

"Pursue him! take him dead or alive!" exclaimed the president; and hundreds started away to execute the order, but after an hour's search, no trace of their bold and dangerous enemy could be discovered. Indeed, so very dense grew the green bushes and tangled vines, that the lynchers might have passed within three steps of a lurking foe, without finding him.

As their present situation had just been proved to be so perilous, the regulators determined to change their place of meeting to Morrow's residence, where they immediately renewed their session, in the large parlor.

The president, for some reason, adjourned the examination of the hunter, and commenced that of Judge Moore, propounding the same invariable question, as to guilt or innocence.

"I am guilty of buying up all the vacant land, that I can meet with, and have the money to pay for. I confess it, and am willing to sign a paper stating the fact," answered the Judge, with an air of blended pride and scorn.

"Respond, sir, to the accusation," commanded the president, scowling ominously.

"I have fully replied to your real charge," said the Judge; "for disguise it as you may, the true cause for the hostility of your dirty gang against me, is my success as a speculator in lands."

"That subject is not up for discussion at present," rejoined Parker, "and I insist upon a categorical affirmative or negative to my interrogatory."

"Perhaps you would like to know who is my secret partner and joint proprietor with me in all the real estate which stands recorded in my name," suggested the judge, with a singular smile.

"No; but answer the question!" threatened the chairman.

"If you only knew my partner, you would plunge your own hands in the fire, rather than harm a hair of my head," remarked the judge, with the same significant, steady smile.

"Who, then, is your partner, in the devil's name?" cried the president in a towering passion.

"General Sam Houston."

Had a sudden earthquake shaken the house from its foundations, the dismay and surprise could hardly have been greater. At the articulation of that distinguished name, the bravest held their breath, and the frightened members gazed silently in each others pale faces, to read there the common thought, "we are ruined!"

The more moderate and humane now seized the propitious moment to press rational and merciful counsels. Parson Carter renewed his motion for a regular legal investigation, and the production of mutual proofs for and against the accused. All those who had previously voted with him supported the proposition with increased ardor, and several others changed to the same side. Even the terrified president himself wavered.

But, unfortunately, the ruffians without, who flocked to the doors and windows, soon discovered what was going on, and determined not to be foiled in their expected feast of revenge. They raised a deafening clamor, and uttering awful menaces, urged the committee to proceed as they had commenced.

The itinerant Baker whispered in Carter's ear, "Brother, withdraw your motion for the time; our only chance in favor of justice and humanity is to delay the tragedy as long as practicable, in the hope that something may happen finally to prevent it." And the parson acted immediately on the advice.

"How are we to be assured that you have told us the truth?" faltered President Parker, recovering, in some degree, from his stupor of fear.

"General Houston is on his way to this country from Nacogdoches, and you can ascertain the facts from his own lips," answered Judge Moore, still smiling.

"Then, by Heaven! let us hang Sam Houston himself!" exclaimed Major Morrow, in accents of the utmost rage.

"Hang the President of the Republic!" ejaculated the judge, with a mocking laugh.

"Yes, yes; hang you both on the same tree!" thundered a hundred wild voices from the door and windows.

"General Houston is coming, attended by three hundred rangers, and has called out all the militia of the Red Lands. Will you hang all of them?" exclaimed the judge, with a triumphant look.

This remark operated upon many as a thunder-shock; but a majority of the reckless desperadoes shouted, "It is a lie! and if it be so, we can whip them all. Huzza! for the free State of Tanaha for ever!"

"If you do not plead guilty, if the court were so disposed, they could not save you. Listen to the exclamations of the

mob, and be wise, before it is too late," insisted Parker, in persuasive tones.

"Do, I implore you, my dearest father," said the beautiful Jenny, kneeling before him, and bathing his feet with her tears.

"I would rather, any day, die a true and brave man, than live eternally a liar and coward!" he answered, firmly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RANGERS.

No human soul can ever know either its own power, or its own weakness, until it encounters the crisis of destiny capable of testing the fact. There are mysterious and mighty energies in every mind, latent forces, amazing faculties to do and to endure, which, like the secret, central fires of the earth, lie dormant and undeveloped, if the shock of the earthquake comes not to call them forth, to free them from the waveless, lethean lethargy of common life. It is this circumstance which renders it so difficult for us to comprehend the history of heroic ages, to imagine the lofty actions of arms strung with nerves of ignited steel, and the terrible daring of hearts alive with lightning. We must have some insight into the hidden depths of our own nature in order to realize fully the awful legends of patriot and martyr, and the brave tales of the wild backwoods.

When man is liberated from the restraints of law, when the strong fetters of custom, habit, and education have been broken from his hands, when he is confronted, face to face, with the scowling forms of danger and the black shadows of death, of

which he had previously only dreamed as unreal phantoms, then he shows, at once, all the naked, undisguised divinity, or devil, lurking in the vast abyss of his bosom, and displays the most marvellous virtue, or amazing crime.

"I would rather die, any day, a truthful and brave man, than live eternally a liar and coward!" Such was the last answer and final resolve of Judge Moore when the lynchers presented their frightful alternative of confession, or fiery tortures and a disgraceful tomb beneath the gallows-tree. And yet this man, during his life hitherto, immersed in the pursuits of trade and money-making, had evinced no signs of exalted prowess, or more than ordinary firmness of character. He had not even distinguished himself in field or foray, when the Texan revolution called all the patriotism and chivalry of the land to fight the glorious battles of their country. Indeed, he had still gone on, amidst the storm and strife, with his darling speculations to achieve a fortune, and had acquired a reputation for personal timidity, which strangely contrasted with his present undaunted conduct.

At the moment of uttering his defiant response, the appearance of the Judge was truly sublime. An electric spark seemed to leap, like lightning, from the folds of his massive brain, flashing in his blue eyes, glowing in his stern features, swelling with lava-currents the valves of his powerful heart, and spreading to the remotest extremities of his frame a fiery flush of irritation.

But hardly had he spoken, when a deafening shout, a perfect tempest of horrible threats and curses thundered in the adjacent yard, and circulated among the crowd, till the tumult resembled

the roar of ocean breakers, mingled with the cries of rage and shrieks of agony, such as resound on the field of battle, when charging columns cross their bayonets in bloody strife, while high above all, might be heard the piercing wail of female voices, from heart-strings quivering for the loved and lost.

The wagons had just arrived with the gory corpses of young Johnson, and the son and nephew of Major Morrow. Every spectator, and even the committee rushed out to survey this new horror, so far transcending all the terrible scenes, which had yet been witnessed. The mothers and sisters of the dead, giving way to the wildest madness of grief, increased the furious passions and ungovernable excitement of the multitude, until the screaming, menacing, howling throng might have been mistaken for a mass meeting of fiends in pandemonium, rather than an assembly of human beings in a civilized land.

Suddenly, the hoarse voice of Major Morrow exclaimed in tones of awful distinctness, heard even above the roar of that storm of burning breath; "blood for blood, boys! let not the assassins of our sons and brothers live one moment longer!"

And five hundred fiery lips, in accents of phrenzied wrath, echoed that appalling cry; "blood for blood!" as they swarmed, with diabolical visages, and flaming eyes around the door.

"Now is the time for true men to die!" said Hiram Baker, as he snatched a revolver from the belt of Parson Carter, and threw himself between the prisoners and their doom, thundering in the face of the astonished desperadoes; "you shall not prove yourselves to be devils! you enter not here, but by passing over my dead body.

His lofty look, the inconceivable sublimity of his brave bearing, awed the ruffians, and inspired the few friends of humanity with his own determined courage. Young Bolling, and half a dozen others, with cocked pistols flew to his side, all equally determined to triumph or fall with him.

But the noble conduct of Parson Johnson had the greatest influence of all, to prevent the impending calamity, as with pallid features, and streaming eyes he stood in the centre of the door, with bowie knives and pistols bristling before his breast, and pointing a tremulous finger at the corpse of his own beloved boy, he exclaimed in accents of unutterable emotion; "Lo! there, I too have lost a child, the idol of my heart, the very hope and stay of my life; but I would rather that every remaining member of my family should be shrouded on the same bloody bier, than behold the commission of a cruel homicide, such as would brand us all, and even defile our country, with the blackest stains of eternal disgrace! Wait patiently, I implore you, in God's name, for the sober action of the committee, whom you have voluntarily sworn to obey. But rest assured, if you massacre them, we will also die with them, and many of you will accompany us to the same gory grave."

"He tells the truth," cried all the Methodists among the multitude; "let us follow the good preacher's advice."

Major Morrow himself saw the danger of proceeding further with his ruthless purpose, and assisting to allay the wild excitement which his words had caused, a degree of order was, at last, restored, and the council again commenced their investigation.

"I move," said the Millenarian Dodson, "that Judge Moore be scourged until he confesses his guilt."

"You deserve the lash on your own brute's back for such a suggestion!" ejaculated Parson Carter, "for you know that he never could be induced to sign any such acknowledgment, and the attempt to force it would be only useless torture."

"It is the rule, adopted by a majority of the members," rejoined the other, angrily, "and I see no reason for making this old land-pirate an exception, merely because he is wealthy, and wears fine clothes."

"I second the motion for scourging," announced Mose Minton, "as judges, we must manifest no partiality."

At that instant, the beautiful Jenny Moore suddenly bowed upon her knees before the itinerant Hiram Baker, and clasping her hands as if in prayer, fixed an imploring look on his countenance. Her features were pale and unspeakably sad; yet she uttered not a word, for fear of separation from the side of her father; but the mournful pantomime said, in language more powerful than any words, had they been spoken in thunder, "Save him! you alone can save him."

Her lovely, beseeching face, and posture of ineffable grief, touched several to tears, and the young preacher made an appeal of mingled argument and pathos in behalf of mercy, surpassing his usual eloquence; but the cries of indignation and wrath, from the mob around the windows, soon drowned his voice, and obliged him to desist.

Lawyer Rider then conceived an expedient to evade the question, for the present, and remarked, "Let us postpone the

examination of the judge, for a while, and take up the case of the boy Tuttle."

"Yes, I am in favor of that," exclaimed Major Morrow, eagerly; "he killed my son, and I demand blood for blood, and I want to see the man who will deny the debt!"

"What do you say, Jack Randolph?" inquired President Parker; "you are charged with the murder of Morton Morrow; are you guilty or not?"

"I popped him over because he struck my daddy, when his hands were tied, and I'd do it again," answered the boy, boldly.

"He owns the fact; let him be condemned at once," cried the major, furiously, adding a murderous menace; "whoever dares vote against it, shall have his ribs tickled with the pike of my bowie-knife, in a way that won't make him feel like laughing, I swear!"

The question being put by the chairman, received seven suffrages in the affirmative, while the others, either deterred by the chief lyncher's threat, or being satisfied how utterly useless would be all efforts in opposition, abstained altogether from voting.

"I move that he be executed this very minute!" cried the major, with a hoarse chuckle, that sounded more like the growl of a wild beast, than any intonations of a human voice.

"And I second the proposition," said the Millenarian; "perhaps the spectacle will bring Judge Moore to his senses."

In vain the more merciful members urged delay until the morrow; the mob around the house yelled like an army of wolves, for the immediate slaughter, and the resolution was carried by a majority of two.

"I will hang him myself," affirmed the arch-regulator, his grey eyes gleaming like those of a rattlesnake in the act of striking, and hastily producing a cord, he fastened one end around the boy's neck, and threw the other over the joist.

Little Jack grew mortally pale, and trembled slightly, but he offered no petition for his young life. He only looked at his father, and cried, in a faint, yet tolerably firm, tone: "Good bye, daddy; if they don't hang you, tell mamma and my sisters good bye, too, and kiss the baby for me. I wish as how I could see 'em all before I go!"

"Blood for blood!" shouted the merciless major, as he jerked the loose end of the rope, and hoisted the poor child into the air.

"Brother Dave will have blood for blood!" exclaimed the hunter, in accents so fearfully, preternaturally hollow, as almost to freeze the very marrow in the bones of the horrified hearers, while great tears of blended sorrow and rage rolled down his sun-burnt cheeks; but not a muscle quivered, not a limb shook, as he gazed upon the writhing awful agonies of his son. His nerves seemed changed to steel.

At that moment, a tall, powerful man, with burning black eyes, swarthy features, and a countenance of unutterable daring, galloped up into the yard, leaped from his horse, pierced through the crowd, and entered the parlor. The sentinels had attempted to arrest his progress, but he waved them aside, with a gesture of lofty disdain, and they all recoiled from his fierce looks, and the full uniform of an officer in the Texan army.

The instant he stood in the presence of the astonished com-

mittee, he cried, in a voice of thundering menace, "Rebels and assassins, what is this I behold? Are ye murdering a child?" and snatching his sword from the scabbard, at a single blow he severed the cord, and released the dying boy.

"Who are you, that thus dare to trifle with your own life?" shouted a dozen lynchers in the same breath.

"I am Colonel Cook, the aid of General Houston," answered the other with a grand air; "and who are you that seek the hemp of the common hangman, by your treason and black-hearted homicides? Away with you, wretches and cowards that ye are, to the Comanches, whose craven cruelty your bloody crimes would disgrace!"

Several members of the council started from their seats, in frightful agitation, as if to obey literally the stern mandate; but Major Morrow fulminated to the ruffians around the door:

"Boys, let no one, friend or foe, leave this house! if anybody attempts to do so, send a score of rifle balls through his brain!"

"That we will!" bellowed the desperadoes; "huzza! for the free state of Tanaha, for ever!"

When this savage order was given, and greeted with such a cordial response, the passion of the Texan officer became absolutely appalling. His dark eyes flashed jets of flame, and his entire visage looked lurid as a face wreathed with the wing of a thunder-cloud, as he exclaimed:

"Fools, rebels, and assassins! do you, indeed, think to defy the public force, as well as to violate all law, human and divine? before the sun sets to-morrow, old Houston will swing you all on a gallows higher than that of Haman, unless you bow down in

prompt submission to the proclamation, which I bring you!" and the colonel drew from his pocket a document bearing the great seal of Texas.

"Do not let him read it!" vociferated Major Morrow. "Boys, cock and present your guns!"

An ominous sharp clicking was heard at all the doors and windows, showing that the desperadoes stood ready to fire at the first signal of their leader; and the muzzles of more than fifty rifles covered Colonel Cook's head and heart. He smiled at the danger, however, with an aspect of infinite scorn, and remarked in clear, calm tones:

"Did I not just pronounce you all cowards and murderers? and now you would prove the truth of my assertion by shooting a man without giving him a chance. I am willing to fight half-a-dozen of your best bravoos; but five hundred such dogs are too many to kill at once!"

"Never mind what he says, boys," commanded the major; "wait until I give the word, and then blow him into mince-meat!"

"Are you all alike rebels, gentlemen?" inquired the officer, scowling at the different members of the committee; "do you know that the President has proclaimed martial law, and that every one of you caught with arms in his hands will die the death of a traitor, without the hope of mercy?"

A few of the council commenced protestations; but the arch-lyncher interposed:

"By Heaven! if one of you offer to desert our cause, I'll have him shot before the cowardly word gets cold on his lying lips!"

then turning towards the colonel, he said sternly; "Sir, surrender your sword!"

Young Bolling and the itinerant Baker, both fearing a refusal from the fiery Texan, and foreseeing the fatal consequences of his rashness, entreated:

"For God's sake, do not throw away your life so imprudently. you are not aware of these men's desperation!"

"Never!" responded the officer, with a countenance of superb pride, and ineffable scorn; "never shall this blade of stainless steel, placed in my grasp by the patriot and hero, the father of his country, suffer the burning disgrace of going into the hand of a wretched rebel, doubly damned with the pollution of both blood and treason!"

"Take aim at his head!" cried the major, almost inarticulate with rage, and the next instant, Texas would have lost one of the brightest stars that burned on the gory field of San Jacinto, when quick as a thought, Colonel Cook broke his sword across his knee, and dashing down the fragments at Morrow's feet, thundered in accents that made hundreds of the bravest desperadoes grow pale:

"There, assassins! when those two pieces of glorious steel coalesce again, then may your treason find pardon; but never till then!" and he wheeled to leave the parlor.

"Halt!" roared the chief regulator; "stir not another step, or your life is not worth a copper. You are our prisoner, or a dead man in spite of hell and Houston!"

"Very well, so be it," answered the officer, with a malicious,

mocking laugh ; "but I shall live to see you all hanged, nevertheless !"

Then, by the order of the major, he was fettered like the other prisoners, and the committee renewed their deliberations, the friends of humanity in a state of pale, shuddering agitation, but the ruthless and reckless in a more murderous mood than ever ; since they had put themselves beyond the reach of mercy, and had no hope now, save in desperation.

"I move," said the Millenarian, "that the accused be all condemned to death, in the aggregate, without any more ado about it !"

"I second the motion," urged Major Morrow ; "and then let old Sam get them back out of the grave, if he can !"

"And I move, that the tall feller, what broke his sword, be hung up with tothers," added Mose Minton ; "he's got too much breath, and a little mite of chokin' will do 'im good !"

"I second the amendment," cried the chief, with his fiendish chuckle ; "he boasted that he would see us hang ; but he'll have to do it with stony eyeballs !"

"That's the brave talk !" yelled the mob at the door and windows ; "huzza for the free state of Tanaha for ever !"

Parsons Carter and Johnson opposed the atrocious proposition, but the terrible threats of the ruffians, without, prevailed against their prudent councils, and the measure became a law.

"I move that they all be executed immediately," insisted Dodson ; "the sooner the dirty job is off our hands the better."

"So say I," seconded the major, "such promptitude and decision will terrify even old Sam himself ; and he'll think twice before he shows his head in the dangerous air of Tanaha."

The two Methodist ministers objected, with still greater warmth and boldness, to this ruinous course, which would necessarily involve them all in the guilt of murder ; but the deafening shouts of the mob drowned their arguments, and the doom of the victims appeared to be sealed, when a messenger rushed into the room, crying, in fearful accents, "The Rangers are marching against us, and will be here before dark !"

Most of the committee turned pale at the intelligence, and many a desperate heart beat like a muffled drum.

"How do you know, Jack Simonton ?" interrogated Major Morrow, without any symptoms of fright.

"I seed them myself, this forenoon, not twenty miles from Shelbyville."

"But perhaps they are only after the robbers," suggested the Millenarian.

"No," answered Jack, trembling in every joint, "they had heern of your nabbin' Judge Moore, and old Sam wur cussin' orfully. It raelly made my har stick up like bristles, to listen to him."

"Well, boys, there is nothing more to be done but stand, and fight it out. Let us begin by hanging these friends of the President !" exclaimed the chief, with his truculent chuckle.

Lawyer Rider now interposed. "Let us commit no such folly. It would be worse than cutting off our own noses. The wisest plan will be to keep the prisoners chained and closely

guarded in one of the rooms up stairs. Then, if we succeed in defeating the Rangers, we can execute the condemned afterwards. But if, on the other hand, they should storm our castle, we will be innocent of the awful crime of murder, and we may easily quibble out of the charge for treason. And besides, they will hesitate to attack us, from the fear of shooting their own friends."

This adroit view of the case commended itself so strongly to the prudence of all, that it was finally adopted, and the prisoners being removed up stairs, the regulators prepared for an obstinate defence.

The itinerant Baker now whispered in young Bolling's ear, "Let us all who are opposed to this horrible insurrection, manage, if we can, to occupy the upper rooms, and concert some means for our own safety." The youth assented, and the circuit-rider proceeded to urge the same advice upon all the members of the Methodist communion, while the other sought his black man Cæsar, and thenceforth kept him by his side.

The day rolled heavily away, and at the dusk of twilight, the Rangers appeared in full view, and halted near the gate through which William Bolling had passed on his first visit to the farm. The troop of bloodhounds and other savage dogs, flew towards the strangers, uttering unearthly yells; but a volley of bullets and buckshot soon silenced their discordant cries, stretching half their number at their hairy length, along the ground, and sending back the rest howling and limping to their kennels.

Immediately, a messenger galloped into the yard, notwith-

standing the challenge of the sentinels, and bloody threats of the lynchers. He paused at the very muzzles of the guns, and cried in a loud voice, "Traitors to your country, I summon you, in the name of the Republic of Texas, to throw down your arms, and surrender at discretion, otherwise you can hope for no clemency at the hands of the Executive."

"Why don't old Sam come, and read his own proclamation?" asked Major Morrow, with a derisive laugh.

"General Houston has gone back to hurry up five hundred brave Red Landers, so that you may perceive it will be sheer madness for you to resist them."

"Who, then, is the commander of yonder cowardly squad?" inquired the chief lyncher, with a sneer.

"Colonel Henderson," replied the other, with solemn dignity, "And I warn you not to test the courage of those troops. They are the men of San Jacinto, and are terribly exasperated by the shamefulness of your conduct."

"If they be such fire-eaters, let them come on; they will find us a tougher morsel to digest than the faint-hearted greasers," retorted the major.

"Once more, and for the last time, I demand an immediate and unconditional surrender," shouted the officer, "and if you obey not, I now admonish all who value their lives, to escape from this accursed and doomed crowd of rebels, and if my advice be not heeded, their blood be upon their own heads."

"Your blood shall redden the earth first, my fine boaster!" exclaimed the furious chief, as he levelled a pistol at the officer's heart.

But the latter wheeled his horse, and darted away like an arrow, while a shower of balls whistled around him, piercing his person, but not dangerously, in several places. Everybody expected now that the assault would commence in earnest. However, for some reason, it was delayed.

In the meantime, the opposers of the insurrection had collected in small groups in the upper rooms of the building; for the majority were too much absorbed in their busy preparations for the coming struggle, to observe the actions of the few.

Suddenly one of the guard, set to watch the prisoners, called out :

"Colonel Cook wants to converse with the Methodist minister, to fit his soul for the death he must shortly die."

Baker approached, and upon being admitted, the officer drew him into a corner, and said in a whisper :

"The rangers have a piece of artillery, and some one must contrive to reach their camp, and tell them not to aim at the second story, as it is occupied by the prisoners, and their friends."

The itinerant soon returned, and after communicating the fact to his associates, Parson Carter determined to bear the message. He descended into the yard, and passing through the lines, drew near the sentinels, and remarked in a low, confidential voice :

"I am dispatched on a mission to the hostile camp," upon which, they allowed him to proceed.

"No pen can describe the anxiety that pervaded the block-house during that sleepless night. The lynchers stood it out

with guns cocked in their hands, expecting every moment to be attacked. Several of them, indeed, attempted to escape under cover of the darkness, and were shot down by their own sentinels; for such had been the merciless order of their ferocious leader.

Nor could the condition of the captives and their sympathizers be regarded as much more favorable; since, if the regulators should discover the impossibility of holding their position, it was highly probable, that they would massacre the prisoners, before they endeavored to retreat; and, although a small party would stand by them to the last extremity, this force was feeble compared with the number that thirsted for their blood.

The feelings of young Bolling were of the most painfully excruciating character. He knew, that if the rangers should even succeed in carrying the block-house by storm, in the moment of victory, when all the inmates should be mingled together, it could not be hoped that the troops of the Republic either could, or would discriminate between the innocent and guilty; and if they did not fall beneath the bowie or bullet, they still incurred the more loathsome risk of being hung for treason. Then his mind would wander to a yet sadder subject. His affianced bride was, doubtless, in the power of the brutal bandits, and the very thought was a dagger in his brain, a serpent's tooth in his heart, a torture more unendurable than the flames of the martyr's stake!

In the meanwhile, a most touching picture was presented in the room of the prisoners. The boy, Jack Randolph, having been resuscitated, after the rope around his neck had been cut by the

sword of Colonel Cook, now clung with unceasing tears to the hunter's bosom, murmuring in mournful whispers of mother and of home, in which the tender word "baby" was often repeated by heart-breaking sobs. The countenance of Sol looked stern and gloomy; but, although his hands, blistered all over by the torture of the morning, must have caused the most intense pain, he never uttered the slightest complaint, or seemed even conscious of the sensation. He was thinking of something else; and the dark passion of revenge on his sunburnt face appeared more awfully ominous than the frown of an electric cloud.

The promised brides of the two Bartons clasped the necks of their lovers; for in this perilous crisis, all cold calculations of prudence were forgotten, and nature untrammelled had her course.

The beautiful Jenny Moore was seated in one corner, on the lap of her father, whispering the praises of the young and handsome itinerant, whose brave eloquence had so powerfully defended the holy cause of humanity. Oh! sweet mysterious madness of universal love, what immortal magic is thine, that defies all danger, and rules even in the house of death!

CHAPTER XXI.

MARY AND LUCY

ABOUT noon of the same day, when the events happened that have been detailed at such length in the foregoing chapter, the agitation among the bandits, at the residence of their chief, fully equalled, if it could not surpass that which prevailed at the headquarters of their mortal enemies, the Regulators. Every arrangement had been made for a desperate resistance against any assault; whether from the mob or the militia of the Republic, and every one seemed determined to hold the position or perish in its ruins; since an inevitable death of shame would follow a surrender.

Captain Carlyle, Lieutenant Curran, Colonel Miles, and all the most intelligent and trustworthy members of the felonious party were collected in the library engaged in consultation. The two former presented their ordinary coolness and self-possession, while the father of Mary seemed unusually sad and gloomy.

At length their discussion was interrupted by the entrance of Dublin Jack who announced, "Captain, thar's a man out yonder, what has hailed the sentinels, and sez he's come from old Houston."

"Did he give his name?" inquired Carlyle, eagerly.

"No, but he's got yer pass-word, and axed whur mout be the moon."

"Show him in," ordered the chief hastily, and his black eyes sparkled with fiery animation.

In a brief space, the stranger crossed the threshold and saluted the several robbers by name as if they had been old and familiar acquaintances. He was a stout, heavy, red-faced man, with common features, and sharp grey eyes, restless and scrutinizing in their glances, at once expressing shrewdness, cunning, and suspicion. He wore the uniform of the Red Land Rangers, with the shoulder-knot indicating his rank as a major, and walked with a proud martial strut, which contrasted ludicrously with his squat, awkward figure, and coarse, angular visage.

"How are you getting along, boys?" asked the messenger in a friendly tone; "I see that you stand ready for the tug of war?"

"Let us have your own news, at once, Major Thorn," urged Carlyle impatiently.

"It is bad enough Heaven knows," said the other, in lamentable accents; "the President is on the march, with half a thousand men, and he is awfully enraged against the outlaws of Tanaha, as he invariably terms your people."

"How near is the army?"

"In Shelbyville, by this time."

At this unexpected answer, the bandits uttered a simultaneous ejaculation of surprise, and the Captain sprung to his feet,

exclaiming; "then we shall be attacked before the middle of the afternoon."

"There is no fear of that," answered Major Thorn, with confidence; "for when General Houston heard that the lynchers were preparing to hang Judge Moore, he changed his immediate destination, and is now pushing on the whole force of Rangers and Red Landers to storm old Morrow's fortress."

"How did he chance to dispense with your valuable services?" interrogated Carlyle, in tones of latent sarcasm.

"Oh, he sent me to you, with an important message," replied the other, with a cunning gleam in his unquiet grey eyes.

"Then, why do you not discharge your lofty mission, dear Major?" said the bandit.

"That may be soon done, as it is so brief, and to the point," affirmed the officer; "in plain terms, the President has deputed me to command you all, in the name and by the authority of the Republic of Texas, to surrender yourselves at discretion, and stand your trials for robbery and murder, and if you fail in obedience to the order, then, he swears that every one of you shall be exterminated without mercy, under the horrors of martial law!"

"By Heaven! he, and many of his own men shall bite the dust with bloody mouths, before that day shall dawn!" cried Carlyle, with a murderous light in his eyes; "we can maintain this position until our friends arrive from Arkansas, and then we shall see who will boast the loudest."

"You cannot hold this house half a day against Houston and the Rangers!" declared the major, solemnly, "and more than

that, they can batter it down without so much as losing a man !”

“How ! what the devil do you mean ?” shouted all the robbers in fright and amazement.

“I mean, simply, that they have brought a piece of artillery along with them.”

“Then we are, indeed, lost,” complained Colonel Miles, in despairing accents, while the others, with pallid features, stood as if utterly stupified by the intelligence.

The captain first recovered from the astounding shock, as the fire in his dark eyes blazed afresh, and he said, in tones of desperate determination, “Well, we still have until to-morrow, to throw up works for our defence, and we may triumph yet.”

“It would be madness to attempt such an act of folly,” urged Thornton, “thousands of Texans would shortly surround you, and cut off all possibility of retreat. You must be insane, as old Morrow is himself, to think of defying the whole power of the republic !”

“Then what would you advise ?” demanded the chief, sharply, “to give ourselves up, and die the death of dogs ?”

“By no means,” responded the officer, earnestly. “I do not confer on my friends such indifferent counsel. You have but one safe course left ; escape with your slaves, and hide in the swamps, until the tempest shall have blown over, and the President returns to the seat of government.”

“That is the only chance,” ejaculated Mary’s father, in tremulous accents, and with many tokens of terror.

“Colonel, I am truly astonished to find you so faint-hearted

in the presence of danger,” remarked the captain, with a contemptuous look.

“I feel no more alarm on my own account, than you do yourself,” retorted Miles, angrily, “but I tremble to reflect on the fate of my daughter.”

“Never mind ; I’ll take special care of the lovely girl,” answered Carlyle, with a sneer.

Lieutenant Curran interposed. “Let us have no discord among ourselves to render the crisis more perilous. I am perfectly satisfied that Major Thornton’s advice is the best. In truth, we have no other choice remaining but to adopt it, or stay, and be penned up like a herd of hogs for the slaughter. So, I move for the freedom of the wild woods and green bowers of tufted cane, with birds to make us music, and the starry heavens for our chandelier.”

As all the council of robbers concurred in this more rational view of the case, except the chief, after many earnest remonstrances, he finally yielded an unwilling acquiescence, and the plan was fixed to be carried out the ensuing night. Major Thornton then took his leave, with the promise to inform the black band, from time to time, as occasion might offer, of everything that concerned their interest, in the movements of the army.

In the meanwhile, Lucy and Mary, from the window of their room, had noticed the approach and departure of the officer, and the former observed to her companion, “See, there goes one of Carlyle’s most unscrupulous tools, although he wears the uniform of a Texan officer.”

"I am truly astonished to hear you say so," answered the other.

"But that is not all," continued Lucy, "for the felons have managed to fill several civil posts with their creatures, and have members and spies scattered all over the country. Their scheme is one of the most stupendous ever devised by such outlaws."

"I shudder to think of their power," replied Mary, with sad emotion, "and especially as I am now their hopeless captive, and even slave."

"We must escape, if practicable, this evening," said Lucy, "for Comanche Ben thinks that the house will be attacked by the Rangers in the morning, and if the robbers should be forced to retreat, they will be sure to carry us off with them."

"Are you certain that the Indian will prove faithful to us?" asked the young girl, with a look of suspicion.

"As much so as I am of my own existence," affirmed Lucy, without hesitation.

The two conversed but little more during the day, but wandered restlessly in the wilderness of their separate and solitary thoughts, which appeared wild and gloomy in the extreme, unblessed even by a single flower of hope, or a lonely ray of happiness. The melancholy mistress of Carlyle, however, had the advantage of possessing an object in her dark meditations of revenge, and she paced the floor with unquiet steps, impatient for the doom of her victim; often muttering unconsciously to herself, or pausing with a lurid smile, as if gazing at some image painted in the air. For every passion of the human

heart embodies itself in fancy pictures, as vivid as sunlight to the sharp eye of the imagination; and the phantoms, ever present now to the woman's mental sight, assumed the form of a grim gallows-tree, with the figure of her unfaithful lover dangling from the lofty limb.

Mary, on the other hand, indulged a thousand changing day-dreams as to the destiny of her absent idol; but continually the sneering visage of the outlaw mingled in all her reveries, thrusting itself between her and the promised bridal. Indeed, she had but too much cause to fear the cruel desperation of the bandit.

The feelings of the young girl towards her companion, were of a strange, indefinable, and contradictory character. She admired her amazing beauty, pitied her marvellous misfortunes, and experienced the warmest gratitude for her sympathy and kindness; but still the repulsion more than equalled the attraction; for she could not suppress her deep abhorrence, either of the crimes that the other had already committed, or the cruel vengeance which still brooded in her bosom. She could not even imagine how this boundless, burning hatred could find a habitation in the soul, once illumined with the divine light of the tenderest, truest love; and as she surveyed the fierce smile on those fair features, and the arrowy fires of the glittering black eyes, she felt, as if in the presence of some supernatural, or diabolical agent, belonging to a different order from the creatures of human clay, and predestined to horrible fatalities. Even the sound of her wild, bewitching voice seemed unearthly, and without resemblance to the tones of mortal speech; and she could

not forget that this had been the wife of the murdered Juan Gordo, and that she herself was the daughter of one of the assassins ; and thus by a natural law governing the association of ideas, she could not look upon her new friend without a painful tremor.

At length, the sun declined, and the dark purple shadows of twilight fell over field and forest, while, here and there, the eternal beauty of the stars began to beam with pale fires in the firmament.

"Now, let us go forth, under pretense of a brief stroll," whispered Lucy, as she filled her bosom and the pockets of her dress, with handfuls of jewels and gold coins.

The two women then put on their cloaks, without bonnets, in order to allay suspicion as to their purpose, and descending into the parlor, where they found no one, passed out into the yard. Here, they were both alike struck by the appearance of hurry and bustle, and the evident preparations for a general removal. Hundreds of horses stood bridled and saddled, burdened with heavy packs, as if for an immediate journey, while utensils for cooking, and various articles of light furniture, lay scattered about in all directions. Even the slaves had been collected in front of the door, and each ebon hand bore its bundle of clothing.

"What can it all mean?" asked Mary, in a whisper, and trembling with nameless apprehension.

"The robbers are going to retreat," replied the other ; "let us glide away as fast as we can, without attracting observation"

At the moment, the rude tones of Dublin Jack hailed them :

"Whur ar' you guyin', gals? The captain ordered us not to allow nobody to leave these diggins, till we all go in a pile."

"Where is your leader now?" interrogated Lucy in a careless voice.

"Gone out fur a walk, I 'spose."

"Well, we wish to take a little turn around the field. You need not be afraid of our running off without our bonnets, remarked Lucy with an affected laugh.

"Then, be in a hurry about it, for we're all to make tracks in five minutes," said the desperado.

The females hastened forwards, in a line diverging from the main road, in the direction of the fence near the bank of the Tanaha. This they gained without interruption, and were about to cross over into the forest, when they came suddenly upon Lieutenant Curran.

"Where now, ladies?" inquired the robber in surprise ; "these are dangerous times for romantic rambles by starlight."

"We are seeking for a few sweet mouthfuls of the cool evening air," suggested Lucy, with her usual presence of mind.

"I am afraid, that you will get more than you want before the noon of night," rejoined Curran ; "I suppose that the captain has informed you of the intended emigration?"

"No ; but we will be back in a few minutes, and then you can tell us the facts," responded the woman, as she and the young girl turned towards the road.

"Pardon the impoliteness," said the lieutenant interposing ;

"I fear, that the chief will be very angry if I suffer you to escape, for such is evidently your object."

During the previous dialogue, Mary had quivered with the dread of this inevitable arrest, and now, almost without the consciousness of her acts, she implored the young man :

"Oh ! for pity's sake do not detain us. I have never harmed you, and it cannot advance your interest or happiness to break my heart. I would rather die than be the prisoner of your cruel captain, who has the baseness to seek by force the hand of a girl that abhors him !"

"Well, you may proceed, ladies, without molestation from me. It is my misfortune to be a robber, but nature will not permit me to be a ruffian also."

The maiden faltered her thanks, and again the companions hastened to reach the woods, rejoicing greatly at the unexpected generosity of Curran. They soon crossed the fence, a short distance from the farm-gate, and began to consider themselves safe, when another incident opposed their progress.

Suddenly a shrill whistle pierced the silent ear of night, and a hoarse voice shouted :

"Thar's sumthen in the bushes, boys, see what it is."

"Whar ? whar ?" inquired half-a-dozen others.

"Thar, under the big pine-tree ; close up round the place quick, and shoot if anybody starts to run off."

The two females crouched down beneath a small shrub, and endeavored to cover themselves with its leafy mantle of luxuriant wild vines, while they could almost hear as well as feel the tumultuous and terrible throbings of their own agitated hearts,

as the brush on all sides rustled and cracked louder and nearer to their hiding-place, till, at last, one of the men stood within three feet of their bodies.

"I don't see nuthen at all here, whatsumever," cried the robber, and turned to depart.

"Wait thar till I come and look," ordered the first voice, and the moment afterwards two more approached the bush which served to screen the fugitives.

"Here it is, and a gal, too, or I'll be switched," exclaimed Roaring Dick, as with a grip of his iron fingers he dragged the young girl, more dead than alive, from the curtain of tangled vines.

"Who are you ?" inquired the outlaw, rudely, "and what brung you into the brush like a possum ?"

Mary was too horribly frightened to articulate a syllable, when Lucy sprang out with a merry ringing laugh, exclaiming, "Well, Roaring Dick, confess the truth, did we not scare you ?"

"Scare the devil !" ejaculated the robber ; "but I want to know what you're doing out here in the woods, arter dark, instead of packin' up your traps at the house, for the cane ?"

"We were amusing ourselves with a short evening walk, when we heard you, and thought of this slight frolic ; but were you not really alarmed ?"

Before the other could reply, the piercing tones of a bugle sounded from the block-house, and then came the thundering echoes of horses galloping over the field in all directions. Mary staggered with terror, for she felt that their absence had been

discovered, and that these tokens indicated a determined pursuit. But Lucy spoke in calm accents. "Come, Miss Miles, let us now return; our friends may be uneasy on our account. Good bye, Dick, and pardon the fright that we gave you."

"By thunder! you leave not this spot without my company," declared the desperado. "You had started to run away, that's the fact; but I've grabbed you, and you'll not get loose till I put you in the clutches of our captain."

In vain the females pleaded and protested. Roaring Dick seized a hand of each, and hurried them onwards through the gate to the dwelling. Colonel Miles and the chief of the gang received the refugees at the door with lowering looks, and as soon as they reached the parlor, the storm of wrath broke forth.

"Lucy, what means this conduct?" exclaimed Carlyle, nearly beside himself with passion.

"Why, what have I done?" asked the artful woman, in tones of blended surprise and innocence.

"What reason induced you two to wander out after dark, and even into the forest?"

"Have I not always been accustomed to such evening rambles?" urged Lucy.

"But wherefore did you endeavor to conceal yourselves from my men?"

"Simply because we could not know, in the darkness of the woods, whose men they were."

Finding that every one of his own guns was turned against him, and deceived by the apparent truthfulness of Lucy's manner, the captain wavered, but, nevertheless, tried a last

shot. "Why did you go out, when you must have been sure that I did not wish it?"

"Brother, dear, you must be crazy," said the pretended sister, with a smile, "for I never before heard an objection to my usual strolls."

"But you knew of our intention to remove from here to-night."

"Did you tell me?"

"That is true; forgive this hasty suspicion," remarked the chief, after a moment's reflection, "and now get ready for a night journey. We must retreat from the accursed Rangers, and the devil only can foresee when we shall return."

Lucy and Mary hastened instantly to their room, when the mistress of the robber clasped the young girl's hand affectionately, and insisted: "Do not resign yourself to despair, my dear friend. We will foil the villain yet, by using the proper coolness and cunning. He will have many opportunities of conversing with you during our excursion, and I implore you, as you would hope to see your own true love again, do not irritate the outlaw by useless insult. If he presses his suit, procrastinate a decisive answer; for every day and hour brings him nearer to his inevitable doom. I have more than one confidant among his gang, and if he tries force rather than persuasion, that second he shall die. Be prudent, be hopeful, and fear no harm. Will you follow my advice?"

"Yes," murmured Mary, in a faint tone, through her tears; and they dressed themselves for their disagreeable travel, and soon the whole party moved forwards.

It took some time to ferry over the Sabine, and the colonel and captain, with the two females, crossed last. As they reached the top of the opposite bank, an extraordinary scene was presented. The entire company of three hundred desperate men stood huddled together, like a flock of frightened sheep, apparently stupefied and distracted by supernatural horror. Their teeth chattered, their eyes rolled wildly in the darkness, and their very lips seemed frozen beyond the power to breathe so much as a whisper.

"Forward, march!" exclaimed Carlyle, but not a foot stirred, and some of the more timid leaped from their saddles, and crouched upon the earth, as if to hide from some terrible vision.

"Fools and cowards! what is the matter? have you lost your senses, or seen a ghost?" thundered the captain, unable to conceive the reason of this unaccountable conduct.

Roaring Dick drew near his leader, and pointing with a tremulous finger at something about twenty-five paces distant, by the side of the road, gasped an awful whisper:

"Look there!"

The chief turned his eyes in the direction indicated, and suddenly shook like a leaf in the hurricane, while the clear starlight on his features showed them livid as those of a corpse.

Indeed, the spectacle was enough to strike the heart of the murderer with unimaginable amazement and horror. For there, on the very spot, where he had buried a pair of victims, stood two tall forms in the human shape, wrapped in long winding-sheets, white as the driven snow, motionless, silent, awful to behold.

"Them ar' Parson Cole and Bob Bennet!" faltered Dick, scarcely daring to draw his breath.

"And is it even so?" muttered Carlyle, with cold, quivering lips; can the souls of the slain recross the ferry of the dark river to haunt their bloody graves? Is there truly a world of spirits, and do the dead, indeed, never die? Must we meet on the shore of shadows, the men that we have murdered on the earth? It is too horrible!"

How wildly wonderful is the emotion of mighty Fear, whether it builds its black house of horror on the arches of the infant mind; or weaves the wizard's web of superstition for the pall of numberless nations; or works its icy agony in the mystic depths of the individual heart; or waves its pale sceptre in the silent air, and the world of living men cower in the dust; or thunders in the rear of routed armies, as if all the devils in the hold of hell were in the chase; or smites the conquering hero's knees, like an earthquake, in the very crisis of victory; or fills the asylum of the insane; or peoples the weird solitude of dreams, with phantoms of death and demons! Everywhere, and ever, it is still the same mystery of a madness, as universal as man!

At length, Lieutenant Curran, who had paused to water his horse, ascended the bank, and, astonished at the appearance of the band, cried out:

"Captain, why do not you move on?"

The other spoke not, but pointed his shaking finger at the hideous apparitions.

Curran burst into a loud laugh, exclaiming:

"Well, boys, have you found a pair of ghosts at last? I never heard before that such animals hunted in couples!"

In such cases of general consternation, the sound of one fearless, ringing voice, usually breaks the force of the icy spell; and so it operated with the robbers. Many of them began to conclude that these ghostly figures must either be optical illusions, or perhaps, white stumps, that they had never noticed previously; but a respectable minority still persisted in their horrifying faith.

"Them ar' Parson Cole and Bob Bennet, lieutenant, for sartan!" affirmed Roaring Dick, recovering sufficient courage to use his tongue.

"Come on, boys, and let us speak to them," said Curran, riding to the front, and hailing the objects. "Who are ye, melancholy forms that hover above the bones of the dead? answer, or by Heaven, I'll put a bullet through your night-gowns!"

There was no response; and the lieutenant discharged his pistol; but the white robed apparitions remained immovable and silent as ever.

"There is one comfort, at least, if they be ghosts, they do not seem to be armed, or else they would return the fire," laughed Curran; "and now, men, do as I command, and at the word, deal them a volley. Make ready—take aim—fire!"

The roar of the entire platoon, pealed like thunder on the still air of night, and awakened ten thousand sleeping echoes in the old woods, which rung again; but when the smoke cleared away

and the figures once more became visible, a hundred voices uttered wild exclamations of dismay and terror.

The apparitions still kept their position over the ashes of the murdered men, but they were no longer motionless. They swayed back and forwards, waving their long skeleton arms, as if to warn the robbers away from this haunted ground!

"Didn't I tell you them wur no bein's of flesh and blood!" gasped Roaring Dick; "them ar' things that the biggest cannon couldn't bring down!"

"I'll soon see what stuff they are made of," shouted Curran, as he sprung from his horse, and rushed upon the ghosts, while the others held their breath, expecting, every instant, to behold those shaking, shadowy arms grasp their adventurous victim, and fly away with him bodily.

Suddenly the lieutenant bore down the two figures, and exclaimed, with boisterous laughter:

"Come on, boys, I have conquered the spectres."

They were, indeed, nothing but shapes having the human outline, formed of masculine clothing, sewed together, and stuffed with cotton. Being suspended on slender sticks, which many bullets of the volley had struck, the collision had caused that wavering motion that had so frightened the bandits.

"Did you arrange this piece of folly, Curran?" demanded the chief, with much severity of tone and manner.

"No, captain, upon my sacred honor," replied the lieutenant earnestly.

"I ordered Comanche Ben to do it," whispered Lucy in the ear of Mary.

Indeed, Carlyle felt almost as great fear now, although of a different kind, as he had previously experienced, while under the impression that he saw weird visitants from the ghostly world. None of his own band could have done this, he well knew, from their unfeigned fright, and besides, it was dangerous to them all—this evident indication of a bloody secret, which they had buried in the earth. It must then have been some enemy, who had learned the mystery of a murder, for which he might yet be called to suffer the death-penalty of the violated law !

CHAPTER XXII.

MAJOR MORROW AND JOANNA.

Two distinguished phrenologists, Doctors Powel and Buchanan of Cincinnati, have, at different times, travelled all over the western frontier, and both gave the same reason for their tour of observation, that they could find more angular heads, more organs of strongly defined character here in these remote woods, than in countries under the restraints of civilization.

The causes, producing this general fact, are obvious. The first emigrants to the wilderness, must, of necessity, possess both perseverance and prowess, in an eminent degree, to dare the difficulties and dangers which oppose the progress of the pioneer ; who must do battle with wild beasts and wilder men, while he wars with the very elements for existence itself. Feeble souls never venture into such a contest, or at least, fly at the outset of the struggle. The circumstances surrounding the settlers, also tend unceasingly to the development of marked peculiarities. Death-defying courage is the dominant principle in society, and the only avenue to influence, fame, and fortune, and more than all, the trammels of law, custom, and public opinion, being

removed, the instincts, and original passions of the man, are left free for their unfettered and natural growth and utmost expansion, without hindrance or an attempt at concealment. Every person follows the primitive and hereditary bent of his own mind, and shows what he is, in his countenance and conduct.

Perhaps, there could not have been found in all the forests of the frontier, a more strange and striking example of the truths just stated, that that which was afforded by the eventful history of the arch-lyncher, Major Morrow. More than twenty-five years before his culmination in Texas, he had rendered his name famous, or more properly notorious, throughout Missouri.

His father was a small farmer, some miles below St. Louis, on the Mississippi river, and sustained an excellent character among his rude and humble neighbors, for honest and orderly behavior. But from his earliest boyhood, young Jack utterly ignored the paths of peaceful labor, and took to the woods, as naturally as an Indian, with his gun and dogs; and by the time he had seen his eighteenth summer, he was a mighty hunter—the unrivalled Nimrod of his native State.

At this period, an incident, happened to arouse within his fiery bosom the most powerful passion which can sway the human heart, either for good or evil. An English family settled in the vicinity, who astonished the ignorant populace, as well by the elegant refinement of their manners, as by their superior acquirements in knowledge. The head of the household announced himself and his accomplished lady as physicians, and very soon the celebrity of the new doctors, Mr. and Mrs. Dewville, rung in everybody's mouth. They were a proud, haughty couple, although

poor, and notwithstanding their scrupulous politeness, their mutual appearance expressed gloom and melancholy, as if they had felt in former years, the shock of some great misfortune, and could not resign themselves to their fate.

They had an only daughter, their common idol, of such remarkable beauty as to bewilder and fascinate the most cynical and coldly careless spectator. With the airy figure of a sylph, the voice of a siren, the love-smile of a seraph on a faultless face, vivid with animation, and eyes of dark light, magical in all their glances, this young girl carried every heart by storm. Her all-conquering charms had created an immense sensation at the hotel, where the family had remained in St. Louis, for a few days after their arrival from the old country, and several of the lovers, who had there become infatuated on first sight, sought her out in her lonely forest home.

Among these was a lawyer Ellsman, a slender, but extremely handsome person, of courtly manners, and considerable fortune, with the most flattering prospects of success in his profession. As soon as his attentions to the beautiful stranger became generally known, all other competitors abandoned the field, in fear and despair; for the young attorney, from his passionate temperament, and deadly skill with the weapons of the duellist, as had been manifested in half-a-dozen terrible combats, was dreaded by the bravest chivalry of Missouri, and no one wished to risk his life against a marksman, who could split his bullet on a knife-blade at twelve paces!

There was, however, a pair of solitary eyes, that watched the visits of the lawyer to the dwelling of his charmer, with the

burning glances of a jealous rage, unmixed with sentiments of fear. The residence of Doctor Dewville was a mile below that of the Morricks, and the road running down the river from the metropolis passed by the door of the latter.

One morning as Ellsman was returning to the city, after spending the night at the habitation of his idol, as he was riding beneath an overhanging cliff, about half way between the houses above mentioned, a strange figure suddenly emerged from a cavern into the narrow road before him, and barred his passage. The visage of the stranger writhed with such a look of unutterable hatred and revenge, and his grey eyes darted such arrows of furious fire, and fierce determination, that even the duellist shuddered slightly, and felt in his pockets for the pistols, which, unluckily, he had forgotten to bring with him.

"Stand aside, if you please, and let me pursue my journey," requested Ellsman, in as tranquil and courteous tones as he could master.

"Not until we have a little conversation," said the other, in a loud hissing whisper, more awful to hear than the loudest thunder-peals of angry passion.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" inquired the attorney in his blandest accents, yet tremulous with terror, as he began to think, that the red-haired, leather-dressed youth must be a maniac.

"My name is Jack Morrow," answered the other, in the same murderous, menacing under-tone; "and I want you never to visit Doctor Dewville's again, or either speak or write to his daughter."

"Why! what is that to you?" exclaimed Ellsman in amazement.

"Because, I love her, and mean to make her my wife," replied Jack, in a terrible voice.

"You!" ejaculated the duellist, bursting into a sneering laugh at the ludicrous idea, which completely dissipated his previous apprehensions.

"Yes, me!" shouted Jack, the hunter, enraged still more by the withering ridicule on the face of his proud rival. "Yes, me!" he repeated in tones that reverberated among the old grey rocks, like thunder; "and by Heaven! I'll have her, in spite of a hundred fops such as you!"

"Have you yet told her the sweet story of your tender love?" asked Ellsman, with a look of burning irony.

"No, but I'll do so at a proper time."

"I have no doubt, that she will duly appreciate the distinguished honor," remarked the lawyer; "and if you obtain her own consent, I shall certainly offer no objection."

"But you must promise me to let her alone herself," cried young Morrow, "or I'll blow out yer heart this minute!" and he levelled his long rifle at the attorney's bosom.

The latter turned mortally pale, and reading the other's deadly purpose in his countenance, signified his acquiescence, but without any intention to keep the involuntary pledge.

The hunter then drew aside, and the lawyer went on, with feelings of shame and mortification, which may be more easily conceived than described. If the truth must be recorded, his

fickle affection was already on the wane, and this rude shock almost crushed out the last latent spark.

A month elapsed before his next visit, occurring early in the morning, and this time he came thoroughly armed. As soon as he had passed the residence of the Morrows, young Jack seized his gun, and following the same road, concealed himself in the cavern beneath the cliff, which had witnessed the former interview, and there he waited impatiently for the return of his rival.

What grounds of hope could this rude, common hunter, entertain to win the hand of the most beautiful and accomplished woman in all Missouri? None whatever; nothing but the reckless daring, the utter desperation of passion, the savage love of the human tiger, resolved to tear in pieces every competitor that crossed his path. He had never yet breathed in the ear of the enchantress, so much as one burning sigh of his fierce desire, although she saw it all in his ardent looks, during his frequent calls, under the pretext of presenting choice specimens of wild game to the doctor. And, although it could not be expected that she should, in the slightest, return the tenderness of so coarse a creature, nevertheless, it did not give her apparent pain; for when was ever the vanity of a woman offended by the silent sacrifice of a whole bleeding heart, as an offering upon the altar of her beauty, however homely might be the worshipper?

At length, Jack Morrow heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and glancing from his hiding-place, trembled violently on beholding his rival and the young girl walking up the road, the

former with the bridle of his horse upon his arm. They paused near the mouth of the cave, and continued the conversation in which they had been engaged for some time.

"I tell you, that we cannot be married for a year, at the least," said the lawyer, with considerable sternness of manner, in reply to some entreaty, which did not reach the hunter's ear.

"Oh! my dearest, you will surely not thus violate your solemn vow, to which I have so rashly trusted," urged the beautiful woman, throwing her arms wildly around his neck, and baptizing his bosom with radiant tears.

"Circumstances must be sometimes allowed to postpone the fulfillment of the most sacred promises, as in this case," answered the attorney, coldly.

"Then indeed I am lost, and utterly ruined!" cried the girl in tones of measureless despair.

"Oh no, women are not so easily ruined as that," replied the other in sneering accents; "they can stand the loss of half a dozen lovers without half breaking their elastic hearts." And he released himself by main strength from her embrace.

Immediately the entire aspect of the young maiden changed, as if under the influence of some devilish transfiguration. Her dark eyes grew wildly terrible, and shot arrows of quivering flame. Her features turned pale as marble, and her white lips parted in double curves, like the coil of a serpent. She raised her hand as if about to smite the lawyer in the face, and asked in a sharp, ringing voice; "Sir, I now ask for the last time, will you wed me according to your promise, or not?"

"The bridal must be deferred," was the chilling response.

"Then it shall be deferred for evermore!" she cried in fearful accents.

"That will please me just as well," he retorted scornfully; adding with a brutal laugh, "in the meantime, you may seek another suitor. I met one here, at this very spot, on my last visit—a fine fellow, dressed in buckskin, with bright crimson hair, who boldly avowed that you should yet be his wife!"

"And so I will," she exclaimed, with an appalling smile; but not until his hand sends your false form to a bloody burial!" The hunter in the adjacent cavern cocked his rifle.

"You will doubtless make an excellent teacher of assassination!" said Ellsman bitterly.

"No he shall hunt you up in the public streets," she boasted, with a laugh of derision more fiendish than his own; "he shall defy you and spit in your very mouth, and force you to meet him on the field of honor; and there he will have every drop of blood in your lying heart!"

"Good bye, Joanna dear, I wish you happiness in the arms of your new lover; but if you would enjoy his beauty long, take care to keep him out of my way," cried the attorney, as he mounted his horse, and galloped away.

The angry woman gazed after him with eyes gleaming red, like those of a female tiger, when suddenly the hunter, Jack Morrow, stood before her, with a storm of mingled love and wrath contending for the mastery of his countenance, which burned in every lineament with flashes of electric light.

"I have heard it all," he said in a horrible whisper, and pointed toward his hiding-place.

Then quick as the coming of a thought, she cast herself upon his bosom, and pressing her pale lips to his, wept and sobbed convulsively, while he poured out his own fiery tears with hers, in gloomy silence. Neither spoke for a full quarter of an hour, but clasped each other's vibrating form in the ardor of that burning embrace; and thus they plighted the marriage contract, that had yet to be sealed with the blood of murder. No verbal pledge was given or required. Their hearts alone communicated with fierce throbbings, and thus they loved without words, like wild animals.

"Farewell, till to-morrow, my Joanna," articulated the young hunter, at last; "I must now be off to St. Louis, on our common errand."

"Yes," she answered with a strange smile; "and when you return, my hand shall be yours."

Jack Morrow went home; prepared his pistols, saddled his horse, and hurried to St. Louis, where he arrived late in the afternoon. In a short time he found Ellsman's office, but no one came to the door in answer to his repeated and violent knocking.

A negro, in an adjoining tenement, attracted by the noise, thrust his head out of a window, and remarked:

"The 'torney ain't in, mas'r."

"When will he be back?" inquired the hunter, in a husky voice.

"I dunno, mas'r; I guess he'll be at the big ball to-night, at Judge Quinn's," answered the African.

"Where does he board?"

"At the Franklin Hotel."

Young Morrow hastened to the house, indicated by the black, and passing into the bar-room on the first floor, discovered his enemy drinking with a number of gay friends, at the counter, all laughing immoderately, while the lawyer detailed with many amusing embellishments, the scene, in which he had been one of the actors during the forenoon.

When he had finished the funny history, according to his relation of it, a tall, stern-featured man, with keen blue eyes, who had listened in silence, remarked in grave accents :

"Mr. Ellsman, I warn you to keep your eye well skinned for the red-haired hunter. I happen to be acquainted with him, and regard him as the most dangerous animal that runs in the woods."

"Nonsense, old Jack Smith T.," replied the attorney, laughing ; "he would fly from the blaze of a pistol, like deer from the prairies on fire." And tossing half a glass of brandy down his throat, the duellist turned and beheld the man, of whom he had just spoken, within two feet of his person.

The features of young Morrow were pale as those of a statue, and rigid as lineaments of iron. The most fearful of all murderous tokens appeared on his visage, in great lurid tears, that rolled, drop by drop, down his sunburnt cheeks. The signs of deadly passion are all terrible enough—the scorching smile, the speechless grinding of the teeth, the snake-like writhing of the livid lips, the red radiations of the flashing eye; but to see a brave man weep with unutterable rage is the most appalling of all—an assurance that blood must flow, as certainly as the

thunder-clap follows the lightning of the summer storm. And so the lawyer understood it ; but relying on his own fatal skill in the arts of the duellist, he felt no sort of apprehension, and addressed the hunter in bantering tones :

"What is your wish, Mr. Fire-eater ; do you seek my life as well as my sweetheart ?"

"I want to shoot you, in a fair fight !" hissed the other through his teeth.

"Do you imagine, that I am going to treat such a ruffian as you like a gentleman?" said Ellsman scornfully ; "you had better hurry home, and wed my cast-off mistress, and I hope you will have much joy with the jade ?"

Sudden as the spring of a panther, the hunter grasped the attorney's nose with his left hand, and his chin with his right, and jerking open his jaws, discharged a full volley of tobacco-juice into his mouth, exclaiming, with a diabolical burst of laughter :

"You'll fight now, I reckon !"

"Yes ! yes !" cried the other, foaming with shame and fury ; "let us arrange the matter instantly ; you must die before sunset ! Who will be your second ?"

"I will," answered old Jack Smith T., coming forward, and shaking Morrow's hand warmly, with the declaration of approval ; "I knew you were made of the genuine metal, and no mistake."

The hostile interview was settled to occur as soon as possible, and Morrow, under the advice of his friend, chose double

barrelled shot-guns, and the parties accompanied by hundreds of anxious spectators, proceeded to cross the river.

The lord of light was just sinking in the western sky, beneath a bed of golden clouds, when the foes took their separate positions.

"I have the word," said old Jack Smith T., as he placed his principal on the ground; "aim low, and fire quick as a flash of lightning. That is everything in a duel with double barrels."

The seconds then assumed their proper stations, and the spectators held their breath in horrible suspense for the coming catastrophe. At length Smith shouted, in tones loud and clear as the blast of a trumpet, the usual terms of that fearful formula, which has sounded the signal of death for so many of earth's bravest sons, and which will continue to ring over fields of blood, till the end of the world, unless the constitution of man shall be changed by some unimaginable miracle.

At the intonation "Fire," quick as thought, young Morrow raised and discharged his gun; and with the deafening roar, Ellsman dropped to the dust a corpse, without even touching his trigger—so sudden was the hunter's fire. Half-a-dozen shot had pierced the lawyer's heart; for the distance had been only twenty paces.

Jack Morrow hastened back home, and early next morning flew to the residence of Doctor Dewville, burning with indescribable eagerness to communicate his achievement. An extraordinary revolution had taken place both in his mind and appearance, since the hour of victory. His previous awkward and bashful air and gestures, had been exchanged for a lofty look of pride and

conscious manhood. He had fought a duel, he had slain the all-dreaded desperado of Missouri, he had been congratulated for his prowess by hundreds of brave men, and more than all, he had won the hand of the most beautiful woman that ever St. Louis saw! These thoughts were stamped on his face, filled his soul, and flashed from his eyes. He felt himself the peer of any hero in the world.

He rushed into the doctor's presence, and finding the family at breakfast, hastily described his combat of the previous evening. Both the parents uttered exclamations of surprise and grief, as the lawyer was expected soon to be the husband of their daughter, and they gazed at her visage with the deepest anxiety.

But what must have been their amazement to behold on her features a cruel smile of supreme satisfaction! The hunter, too, did not fail to observe the same token, and he concluded, most unwisely, that now was the fitting moment to demand the gift of his beautiful bride.

"Yes," he continued, with a certain grand air; "I shot him for insulting Joanna; and I now claim her hand as my just reward."

Had he thundered—"I have come to murder all of you, and burn down the house over your dead bodies!" the stupefaction of the good couple could not have been more complete.

"He says but the truth, and I have promised to marry him!" cried the daughter, in her voice of bewildering sweetness.

"What! marry this ruffian!" exclaimed the male physician, bounding from his chair, with such haste as to overturn the

table. "Get out of my house, dog of a deer-killer!" and in the fury of his passion he struck the young man in the face.

Without pausing to think, and as it were involuntarily, Morrow dealt the doctor a stunning blow, which hurled him back across the fallen table, and broke his neck, as if it had been a pipe-stem!

Instantly the awful fact became apparent. The distracted wife flew, with frightful screams, to raise her husband, but he was already lifeless as a stone, and shaking her tremulous finger at the horror-stricken youth, she cried:

"Murderer, you shall hang for this!"

Presently, Morrow recovered from his momentary stupor, and said sternly:

"Come, Joanna, let us fly!" and seizing the hand of the pale, agitated girl, they rushed swiftly away from the mournful house of death. He lifted her unresisting form upon the saddle, mounted, at a leap, behind her, and they galloped off with the utmost speed. He halted at his father's only long enough to procure a horse for his fair companion, and they then pursued their flight, and after the lapse of some days, arrived safely in the wild forests of the Osage, at the point where now stands the flourishing village of Warsaw.

The first emigrants were just beginning to swarm into this virgin country, and as the Indians gave them great trouble, the reckless bravery of Jack Morrow soon achieved the highest distinction, and acquired for him the honorable rank of major in the State militia. Every thing that he undertook seemed to prosper, and in due time he possessed wealth as well as influence.

After a while, however, the wandering thieves and counterfeits grew more annoying than the savages had been before, and a band of lynchers was organized, who, with singular unanimity, elected the major as their chieftain. And then commenced a series of combats and cruel executions, which almost surpass belief. An opposition party shortly sprung into existence, as always happens in such cases, under the name of moderators, whose ferocity, if that could be, indeed, possible, transcended the rage of their enemies; and the civil war continued until more than fifty men had fallen victims in the ruthless strife. While it lasted, the hostile factions endeavored to excel each other in barbarity, and every act of revenge was repaid by some deed of still more awful assassination.

During this reign of terror, there lived in the wildest woods of the Osage, a hunter by the name of Mose Tuttle, the brother of Sol and Dave, a quiet, inoffensive man, but fearless as a lion, when once aroused. From the pure love of peace and order, he enrolled himself in the ranks of the moderators, but never engaged in any of their atrocities, and soon abandoned them in disgust and horror.

It happened, that one of the regulators had been shot down in the road, not very far from Tuttle's residence, and they immediately accused him of a crime, which he did not even know to have been committed.

At midnight, a hundred lynchers, headed by their chief, broke into the sleeping hunter's house, and tearing him away from the arms of his shrieking wife, and the useless prayers of his little children, carried him off a fettered prisoner. The whole affair

had been conducted in silence, and, although the captive entreated them to explain the nature of the offence with which he stood charged, not one of the ruthless regulators answered a word.

They marched him on, until they reached the border of the prairie, where the full moon shone with a brilliancy almost equal to the light of day, and revealed a spectacle which chilled the very blood in the prisoner's veins with an icy thrill of horror. There yawned that frightful chasm in the earth, which has nameless power to agitate the most heroic heart, that ever throbbed in a human bosom—a fresh grave, still empty, with the red clay lying in ridges around it, and which had been but recently dug. The pallid corpse of a man was placed beside it, and the blue bullet-hole in his white forehead, showed him to be a new victim of the unrelenting civil war.

Here, the party halted, and Major Morrow, addressed the hunter in a terrible voice :

“Villain, you are the murderer of that man !”

“I swear, by the God that made me, and as I hope for mercy at his hands, that I am entirely innocent of the deed, and had no knowledge even of his death !” protested Tuttle with indescribable solemnity.

“We will soon see whether you are telling the truth or not,” rejoined the chief, with a satanic chuckle ; “boys throw the dead body into the grave.”

The ruffians instantly obeyed the order.

“Now, Mr. Tuttle, you get in, and lie down beside the corpse, and if you are guilty, it will move, otherwise it will remain

without gesture !” commanded the major, in tones of affected mildness.

“Oh ! for pity's sake, hang me, shoot me, kill me any way you will, only do not bury me alive !” implored the hunter, as a dreadful apprehension of their purpose flashed across his mind.

“We have no idea of doing any such thing,” replied the arch-lyncher ; “we only intend to try an old test for the detection of the murderer ; and if the corpse does not stir, or the wound bleed afresh, when you lie in the same bed, others shall take your place till we discover the real assassin.”

With horrible forebodings, Tuttle descended into the tomb and stretched himself out by the dead body, crying :

“There, you see it does not move !”

“Be quiet till we cover you up a little, to make sure !” answered the chief, and a dozen hands, with spades, began to throw in red clay. The hunter bounded to his feet with a wild wail of despair ; but a brace of rifle balls shattered the bones of his thighs, and he fell back upon the corpse, while the pile of superincumbent earth rose rapidly above both the dead and living, and the murderers yelled like devils !

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEFEAT OF THE LYNCHERS.

PERHAPS there is nothing calculated to test the courage or cowardice of individuals, with so much unerring certainty, as the long, noiseless vigil of a night beset with immediate danger. Because both darkness and silence tend to inspire the emotion of fear, by suggesting to the mind the last sunless gloom of the grave, and the solemn stillness of Eternity. From this natural cause, in all ages and among all nations, the viewless realms of night have been peopled with the shadowy phantoms of superstition. Those are the hours when fairies come forth from their subterranean homes to dance in the charmed circle, when witches keep their revels around hell's caldron of bubbling blood, when lost souls sign the infernal compact with the evil one, when ghosts glide through the haunted churchyard, when pale-eyed murder stalks stealthily to the sleeping pillow of its unconscious victim, and when all the tiger-passions, the fierce furies of the mind, awake to renewed life and monstrous energy. Even the wild animals exemplify this striking truth. The howl of the wolf never sounds so unutterably horrible as at the noon of dark-

THE DEFEAT OF THE LYNCHERS.

ness, and the roar of the lion becomes thunder. And thus do all the aspects of material nature harmonize with the different moods and ideas of man, and with the instincts of the wide living world. No human heart could hold its superstition long, if the sunlight lay forever on the land and sea, as all mankind would soon become wild fanatics, if the grim night-shadows brooded eternally on field and forest.

A marvellous change came over many of the lynchers, at Major Morrow's residence, before morning, as they waited and watched for the attack of the Texan Rangers. The solitary reflection of some brought them to their senses, and exposed the hopeless folly of resistance to the public force, which must shortly become utterly overwhelming. The inherent timidity of others, when the fiery stimulus of extraneous circumstances died out, began to master their nerves, and the rifle trembled in a hundred strong hands, as the first silver arrows of the dewy dawn appeared in the grey east, and the starry sentinels of the night put out their golden watch-fires, and retired, one by one, into the azure depths of heaven.

As it grew broad daylight, the itinerant, Hiram Baker, remarked in a whisper; "it is strange, that Colonel Henderson defers the assault, which should have been commenced, at least, half an hour ago."

Scarcely had he spoken, when a terrible roar, like a sudden peal of thunder, was heard in the direction of the farm-gate, and the block-house shook, as if it were standing upon an earthquake, a wild outcry emanated from the rooms below, followed by the fierce order of the chief: "Now, boys, aim at the men around

the cannon; it is a long shot, but our only chance. When you empty your guns, reload and discharge them as fast as possible. Fire!"

A deafening volley showed the prompt obedience of the company, and for many minutes, the rifles roared incessantly, drowned, at brief intervals, by the still more awful crash of the Texan artillery, every thunder-ball, of which, tore through the slender, quivering pine logs of both walls, as if they had been made of paper, scattering the ragged splinters around in all directions, and strewing the bloody floor with dead and wounded.

Nevertheless, the trumpet-tones of Major Morrow rose on high above the battle-storm of shrieks, shouts, and horrible curses; above the bellowing of the cannon, and the infernal roar of the rifles, animating his men, by mingled menace and persuasion to triumph or fall at their posts.

During this fearful crisis of the conflict, young Bolling could not withdraw his eyes from the singular countenance of the arch-lyncher's lady. Her appearance and conduct spell-bound him, as with a species of fascination. She stood at a window opening towards the position of the rangers, and fully exposed to their fire, gazing, with an aspect of diabolic delight upon the appalling scene. Her slender form seemed to expand with the burning ardor of her internal emotions. Her wild black eyes blazed like the red flashes of the artillery. A lurid satanic smile gleamed on all her features; and the dim war-cloud of rolling smoke around her cruel visage, gave it an aspect truly infernal.

And still the cannon thundered, and the rifles cracked louder than ever, until the external wall of the block-house, shivered

into large fragmentary holes, could no more afford the vain semblance of protection, and a hail of grape-shot began to mingle with the great round balls.

"Hold out, five minutes longer, boys, and if the ammunition of the enemy be not then exhausted, we will order a retreat," shouted the major to his fainting men.

"Now is our time!" exclaimed Bolling; and a dozen of his associates, at this preconcerted signal threw themselves upon the guard around the door of the prisoners.

A fierce struggle ensued, for the parties were nearly equal in numbers, and the regulators fought with the fury of desperation. In a short time, the hall was filled with smoke from the flashing guns and pistols, and the combat went on in the darkness.

The huge bully, Jack Simonton, having discharged his gun, broke it over the head of Parson Johnson, felling him to the floor, as if shot through the heart, and then drawing his bowie-knife, the desperado rushed upon Bolling. The latter suddenly dropped to his knees, thus avoiding the deadly blow, and grasping the other round the legs, jerked them from under him, and they rolled over together, the lyncher losing his dagger in the scuffle. They clinched instantly, but by an unlucky chance, the iron fingers of Simonton gripped the young man's throat, and held it, like the jaws of a vice. All his efforts failed to break that awful clasp of death. He tried to call for assistance, but only a faint murmur gurgled in his mouth, while the waves of an ocean of blood seemed to roll before his darkened eye-balls, and the weight of an iron mountain pressed upon his brain. He felt that his hours on earth had been numbered, and thought a last

prayer for his own soul, and the safety of his beautiful beloved, and resigned himself to his miserable fate.

At this terrible moment, when the youth had no more power to put forth a struggle, he heard, through his misty sleep of incipient unconsciousness, a sudden crash as of shattered bones, and his foe fell heavily upon his own bosom. Then, some one aided him to rise, and the triumphant shout of Caesar exclaimed:

"I fix him, Massa Bolling; I mash him scull, like a possum's, with the gun-barrel!"

The fight still continued, but with less ardor on the part of the regulators, who, at last, were driven to the head of the stairs. Bolling and Baker then seized the opportunity to burst in the door, and free the prisoners. Immediately Colonel Cook and Sol Tuttle, snatched up a couple of rifles, which had dropped from hands that never would need any weapons again, save the spade of the grave-digger, and charged the wavering lynchers. The fury of the hunter baffled all description, the blows of his gun-barrel flew like lightning, regardless of the shots that hissed around his heart, not one of which touched, while every stroke of his brought down a foe.

At last, all the defenders of the upper story were forced into the lower part of the fortress, causing the utmost consternation.

"Now, boys, every one, charge up the stairs, and shoot the whole accursed crew, women, and all; and then we'll retreat!" vociferated Major Morrow.

The men hurried to obey him. Yelling like savages, and firing volleys of buckshot and pistol bullets, they swarmed up the steps to massacre the friends of mercy. The latter, unfortunately,

had already discharged their weapons, and most of them being without the necessary supply of balls, there seemed little hope of their successful resistance. However, Bolling, Tuttle, and Colonel Cook stood their ground, near the top of the stairs, and shattered every head as soon as it appeared above the floor.

"Get the two ladders in the yard, there, and climb in through the windows!" roared the major; and half the brave defenders of the prisoners were now called to oppose this new danger; and they all felt the impossibility of escaping from their inevitable doom.

Suddenly, a frightful exclamation of uncontrollable terror rent the air in the lower rooms:

"The rangers are coming at a charge! let us fly for our lives!"

Instantly, the wildest panic seized the great body of the regulators; and in spite of the threats and entreaties of their undaunted chief, they broke from the house, and fled in the utmost confusion. From motives of pity, and acting under the humane order of the President, the Texan troopers suffered most of the fugitives to escape, but they had been directed, at all hazards, to capture, or kill the arch-lyncher.

When the infuriate major saw that all was lost, he ran off with the rest, and soon outstripped every competitor in that awful race, upon which so many heads depended. At length, a ranger, who knew Morrow personally, singled him out with his eye and flew after him, like an arrow, with his sword flashing in the morning sunlight, and uplifted to cut the fugitive down.

Joanna, gazing on the scene from the upper window, uttered a shriek, as all hope for her husband departed. But suddenly,

when the trooper came within ten steps, quick as a glance of the eye, the major wheeled and fired his revolver, and the pursuer tumbled from his saddle, shot through his right eye; while his horse bounded two more leaps, and halted at the lyncher's side. Instantly, the latter sprung upon his back and urged the animal to the highest speed.

He obtained this needful assistance just in time; for a hundred rangers were at his heels and gave chase over the smooth field, for half a mile towards the woods, firing their pistols, and shouting for him to surrender. As they drew near the fence, they felt sure of their victim, for a terrible thicket of black thorns lay immediately beyond this barrier, into which the very wings of a bird might hardly dare to venture.

"They'll catch him now!" cried Sol Tuttle, as he paused to renew his breath, for he had followed on foot after the rangers, while the pale lips of Joanna, from her window, uttered another wild scream.

But no, as the chief approached the fence, he gathered up the reins of the bridle, drew his bowie-knife, and pricking the horse with its point behind the saddle, thundered a fearful yell, and the animal took the mighty leap, and came crashing down into the thorny bushes outside of the field.

Even the bravest troopers shuddered at a recklessness so far surpassing their own, and feared to attempt a similar feat of prowess. Before they could dismount and essay to follow on foot, the lyncher had left his saddle, and disappeared in the dense and dangerous undergrowth of the forest, where they afterwards continued their search for him in vain.



But no, as the chief approached the fence, he gathered up the reins of the bridle, drew his bowie-knife, and pricking the horse with its point behind the saddle, thundered a fearful yell, and the animal took the mighty leap, and came crashing down into the thorny bushes outside of the field.—PAGE 316.

In the meantime, the leaders of the Texan force entered the block-house and beheld a horrifying scene. More than twenty persons dead, or wounded, lay scattered about on the floor, which was slippery with blood. Colonel Cook greeted the President warmly, and presented his new friends, Baker and Bolling, who were both surprised and delighted with the majestic air and courtly manners of the first officer of the Republic.

Presently the airy form of Joanna came tripping down stairs, and passing, without apparent emotion, by the corpses of her two sons, fallen in the recent combat, she grasped the hand of her former acquaintance, remarking with a pale smile :

"General Houston, I am very happy to see you again, although, I might wish that your visit had been of a more peaceful nature."

"It is always a pleasure for me to receive a welcome from the lips of the beautiful under any circumstances," replied the President, with his usual gallantry.

"Our people have been basely slandered to your ears," said the woman, in her sweet silvery accents ; "or else your noble heart could never have treated us with such merciless severity."

"I never discuss political questions with the fair sex," rejoined the general, with a gay smile ; "not because I deem such subjects above their capacity ; but, conscious of my own weakness, I fear to be enchanted from my duty."

"Ah ! I see, you are the same old deceiver, as great a flatterer as ever," answered Joanna, with her bewildering smile ; "but I must hasten, and order your breakfast."

"No, I thank you, my dear madam," refused Houston; "we must march forthwith to attack the robbers."

"Well, at all events, accept a cup of hot coffee; it will occupy but a moment to prepare it," insisted the lady of the house.

"Joanna, you are always irresistible," assented the President, in a tender voice; and the woman, with a strange gleam in her eyes, left the parlor.

"The she-devil!" ejaculated Houston, as soon as she disappeared; "what other matron in the world could play the coquette over the corpses of her own children?"

Bolling, however, had noticed the sinister countenance of Joanna, and calling to mind their former conversation, he guessed at her present object, and glided stealthily after, to watch her actions. He saw her unlock a closet in the kitchen, when taking from the shelf a small vial, she poured out some grey powder, and mingled it with the coffee, and then calling a servant, she handed him the pot with the direction to boil and bring it into the parlor as soon as he could do so.

From the murderous smile that writhed on her livid lips, the youth inferred the character of the intended beverage, and flying back to the party of officers, he whispered his suspicion in the ear of the President. Even Houston himself turned pale, and beckoning the others to him, communicated the terrible idea, in a low voice.

A general exclamation of horror rose from every tongue, and several cried out furiously:

"Let us hang the old hag—the infernal wolf-witch!"

"Not another word, gentlemen!" said the president sternly; you would certainly not disgrace yourselves by cruelty to a female. Leave me alone to deal with the lady."

The instant afterwards, she came in with a beaming smile, and proceeded hastily to arrange the table with teacups and saucers; and very soon, the slave appeared with the steaming coffee-pot. She quickly filled a dozen bowls with the fragrant liquid, and remarked in her sweetest tones:

"Here, general, I think, that you will find this to your taste, for I told Aunt Hannah to do her best."

Houston approached, and raising the cup towards his lips, suddenly paused, and gazing into her changeless black eyes, remarked, with a radiant smile:

"Joanna, dear, I am really afraid to drink your pleasant libation."

"Why?" she asked, without alteration of countenance.

"Because," he answered, in a voice of well-feigned tenderness; "it has a singular odor; and with what I feel for you already, if you have mixed a philter in it, I should run mad with love!"

"Nonsense! how you talk!" she said, with an attempted smile, but the paleness of her visage perceptibly increased.

"I would not care," he continued, without once removing his keen eyes from her countenance; "if you could be inspired with a similar degree of frenzy. Suppose, that you first imbibe the same divine beverage."

"I am proud to have the honor," she responded promptly, in such calm accents as almost to overthrow all suspicion, and

lifted a full saucer to her smiling mouth with the evident intention of swallowing the whole.

Houston arrested her hand, and taking the vessel, observed :

"Let us first try the effect on some of the inferior animals."

He then whistled up a large black dog from the door, and setting down the saucer, the brute lapped it to the last drop. In half a minute afterwards, the animal uttered a mournful whine, and falling upon the floor in horrible contortions, almost instantly expired.

"Did I not say, that you had mixed a love-potion with your coffee, Joanna?" exclaimed the President, in a voice of thunder.

Immediately, the entire appearance of the wicked woman changed, when she found her murderous design unmasked.

"Yes," she cried, with a burst of fiendish laughter ; "it was a philter prepared especially for you, assassin of my darling sons ! Oh ! if I only had the power, as I possess already the will, I would poison the whole atmospheric ocean, that lies around the universal globe ; I would fill the sea with blood ; or with the blaze of burning thunder-bolts, scorch all mankind into cinders, in order to behold you a corpse at my feet ! I would endure any torture, die by inches, even howl in the fires of hell for ever, if you were only doomed to suffer by my side !"

She foamed at the mouth, like a maniac, tore her flesh with her teeth, while her black eyes grew red and blood-shot.

But all at once, the mood of her frantic imagination changed to tones of the wildest sorrow. She reeled giddily a few steps, and throwing herself down beside her youngest son, clasped the

dead body to her bosom, and kissing with infinite fondness the icy lips, exclaimed in wailing accents, the saddest ever heard :

"Oh ! my beloved boy, the most precious memory of all the past, my morning star of hope for the future, my sweet dream of the heart, the idol of all my worship, forgive thy unhappy mother for failing to avenge thy young blood, which the cruel one hath shed like water !" And at last her tears came, first in drops, and then in quick showers, as the fall of summer rain.

Even the spectators, in spite of their hatred and horror, felt moved by the mournful scene, and Bolling felt the dews of gentle pity flowing from his own eyes at the sight. For of all the sorrows that this world of woes has ever witnessed, there is not one, at the same time so unspeakably profound and purely unselfish as the grief of a parent's heart at the loss of a dear child. Personal interest may mingle in the painful emotions in other cases of bereavement, passion may burn still in the fiery tears of the weeping lover, separated for ever from the bosom of his beautiful bride, but the drop of agony in the mother's eye on the coffin-lid of her babe is a molten pearl from the very centre of the soul, and as unpolluted as the soul itself, when emerging from the holy hands of its Maker. It is a gem of morning dew from the first flower-cup that opened in Eden—a particle of celestial rain brewed in the sinless air of the uppermost heaven—and wafted by angel wings to the earth as a specimen of immortal love and pity !

"Come, gentlemen, let us be travelling," said the president in a saddened voice, touched by the spectacle of unutterable misery,

which he had involuntarily caused by the performance of his official duty.

At the moment, however, a noise was heard at the door, and some Rangers led in a prisoner, crying as they did so ; " here, General, is one of the robbers, that we found at the farm-gate."

" Why ! this is an Indian ! " exclaimed Houston in surprise.

" He speaks English, nevertheless," remarked one of the captors.

" What is your name ? " inquired the president.

" Comanche Ben," was the reply.

" Do you belong to the band of robbers ? "

" Yes," answered the other boldly.

" Are they still at Carlyle's house ? "

" No, they went away last evening.

" Where are they now ? "

" That I will only tell to one person."

" And who may that be ? " asked the general sternly.

" A man named William Bolling," responded the Indian.

" The youth sprung forward eagerly, saying, " I am he ; what message have you ? "

Ben drew from the pocket of his hunting-shirt, a small letter, and handed it over, according to the direction. Bolling unfolded the sheet hastily, and devoured the contents with pallid features, and wildly flashing eyes.

" What is the news ? " asked Houston, observing the violent agitation of the young man.

" The felons are in the big swamp," said young Bolling, with a deep sigh.

" Will you permit me to glance at your note ? " interrogated the president, in courteous, yet commanding tones.

" I cannot possibly do so," affirmed the youth, blushing ; " for in truth, it is from a lady and confidential in terms."

" Then, it seems, the outlaws have beauty, as well as booty among them," remarked Houston, with the shadow of a sneer.

Bolling answered with a haughty air ; " the lady, to whom I allude, is the daughter of Colonel Miles, and is a captive among the bandits against her will. I am ready to vouch for her truth and honor with my life ; nor will I allow any man, even the most lofty, to impugn the character of my future wife."

" Pardon my idle raillery," interposed the president kindly ; " I am acquainted with the excellent girl, that you have just mentioned, and almost envy you the prospect of possessing such a brilliant and stainless jewel."

" Her parent, to my great regret, is one of the robbers," added the youth mournfully ; " but I cannot, on that account, break my plighted faith with the innocent daughter."

" And every true-hearted man would despise such meanness," affirmed the general.

" This person," said the other, pointing at the Indian ; " will guide us to the camp of the outlaws.

" Can you trust him ? " asked Houston, with a look of suspicion.

" With undoubted assurance," answered Bolling ; " and I will accompany you, and take part in your enterprise."

" We shall be rejoiced to have your assistance," remarked the president with a gay smile ; " and wish we all were inspired by

the hope of as bright a recompense as yours after the toils of the war are over."

Immediate preparations being made, the rangers commenced their march; and the faithful servant, Cæsar, insisted on attending his master, while Comanche Ben acted as the guide. About the middle of the afternoon they reached the block-house of Carlyle, and as the Indian had said, found the fortress deserted. The president and young Bolling dismounted, and examined the place, and both expressed much astonishment at the costly furniture and magnificent library, which the captain had been forced to leave behind him.

Here a debate arose, as to their farther course. According to the statement of the Comanche, the camp of the robbers was on the Texan side of the Sabine, some twenty miles lower down, but the path of approach on this bank was tedious and difficult, while, by crossing into Louisiana, they could have a good road nearly all the way, and would also shorten the distance by half.

The fiery Colonel Henderson urged warmly, that they should take the latter direction; but Colonel Cook objected, that it would look like an armed invasion of a foreign state, and might involve the Republic in unpleasant difficulties with the Federal Union.

Houston, after maturely weighing the opposite reasons, determined to keep on his own soil.

Again, the little army moved on slowly; for their dim trail extended through a dense forest of gigantic trees intermingled with tangled undergrowth, and frequently obstructed by green-mantled pools, and shallow miry lakes, which compelled them to

diverge widely from a straight line, indeed to make sometimes, as crooked curves as the rainbow.

Nevertheless, in this wild swampy region, beneficent nature had endeavored to afford, as much as might be, the fullest compensation for her own weird work of utter desolation. Magnificent pine trees towered everywhere, tall enough for the soaring masts of the mightiest admirals. Millions of lace-like vines, bearing delicate blooms of every form and fairy tint, filled the air with the richest perfumes. Along the borders of the stagnant lakes, or floating above their black surface, appeared innumerable wild flowers, revealing, by turns, all the sparkling hues of the iris, all the glories of the most gorgeous sunset, all the beauties of the diamond dawn. There, gold, purple, vermilion, flaming amethyst, violet, blue, and stainless white, all gleamed together in the wilderness, which human feet seldom trod, to be seen only by the careless eye of the unpoetic hunter, or the timid glance of the spotted fawn.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed young Bolling, as he pointed out a radiant cluster, more lovely than ever glittered in any garden of the earth.

"There is one," said General, Houston, directing the other's attention to an unpretending and rather coarse plant just before them; "which is by far more beautiful than all the rest."

"That lowly weed!" cried the youth, in amazement; "you must refer to its medicinal virtues; for surely such a thing can never yield either fragrance or flower to please the senses, in comparison with the vegetable queens of the forest and prairie."

"I might easily overturn your reasoning by an argument *ad*

hominem, deduced from your own experience," replied the president with a sly smile: "for often, the most unpromising parents show us children lovely as angels; and the rudest exterior occasionally covers a beautiful heart. The blossom, of which, I speak is a true vegetable time-piece. It never unfolds its rainbow petals to the burning beams of day. It comes not forth, like so many others, at the dewy dawn, or beneath the purple shadows of the evening twilight. But at the precise hour of midnight, it opens wide its great, glorious eye to gaze on the beauty of a thousand stars, and to breathe its divine incense, like the prayer of an humble heart when all the universe sleeps, but its Almighty Maker!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DEFEAT OF THE ROBBERS.

WHILE the rangers were urging their way with tedious difficulty, the camp of the outlaws presented a wild, almost romantic appearance. It was situated on a small mound-like elevation of dry ground, including not more than half an acre in extent, on the Texan bank of the Sabine, and surrounded on all sides by a dismal swamp, impassable only at one or two particular places, known but to the robbers, who made it their hiding-place, at times of unusual danger.

Here, two tents of brown canvas had been stretched, half-a-dozen paces apart, one for the accommodation of Carlyle and the officers of his band, and the other for the two females. Hundreds of leather-dressed, coarse-featured men, with arms in their hands, or by their sides, stood conversing in groups, or reclined lazily on the earth, while sentinels had been stationed in every direction, and a strong force of choice desperadoes guarded every possible path of approach.

A little before sunset, the captain and his first lieutenant were seated by themselves in their tent, the latter apparently in

his usual gay good humor, but the former restless and gloomy.

"You seem to be rather melancholy, this evening, cousin," remarked Curran, kindly; "you need not entertain the least apprehension that old Sam will ever think of seeking for us here."

"That is little consolation," answered the other, almost angrily; "the infernal turn that things have taken will disarrange all our plans. The slaves have already discovered that we are all thieves instead of liberators, and they have commenced running away from us, by the dozen. Most of our own band have become moody and dissatisfied, and if the devil's luck continues, will very soon leave us and shift for themselves."

"Then, we can fly to some new country, and under assumed names, begin again our lives, with the lofty resolution and honest purposes, which inspired our hearts of old in the golden dreams of the law-office," said Curran, with a look of enthusiasm.

"We can never re-cross the dark river of crime with its billows of blood, that rolls eternally between our souls and the rainbow-winged visions, the starry hopes of our early youth," replied the captain, with a profound sigh.

"Such memories would gradually fade away, if we were once environed with different circumstances, and among people, who knew us not, and never heard of us before," urged the lieutenant.

"A change of scene can have but little influence on the person, unless, indeed, he could leave his nature behind him."

"But you forget the possibility of repentance, that transformation of the heart, which the wisest and best of our race assert with so much confidence."

"Repentance?" ejaculated Carlyle, with an accent of intense bitterness; "the very term is folly; for how can one repent of actions caused by irresistible Fatality? And reformation—the idea is still more absurd; for who can alter a single faculty of his mind, a solitary emotion that burns in his own bosom? Can you render the tiger tame as the deer-hound? Can the air, earth, or water, be metamorphosed into opposite elements?"

"The wildest beasts of the woods can be domesticated by sufficiently long and patient labor, and every aspect of the universe presents, in succession, the most striking scenes of miraculous transformation. The same changing sky is now grey, then, gleaming silver, next, all burning gold, blushing, like a young virgin, beneath the kisses of the morning sun, then radiant blue—bluer than any tint of indigo on the earth or in the sea, and lastly, a dome of stainless azure, sprinkled with flakes of stellar fire. Lo! the dew-drops of the rosy dawn, exhaled by the summer sunbeams, in the afternoon become thunder-clouds, black as the mantle of midnight, which, in their turn, change into smiling rainbows—beautiful as the golden lightning, that plays beneath their air-built arches. In truth, all matter is but a magical Proteus of endless changes; then, why not man be renewed, like the world in which he has his home? Cannot even we go back again to our morning, and feel upon our hearts the heavenly dews of innocence, as in the hours of our purple prime,

when every leaf of grass was a young glory, and all the flowers seemed fresh from Eden?"

"The transformations, to which you have referred," said Carlyle, with a sneer; "all tend to overthrow your own feeble fallacies; for every one of them is but the inevitable evolution of natural law."

"But may not the law of our natures also have endowed us with the powers of free volition, to aid, at least, in making or marring our own destinies? The warp of the doom, doubtless, is spun by the iron fingers of the inexorable Fates, but we weave in the woof as we will."

"Well, however, it may be," exclaimed the chief robber, fiercely; "I for one, would not reform if I could. I shall never exhibit the cowardly meanness of seeking to avoid the consequences of my actions, and more especially, if they be, as you say, the result of my voluntary choice. I will not serve the devil in fair weather, and then turn towards Heaven with hypocritical tears and whining prayers, the moment there comes a storm."

At this instant, a couple of horsemen, with marks of haste and unfavorable news depicted on all their features, galloped up to the tent, and leaped to the earth.

"What now, Roaring Dick? Why have you left your post?" inquired the captain, springing to his feet, with an air of the most painful anxiety, while the robbers, by hundreds rushed around to hear the message.

"The rangers are marching down the river," was the answer.

Carlyle lost color, but in order not to discourage his men, replied calmly:

"It matters not; for they can never find their way into this swamp, and even if they did, not one of them would ever return to tell the tale."

"But I've wus news nor that," said the other messenger; "the folks of Harrison county have all turned out, and licked our boys like blazes, and they've got all yer niggers from Soda Lake."

"Is that, indeed, true?" exclaimed the chief, trembling with agitation.

"Yes," responded the other; "and thar is more on it. Bill Barker and his fellers has run off all yer darkies from yer camp on Red River into Arkansas."

"Oh! the villains and traitors!" shouted Carlyle in a paroxysm of furious rage; while the bandits around him, uttered a wild yell of dismay and grief, at the loss of their hard-earned booty in years of perilous war upon society.

"The captain well understood the effect, which such malign intelligence was calculated to produce, and endeavored to inspire the felons with hopes which his own reason repudiated. He urged them to hold the present position until the Texan troops should be withdrawn, and promised then to lead them into Arkansas, to avenge the treason of their false confederates and recover the property, which had been carried away.

He perceived, however, with extreme mortification, that all his arguments, menaces, and entreaties, had failed to restore the

confidence of the ruffians, who soon gathered in small circular groups on the verge of the swamp, discussing, with gloomy countenances and angry gestures, the ominous prospects before them.

Soon the sable shadows of night descended, and a couple of large fires were kindled in front of the tents, which illumined, with crimson radiations, a circular space around them, shut in by walls of the blackest darkness, weird and awful to behold, and which now veiled the wild forms of the outlaws on the edge of the swamp.

Some three or four hours after nightfall, as the leaders were pacing unquietly backward and forward, before the fire, Dublin Jack advanced with a prisoner in the person of a huge, very black negro, remarking as he presented him :

"Captain, the guard found this ere feller, tryin' to git into yer camp."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded Carlyle, sternly.

"My name ar' Cæsar, and I'd like to have, my freedom," replied the slave, earnestly.

"To whom do you belong?"

"Massa William Bolling."

The chief started as if bitten by a rattlesnake, and muttering an imprecation, gazed into the large white eyes of the African, with a look of suspicion. At length, he asked :

"What led you to expect freedom by coming to us?"

"Becaze the yaller man, what them call Han, at Major Morrow's, telled me so, and I wur in the big nigger meetin'

'mong the woods, and seed that gemman thar," said Cæsar, pointing at Curran.

"He says nothing but the truth," observed the latter ; "I remember to have noticed him at the time."

In the meantime, the females in the neighboring tent, had not been indifferent spectators of this scene. Mary had turned mortally pale, the instant, when she perceived the black, and could hardly suppress a wild cry, at the mention of her lover's name.

"For Heaven's sake be calm, and do not betray your recognition, by a word or gesture !" urged her companion.

"Can it be possible, that so faithful a slave will betray his kind master?" murmured the daughter of Colonel Miles.

"Never fear," consoled Lucy ; "he is only acting a part, as I see, from the cunning gleam of his eyes."

Carlyle continued his examination, apparently satisfied with the testimony of the lieutenant :

"Where is your master now?"

"With Ginerel Houston's army."

"And where are they?"

"Comin' down the river, as fast as 'em can."

"Do they know the situation of our camp?"

"Yes ; fur I hern 'em say, 'twur strait along the Sabine, in a powerful swamp ; and so I slipped off from 'em ; and that's how I fotch up here."

"Have they any one to guide them?"

"I can't say, massa," answered Cæsar, shaking his head.

"There, now, that will do, my good fellow," remarked the

captain, thoroughly deceived by the statement of Curran, and the innocence of the African's manner ; " if you be faithful to us, you shall be free in a few days ; go to the other tent, and get your supper. Lucy, give this man something to eat."

" Certainly, brother," replied the delighted woman, in anticipation of some important message, as she beckoned the slave to her, and presented him a plate of bread and meat.

The latter, without lifting his eyes to her face, slipped into her hand a soiled piece of paper, containing only these words :

" We will attack the robbers at midnight. Trust Cæsar for the rest. W. B."

Slowly the leaden-winged hours rolled away, until the noon of darkness. The females seemed to be asleep ; and Cæsar lay stretched on the opposite side of the fire from their tent, filling the air with the sonorous music of his large, dilated nostrils. By the other blaze of pine-knots, sat Colonel Miles, Carlyle, and Curran, discussing as busily as ever, their circumstances and prospects ; while at the distance of a dozen feet, beneath an enormous oak, stood Roaring Dick and Dublin Jack, with double-barrelled shot-guns on their shoulders, their florid, sun-burnt visages, in the lurid illumination of the pine flame, looking ghastly, and almost infernal in every lineament.

A solemn, and as it were, unearthly stillness pervaded the primeval forest, which was only broken, at intervals, by the ill-boding screech of the owl, sounding like the wail of a fiend in pain, from the leafy top of a neighboring tree, or the distant howl of a wolf far away in the swamp, calling for its wandering

mates. A scene of more utter solitude could not well be imagined.

" Suddenly the loud booming of a gun broke on the profound silence :

" There," exclaimed the chief, bounding to his feet, with flashing eyes ; " that was at the pass into the swamp !"

" It can only be a shot at some wild animal," suggested Colonel Miles.

" No," answered the other ; " I gave the strictest orders, not to discharge a barrel, unless as a signal, that the enemy had approached."

" Immediately, there followed a similar report, then another, and the minute afterwards, a terrible volley, which seemed to be returned by a roar equally awful.

" Now for the combat !" shouted Carlyle, with the red light of battle burning on his face, as he snatched a bugle from the tent-pole above his head, and blew a loud, lingering blast. " That is strange !" he cried, with a furious countenance ; " I get no answer."

" The boys must be asleep," said Curran, flying towards the edge of the swamp, and followed by Dick and Dublin Jack.

In a moment, all three rushed back, exclaiming :

" They are gone, sentinels and all !"

Colonel Miles trembled with terror, crying in horrified accents :

" We are lost !" while every second, the distant firing grew more appalling, and the cries of the combatants floated afar on

the still night air, like the wail of lost souls, bidding a mournful farewell to life and light for ever.

For a brief space even Carlyle seemed stupefied by the fact, which he had just heard, but his dark eyes renewed their fire, as a sudden thought darted through his brain.

"Yes," he said; "I see it all. The wretches had started to desert me; but have been met at the pass by the rangers, and will, doubtless, be driven back. They will be glad enough of my assistance now. Not an instant must be lost; let us fly to their rescue. And you, Roaring Dick, take care of the two women; you must answer for their safety, with your life. Come on, all the rest;" and away they flew towards the scene of strife.

As soon as they disappeared, Lucy advanced to the seemingly slumbering form of Cæsar, and endeavored to arouse him; but the nasal intonations continued as regularly as ever, notwithstanding the pinches, which she gave to his enormous ears.

"What ar' y'at thar, gal?" asked Dick, sharply, who had not forgotten his suspicions against the womam, conceived the evening when he arrested her in the woods of the Tanaha bottom.

"I want to waken the lazy coward, and send him to help fight for his own liberty and our common safety," replied Lucy.

"Never mind, I'll quickly make him stir his black stumps," said Roaring Dick, coming forwards, and striking the pretended sleeper with his foot.

But in the twinkling of an eye, the African seized the robber round the legs, and threw him over on the earth. A frightful struggle followed. Tightly clinched in each other's arms, Dick had no opportunity to draw his weapons, and, indeed, Lucy

managed to snatch away both revolvers from his belt. The antagonists seemed very equally matched. If anything, the black man possessed the greatest muscular power, and the white, the most agility and skill. They swayed to and fro, rolled over and over, each in his turn uppermost and beneath, while the females gazed with pallid features on the contest, which would, in all probability, decide their own doom.

At last, the bandit contrived to grasp the windpipe of his foe, and held it with a gripe of steel. The contest was virtually decided, and the victor uttered an exclamation of triumphant laughter, as the other lay helpless beneath him. But at the instant, Lucy glided up behind him, with her wild black eyes burning like live coals, and plunged a long, double-edged dagger up to the hilt, in the giant's heart. With a low, stifled moan, he fell from the bosom of the African, and immediately expired.

"Ha!" cried Lucy, with a fearful smile on her livid features; "there lies my first victim; but by Heaven, that shall not be my last!"

The sound of the firing at the pass into the swamp, which, for a short time had slackened, now roared more awfully loud than ever; while Lucy exclaimed, "Carlyle is among them. Listen how the robbers cheer him. What if he should fall in battle, and cheat me yet out of my sweet revenge! I should die of grief and shame!"

Widely different were the feelings of the beautiful Mary, as the mournful echoes floated on the air. She thought of her father and of her lover, exposed to the midnight storm of that murderous fiery leaden hail, and she bowed upon her knees in silent prayer.

Soon, however, the signs of the conflict again began to die in the woods. The booming of the shot guns, and keener cracks of the rifles and revolvers, became scattering, at longer and longer intervals, and drew nearer to the camp.

"Ha! the robbers are beaten—they are retreating—the luck of the devil has failed him at last. His dream of golden fortune has turned to a vision of burning blood! He shall hang high on the gallows-tree, and hear my howling curses!" cried the bandit's mistress in a wild delirium of joy.

"We had better be hidin' outer thur way, before they git back," remarked Caesar, as the sounds of the tumult rapidly approached; and the three hurried off into the darkness, and hid themselves in a thicket of bushes on the bank of the Sabine, from which, however, they could both see and hear everything that transpired near the tents.

In a couple of minutes afterwards, Colonel Miles, Carlyle, and Curran rushed towards the fire, their clothing torn and blood-stained and their visages livid as death.

"Oh! Mary," cried the father. "Lucy! Lucy! where are you?" shouted the captain, in a terrible voice, as he glanced into the vacant tent, and gnashed his teeth furiously. "Roaring Dick!" he yelled louder; "hell and the fates! has he deserted me too?"

"There he is!" answered the lieutenant, pointing at the corpse of the bandit.

"The she-fiend!" thundered Carlyle; "that is her work; but I'll roast her alive for it yet!"

As he spoke, half a dozen more fugitives emerged from the

darkness, followed by the rattle of a sharp volley, and the victorious shout of the rangers, who charged, at a swift run, towards the camp-fire.

"The river is our only chance!" exclaimed Carlyle, and they all fled in the direction which he indicated, passing within six feet of the bushes which concealed the females. Not one of them paused an instant, but leaped over the steep bank with sullen plunges into the swift current.

"Great Heaven! has he indeed escaped?" almost screamed Lucy, as she wrung her hands in despair. "Oh! merciful God, preserve my poor father!" prayed Mary in an agony of grief.

The next moment, the Texan rangers swarmed to the spot, discharging their guns at the surface of the dark-rolling river, wherever an object appeared on its surface; and several wild yells of pain and terror, told that some of the shots had taken effect.

"Come on, boys," cried the savage voice of Comanche Ben; "and I'll find a boat half a mile lower down. The Captain would not let the rest of his men know where it was, for fear they would run away."

Immediately, Colonel Henderson, young Bolling, and about fifty others, started with the Indian to seek a passage across the stream. Their path was extremely difficult, and their horses nearly mired down at every step, while their course meandered through so many mazes, that no one, except the most experienced guide, could have toiled successfully among its numerous crooked windings.

At last they gained firm ground, and the Comanche, point-

ing to a tangled mass of green cane, remarked ; " there is what will carry us over," and dismounting, he parted the jungle with his hands, and unmasked a boat of some size.

Instantly, they dragged the vessel down the bank, and upon its being launched, eight persons got in, and rowed across the stream, holding their halters while the horses came swimming behind them.

" Now," said the Indian, as they landed safely on the Louisiana shore ; " one of you go back for more help, and let the others follow me ; the woods are open for three miles up the river, where there is a swamp, and if we hurry, we can overtake them before they reach that."

They leaped into their saddles, and the Comanche with Colonel Henderson, and Bolling leading the way, the party galloped forwards. The forest, consisting of tall pine trees, being free from undergrowth, they were enabled to ride with the greatest speed, and flew quickly over half a league, when they discovered a couple of dark forms some hundred paces before them in the starlight.

" Yonder they are !" exclaimed the Indian, and in a moment they arrived at the spot, but the fugitives seemed to have disappeared.

" They have sheltered themselves in a hollow tree," said the guide, and the rangers sprung to the earth, and commenced an eager search in all directions.

As young Bolling passed by a large log in the vicinity, he perceived that the end was hollow, and stooping down to look in, a pair of demoniac black eyes, gleaming like fire-balls, met his

gaze. He uttered a loud exclamation, which drew the remainder of the company to the point, and seizing the robber by the hair, dragged him from his hiding-place.

Carlyle attempted a desperate resistance, but having been forced to throw away his heavy revolvers in swimming the Sabine, his efforts proved ineffectual, and he was soon overpowered and fastened with cords cut from the halters of the horses.

" Where is your companion ?" demanded Colonel Henderson, aiming a pistol at the outlaw's bosom. " Where is he ?" repeated the fiery officer, " tell me, or I'll blow out your heart !"

" Like a cowardly dog, as you are !" said the robber, with a scornful chuckle.

" Do not shoot ! here I am," cried the voice of Curran from the fallen tree ; and he came out and delivered himself up.

The party with their prisoners then moved again down the river, searching for Colonel Miles and the remaining rogues, but in vain. They could find no traces of the others, and concluded with strong reasons, that they must all have been either shot, or drowned in the rushing stream. If the truth must be told, young Bolling hoped most sincerely, that such might turn out to be the case.

In the meantime a somewhat singular scene was being enacted at the camp of the outlaws. Immediately after the departure of the party in pursuit of Carlyle and his comrade, Caesar with the two females emerged from their concealment, and advanced to the fire, where they saw General Houston.

The president, with his usual polished and dignified courtesy,

extending a hand to each, greeted them in his rich winning tones: "Ladies, believe me, I value this as the proudest victory with which fortune has ever been pleased to favor me; since by it I am enabled to free youth and beauty, from their gloomy imprisonment among murderers and outlaws."

"Oh! General, cried Mary, weeping as if her heart would break; "show mercy to my poor father!"

"I will do all that I can consistently with the claims of public justice," replied the president, evading the petition; "but he may not need any clemency; for the colonel is not yet captured, and very probably, will not be. But has not the other lady here, also some request to offer?"

"Oh yes, your excellency," said Lucy in anxious tones, while her dark eyes blazed with strange flashes of fire; "I pray you to have Captain Carlyle tried by a regular court of law, for the crime of willful murder, and then let him be executed by the common hangman, like a cold-blooded, cruel assassin, as he is!"

"But, my dear Miss, where shall we obtain the evidence to substantiate the fact, which you allege?" inquired Houston.

"I will furnish the fullest proofs," she asserted, with a look of absolute assurance; "I am myself a witness, and Comanche Ben will show you the graves, where he buried his victims."

"Who were they?"

"A Parson Cole and Bob Bennet."

"Would you not be as well pleased, if he should die under martial law?" asked the president, wondering much at the revengeful, though enchanting visage of the woman, whom he suspected to be the robber's mistress.

"By no means," she answered; "for the latter method of taking leave of life is not so unutterably disgraceful as the former; and besides, I will also have time to learn from his own lips, the hiding-places where he has buried his treasures, as well as the haunts where his confederates keep their stolen slaves."

"Very well, it shall be as you wish," assented the General, "for it is the best course."

"Then, your Excellency," said Lucy with a sweet, bewitching smile; "let the Indian's testimony alone be taken before the committing magistrate, and suffer not my agency to appear in the matter until the hour of trial."

"I give you my promise, to that effect," affirmed Houston; "but the Captain must have injured you most deeply to account for your feelings of hatred!"

"Oh! he has ruined me utterly and forever!" she whispered in accents of indescribable bitterness; while her entire frame shook with the intensity of her passion, and burning tears of rage stood in her dark eyes.

After the lapse of some hour and a half, a loud exclamation was heard, at the distance of a hundred yards below on the bank of the Sabine; "we have caught the villains! here they are!"

Lucy requested the president; "your Excellency, let me and my companion retire, and draw down the front sheet of the tent. I do not wish Carlyle to know where I am to-night;" and the two females disappeared beneath the canvas.

The general immediately ordered Colonel Henderson to go on

with the two prisoners, and lodge them, under a strong guard, in the jail at Shelbyville.

Young Bolling, who had joined so ardently in the pursuit, in order to save Mary's father, now rushed forward, with eager inquiring eyes, to which the president responded, by raising the canvas in front of the tent, and the lover and his maiden met once more.

It would be a species of profanation to paint their emotions, or repeat their words—holy as the love of their young hearts!

CHAPTER XXV.

MAJOR MORROW AND DAVE TUTTLE.

WHEN the arch-lyncher, Major Morrow, effected his escape, by urging his horse to the frightful leap over the tall fence into the jungle of black thorns, as soon as he could crawl away a sufficient distance for safe concealment, his first care was to examine the extent of his injuries. Fortunately for him, the animal had broken down the brush of the thicket, as it fell to the earth, and being dressed completely in leather, he, therefore, received no wounds of any severity except some ugly scratches about the face.

But the deepest, the most enduring scar of all had been made, beyond the reach of human sight in the bleeding depths of his proud and passionate heart. He had lost all, his fame, his fair character, his influence, the prestige of a success, that hitherto had never deserted him for a moment. His wealth gone, his sons slain before his eyes, and the everlasting terrors of the law, suspended above his head, nothing now remained but the miserable life of a fugitive from justice.

There are moments in the existence of every, even the most unpoetic individual, when all the events in the long history of the consciousness, which has past, are suddenly, and as it were, simultaneously revealed, as by a flash of internal lightning, that searches out the darkest secrets in all the caverns of the soul, and reproduces each faded fact of memory, until the entire life lies before us, not in severed fragments, but as a homogeneous whole—a present picture, with all its lines of light and shadow, misty, mournful, yet vivid as the images of those strange dreams, which defiant of the laws of time and space, crush ages of joy or grief into an instant.

Such minutes of miraculous retrospection come at no particular season, nor in any given mood of the mind ; but apparently free from the ordinary fetters of association, and beyond the control of psychological causes, as if breathed into our hearts by inspiration, or the supernatural whispers of the angel or demon, that rules our earthly destiny, they visit us at all hours alike—at the gay bridal, beside the gloomy grave, in the merry avenue of the bright metropolis, and beneath the solemn shadows of the old wild woods, when the sun burns in the zenith at noonday, and when the darkened night shows all her stars. The sound of a voice, the sight of a summer cloud, the warble of a bird, one tone of the evening wind, the pattering of rain on the house-top, the low moans of the pine forest, the climax of pleasure, the crisis of mortal peril, everything and anything, or nothing, can touch this electric chain of our being, and bring back again all the dead that once lived in our hearts, all the perished pictures of fact and feeling from the darkest dells of moonlight memory.

Such an emotion, and the first that his coarse, cruel, hardened nature had ever experienced, mastered, for a short time, the mind of the regulator, as the full extent of his misfortune burst upon his view. All his ruthless deeds, all his many murders, every heart which his fierce hand had broken, every bitter tear that it had wrung from other eyes, recurred, at once to his recollection, and thrilled his soul with horror.

He rolled upon the ground in agony. He tore up the young grass with furious teeth. He dashed his head against the sharp thorns, foaming at the mouth like a mad dog. Suddenly he sprung upon his feet, and gazing with an awful smile upon his pistol—that darling weapon, which had shed blood enough to cool its iron, had it been red-hot from the fires of a forge, he exclaimed, in a loud demoniac whisper :

“No, I will not fly, like a coward, from my home. I will not leave the dead bodies of my children to be buried by my enemies. They shall not hunt me as a wolf, from bush to bush through all the wild woods ! I will return, and die at my own door ! but several of them shall bear me company in the quick journey to everlasting hell ! let me see how many—one, two, three, yes, I have half-a-dozen loads still left ; and I will take with me six souls as presents for the devil !”

As he spoke, the cries of the rangers, searching the thicket, came nearer, and he crouched down again in the jungle, like a hunted tiger.

“No,” he said to himself, in the same hissing, inhuman whisper ; “I will not now throw away my life by an act of folly. I will keep it for a richer feast of revenge. I will become a wild

man of the woods. I will wait, watch, waylay, and shoot them one by one, till the last foe licks the dust. I will combine with the robbers, the Comanches, and the devil—do and endure everything, to avenge the blood of my sons, and my own unspeakable disgrace !”

He crept away on his hands and knees through the green bushes, pausing when he heard the approach of his pursuers, who often came within five paces of where he lay, and creeping on again as they receded. In this dangerous and tedious manner, he finally gained the former council-ground, where the committee had first opened their rebellious proceedings, and their captives had been put to the torture. Here, perceiving no one within sight, he rushed into the large hollow of the sycamore, and ascended to the same internal knotty-projection, where Carlyle had once seated himself to witness the organization of the regulators.

Here he listened to the clamorous cries of the Texan troopers, as they wandered through the forest, calling to each other, and hunting everywhere for their human prey. At length, he saw a strong party advancing directly towards his place of refuge, and gave up all for lost. As they halted beneath the tree, one of them pointed at the hideous corpse of Bob Taylor, which still dangled from the same limb, exclaiming, “There, boys, is a robber, that old Morrow hung yesterday.”

“I wish that he had served all of the black band in the same way, and then committed suicide himself,” answered another, laughing, and the group went on.

As they gained the edge of the thicket, however, the lyncher

heard the commander of the group give the order, “Bill, you stay at this point for half an hour, and watch if any of the rascals pass.”

The attention of the major was now occupied with two objects, equally horrible to his eye and imagination, and he gazed alternately at the form of the ranger, some thirty yards distant, and then at the corpse of his victim, but a few feet from the small hole in the hollow wood, through which he was enabled to observe both. At last the Texan departed, and left the fugitive alone with the dead. His emotions grew terrible in their wild unutterable horror. The staring stony eye-balls of the corpse were turned towards him, as if with conscious upbraidings of his cruelty. The bloated blackened features seemed to scowl upon him still with infernal rage, and the fallen jaw disclosed the great white teeth in a ghostly hellish grin, that said plainly, as if the sentence had been uttered in words, “Lo ! I am avenged !”

Presently, a flock of ravens, which had been scared away by the troopers, with savage croaks, like the cries of dark-coated devils as they were, came back to finish their fearful feast. The murderer beheld their fierce bills, contending for the eyes, the lips, and all the dainty morsels of the human carcass, fighting, shouting, screaming, as it were, with yells of diabolical laughter.

“Oh !” he moaned, in mental anguish, “shall such a doom ever be mine ?”

“Croak ! croak ! caw—huzza !” answered the ill-omened birds of Fate, screaming more wildly, revelling more infernally

over their horrid meal, and calling all the crows and vultures to their orgies.

The conscience-stricken man could endure the vision no longer, but gave an involuntary cry, which frightened off the unclean fowls, yelling their maledictions as they flew.

The major, however, trembled with apprehension, as he saw that his silly exclamation had attracted towards his asylum a human figure, coming at a swift run. The face was so much deformed by bleeding wounds, that the very mother of such a son would have failed to recognize her own child; and, indeed, the old lyncher had little time for observation, as the instant after the first glimpse, the other rushed into the hollow sycamore, and began to climb upwards.

Morrow instantly cocked his pistol, and pointed the muzzle down at the ascending head of his supposed foe; but the second before he would have fired, a voice below inquired, "Major, are you there?"

"Yes, Mose Miller, is that you?" said the chief, rejoiced to find the bravest desperado of his band.

"What is left of me," answered the other. "Move up higher, and let me have your seat."

"Morrow, with much difficulty, clambered to a greater elevation, and obtained a somewhat similar footing, but far more unpleasant, and where the hole in the hollow wood was still smaller than the one beneath.

"Keep a sharp lookout there, Miller, to notice if anybody appears," ordered the chief.

"I can hardly see for the blood in my eyes," responded Mose

"Are you badly hurt?"

"Not dangerously, I think, but the cut is on my forehead, and the claret runs rather freely," said the other.

A few minutes afterwards, footsteps resounded on the other side of the tree, and soon came to the opening, where they paused. Then a voice called out—"Run here, Mr. Moore. Thar's some sorter game up this holler, or my name's not Tuttle."

"Great God! I am lost!" thought the lyncher; "that is Sol."

"How do you know, Dave!" asked a more youthful and polished tone, eagerly.

"Becaze thar's warm blood droppin' down here, and that's a sartin sign, I reckon."

"Then I will owe my death to Mose," thought the major, "I wish that I had shot him!"

"You are right, Dave Tuttle," remarked young Moore. "Doubtless, a wounded regulator has concealed himself in this hollow, and I hope it may prove to be old Morrow."

"And I guess I does too," affirmed his companion; "but you must let me kill him."

"No, I must have that honor," urged Alfred Moore, "he caused the death of my poor brother, and his son did the cruel deed!"

"But did he not bury my brother alive in Missouri?" said Tuttle, sharply; "and I'll cut his breath, or have a fight for it."

"Well, I suppose it matters not much by whose hand he dies,

and so I will yield my right to your antecedent claim," assented Moore.

Dave then moved stealthily in a circle at the distance of ten paces around the sycamore, scanning its trunk with keen glances, when he suddenly paused, exclaiming, "There's two pair of eyeballs, I'll be sworn!" and he raised his pistol and fired at the lower hole.

But the lyncher, having marked the gesture, withdrew his head, and the bullet missed its aim. Tuttle rushed to the foot of the trunk, and discharged his revolver in rapid succession, three times up the hollow.

The roar in that confined air was deafening as a thunder clap, and the shuddering fugitives felt themselves almost stunned by the shock, as well as stifled by the smoke of the powder; but protected by the knots beneath, they nevertheless escaped without any wounds.

"We can't git 'em that ar way," whispered Tuttle in the ear of his comrade; "let us fust stop 'em up, and then we can study what to do." And the two immediately dragged several large limbs, that lay around, and soon filled up the entrance completely.

From the noise of their efforts, and the increased darkness within, Mose Miller conjectured the frightful purpose of his foes, and cried in accents awful as the howl of a wild beast: "Oh! Major, they are barring up the hole at the foot of the tree! My God! we are gone!"

"Let us descend and prevent it," yelled the chief; "get down quickly as you can."

"Then they will shoot me!" ejaculated Mose; "for I lost my revolver in the flight."

"Damn you! go down this instant, or I'll shoot you!" shouted Morrow, striking the other's head with his heel.

In a moment both were laboring to remove the obstruction to their egress; but all such attempts seemed unavailing; for their enemies without continued to pile logs as heavy as they could lift against the entrance, and filled every crevice with pine knots.

The agony of the prisoners became intense. Mose in particular was boisterous in his mingled prayers and curses. One instant calling on Heaven, with appalling imprecations, and the next, imploring his pitiless jailors for mercy. At last he managed to open a crack sufficient to thrust forth his arm; but he immediately jerked it back with an indescribable howl of pain, his hand being mashed to a jelly of blood and shattered bones.

The Major seized the opportunity to discharge his revolver through the crevice, and deceived by the pretended groans of Tuttle, unluckily for himself, fired off every barrel. "There!" he exclaimed, in tones of ferocious triumph; "I think that one of the villains, at least, has got a dose of blue pills in him that he wont digest in a hurry!"

Dave Tuttle answered with peals of mocking laughter: "All right on this side of the tree; how is it in thar, old coon? Each good turn, they say, desarves another, and as you buried one of my daddy's sons alive in Missouri, now I'm even with you, I reckon!"

"Let me out, and fight me like a man!" said Morrow, in doleful accents.

"Did ye fight my brother like a man?" exclaimed Dave, in awful tones; "did ye gin him even the chance of a dog? No, old devil, you'd better say yer prayers, fur ye'll never see daylight agin!"

Alfred Moore then suggested: "Let us set the heap on fire, and roast them, as they sought to serve your brother, Sol!"

"That's a rich idea!" replied Dave; "we'll do it—burn 'em up like snakes!"

They hurried, and brought some live coals that remained among the ashes from the fire of the previous day, and kindled a bright blaze.

"Oh! for pity's sake, do not burn us to death!" entreated Mose Miller, in accents inconceivably mournful.

"Cowards! fiends! give us a chance like men!" shouted the major, in a voice terrible as the roar of a lion.

But the response came in bursts of merciless laughter, while the funeral flame increased every moment. Even the destroying element seemed to rejoice over its human prey. It licked every crevice in the pyre with its long, laughing-tongues, red as the hues of living blood. It sung, crackled, roared, fairly shouted, as if with infernal glee, and drowned the cries of the doomed men.

The last articulate sound heard was the wild, wailing prayer of Mose Miller: "Mercy! mercy! I did not kill your brother!"

The countenance of Dave Tuttle changed instantly as if by magic. His features grew mortally pale, and trembling in every limb, he exclaimed in hollow tones: "Cuss me if I can do it!"

and commenced scattering the brands in the utmost haste. The combustible fuel of pine-knots being removed, the flame ceased, and the larger logs, not yet having become ignited, nothing was left but the smoke and some embers beneath the heap, or live coals that could not be taken away with the naked hand.

"What do you mean, Dave?" asked young Moore, in the wildest astonishment.

"Cuss me, if I can do it!" responded Tuttle solemnly; "it's wusser nor the Comanches and cowardly Mexicans. I never yit did kill a man without giving him a fair show, and I wish I may turn to a wolf, if I ever do! and, although the old wretch did bury my poor brother alive, that's no reason for me to make myself as bad as him."

At the moment, the look of Dave had a certain air of sublimity. His figure towered up to its full height. His bosom expanded with the consciousness of nobility in act and feeling, and his sunburnt swarthy face was illumined by a rich radiance of generous and indescribable bravery.

"Then what do you intend to do?" inquired the other.

"Open the hog-hole fur 'em to crawl out," answered the rough hero, "and fight 'em like a true Texan."

"But they will probably shoot you down the instant when they get a sight of your person," suggested Alfred Moore.

"I'll fix 'em fur that," affirmed Dave Tuttle with a sly wink.

He then made a small opening, and inquired, "ar y'all alive and kickin' in thar?"

"Yes," replied the half-stifled voice of Mose Miller; "bu'

we are almost suffocated with the smoke. For the love of God let us out !”

“I will, if ye'll promise to fight us a fair jewel on the spot,” said Dave.

“We do—we do,” answered both prisoners in the same breath.

“Then poke us out yer weapons, so you can't unexpected git any advantage,” ordered the other, imperatively.

Hardly able to credit his senses at such magnanimity, the major handed over his revolver through the crevice in the wall of the besiegers.

“Is that all ?” interrogated Dave.

“Yes ; I swear it is,” responded Miller, “for I lost my pistol in the flight.”

Tuttle then pulled away the logs, one by one, while his friend stood with his revolver cocked, ready to fire, if he should observe the slightest token of danger from the liberated captives.

Such instances of heroic generosity are not unfrequent among the most reckless desperadoes of the backwoods. Men whose right arms have been crimsoned with human blood to the very elbow, shed on the miscalled field of honor, and in sudden encounters, where the chances are equally balanced, nevertheless, disdain to attack an unprepared foe, or to deal one stroke which cannot be returned. And yet these persons, without discrimination, as an entire class, have been stigmatized as ruffians by writers who scruple not to perpetrate more deadly stabs with their steel pens, than were ever given by the point

of the poisoned dagger, or the keenest blade of the bowie knife ! For what are all material tortures in comparison with the crucifying pangs of the mind, murdered in its dearest memories, its fondest loves, its brightest hopes ? How many of the rich, in the gay capitals of commerce show mercy to the breaking hearts of the poor, ground into the dust by their cunning monopolies ! Aye, the most clear-headed and calm philosopher, the most warm-souled philanthropist, the greatest eulogist on urban civilization, to be candid, must confess that there are other competitions more fearful than battles with revolvers, and the willful homicide of happiness and reputation is the worst species of possible assassination !

As soon as Miller and Morrow emerged from their smoky prison, Dave saw that they were indeed disarmed, and remarked quietly, “well, gentlemen, I will now load the revolvers, and let you take yer choice.”

“But I can't fight,” urged Mose.

“Why not ?” inquired Tuttle with a look of surprise ; “you seemed willin' enough, when you tuk me and brother Sol.”

Miller held up his horribly mutilated hand, with tears of grief.

“That ar' a fact, poor feller,” said Dave, in tones of pity, “and as long as you havn't killed any body, we'll let you off.”

He next proceeded to prepare the weapons, and then held them up, saying : “now, old sinner, which do y' choose the right hand or the left ?”

“I will select the one in your left hand,” replied his antagonist.

"Then I'll measure off thirty steps, and lay the tool down, and you can go arter it when I come back, and fire when y' like," observed Tuttle. "That's fair, ain't it?"

"Certainly," responded the regulator, with a countenance of malicious pleasure.

The other counted off the requisite number of paces, and having deposited the revolver, walked calmly again to the sycamore.

The major, with a murderous smile on his freckled visage, started hastily towards his position ; but Dave interposed, "wait a bit, old feller, I want a leetle chat with y', as it's the fust, it will most sartinly be the last."

"Talk away, but be in a hurry, if you please," said Morrow, angrily.

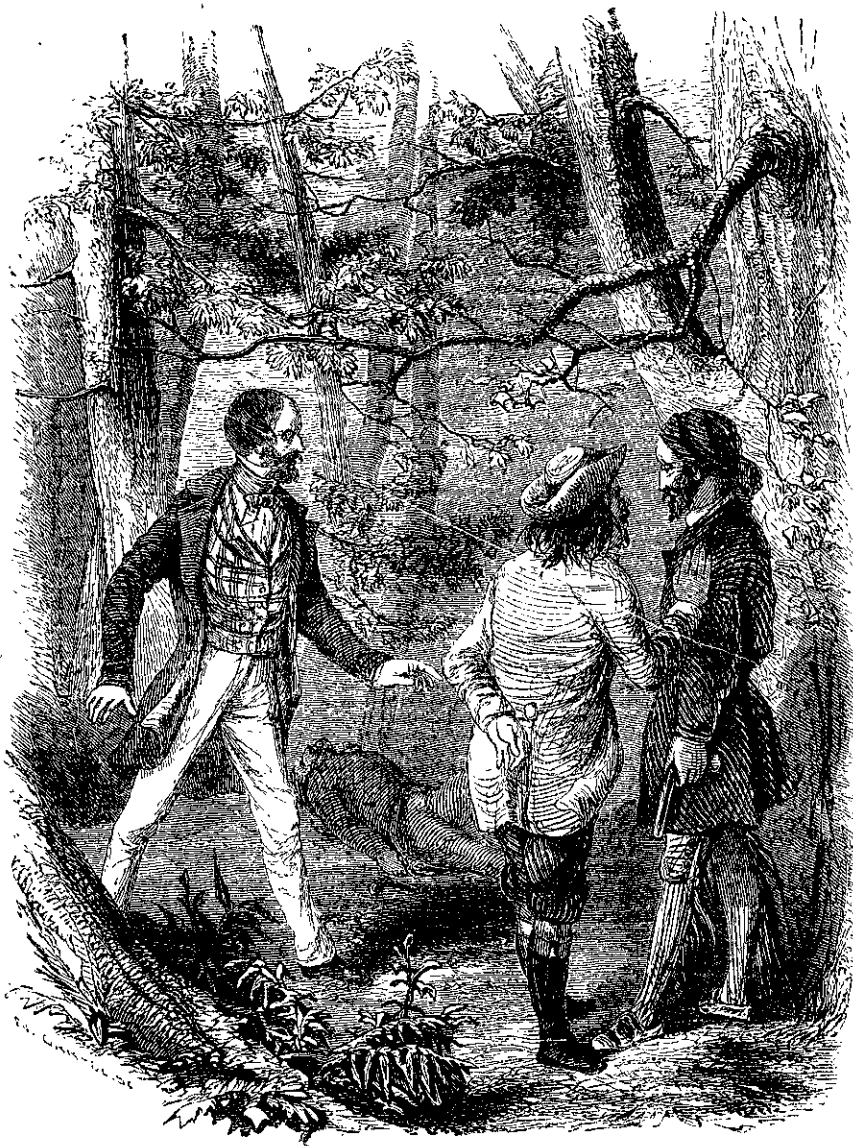
"O, y' needn't git in a huff, becaze y' can't start quick as a streak of lightnin', though it's a long road yu've got to travel," remarked Dave, in a dry tone.

"I had rather fight than stand here, all day, gabbling nonsense," retorted the great lyncher, savagely.

"Would'nt y' rather choke babies to death in Missouri than do either?" asked Tuttle, with an awful look.

"What do you mean, rascal?" gasped the other, turning white as a sheet.

"I mean, that you murdered your wife's fust child, becaze 'twur not yourn, but Lawyer Ellsman's, of St. Louis ; and my brother what y' buried alive seed you do it with his own eyes, in a little holler near the Osage, and then y' cast the dead critter into the river !"



Tuttle's object, by this terrible banter, was to agitate the lyncher so much as to disturb the deadly accuracy of his aim; but in this he was, at least, unsuccessful; for when Morrow, after snatching up the revolver, turned round, although his visage retained its previous death-like pallor, his limbs appeared firm and steady as iron, while he levelled his pistol at the bosom of his antagonist.—PAGE 359.

"It is false!" cried the major, in hoarse accents, quivering in every nerve; "let us decide, however, all differences betwixt us, by the pistol."

"Go ahead, old baby-killer!" said Dave; "but mind y' don't see a ghost before the sights of yer weepun!"

Tuttle's object, by this terrible banter, was to agitate the lyncher so much as to disturb the deadly accuracy of his aim; but in this he was, at least, unsuccessful; for when Morrow, after snatching up the revolver, turned round, although his visage retained its previous death-like pallor, his limbs appeared firm and steady as iron, while he levelled his pistol at the bosom of his antagonist.

Indeed, it was impossible to determine, as they stood with their weapons presented, a moment before firing, which was the firmest, or most fearless. The countenances of both seemed truly diabolical in their fixed frenzy of unutterable hate; but that of Dave wore an awful smile, while the features of the other revealed a satanic grin, lurid and appalling.

Suddenly, both pistols roared together, and Tuttle reeled at the shock, as if about to fall, clapping his left hand to his right breast apparently in an agony of pain; and young Moore thought that the combat had ended fatally for his friend.

"Ha!" exclaimed the regulator, with a wild laugh of mockery, and rushed with the fury of a savage towards his tottering enemy.

But when he came within a dozen paces, Dave suddenly rallied, raised his revolver, quick as a thought, and sent a bullet through the centre of Morrow's forehead, the latter falling to the earth, like lead.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Alfred Moore, in a voice of the deepest anxiety.

"No, I aint even scratched," replied Tuttle, laughing; "I only played possum, to fool the old feller; but I come very near cotching it; fur I heerd the ball whistle mighty close to my jaw, I'll swar."

"Mose Miller immediately advanced towards Dave, and holding out his left hand, with tears in his eyes, said in grateful tones:

"Let me thank you for sparing my life, although it may hereafter be that of a cripple; and forgive my conduct at your brother's house, I was urged to it by the persuasion of others, some of them, too, ministers of the gospel, who caused me to believe that Sol was a common thief."

"I pardon y' freely," answered Tuttle, with the moisture of tender pity on his own brown cheeks; "and now I'm sorry fur mashin' yer hand; but go home with me, and we'll see if it can't be cured." He then added, "we must let Morrow's people know what has happen', so they may put away the body in the ground; becaze, though I hated him orfully, while livin', I don't want to war with the dead!" And the three started for the block-house.

It will be remembered, that Alfred Moore and Dave Tuttle both escaped from the regulators on the same night. As soon as the lynchers left his father's residence, the former returned, and having procured his rifle, a double-barrelled shot-gun, and a couple of revolvers, he followed on after the lawless party, for the purpose of revenge. Wandering in the woods around the major's residence, he met, by accident with Dave, who being a former

acquaintance, they agreed to prosecute their common object together, and the success of their united pursuit, we have just witnessed.

In a short time after they had left the corpse of the major, they arrived at his dwelling, but subsequently to the departure of the rangers, and Sol too had already started for his prairie home. They paused in the yard, and Dave Tuttle remarked in a mournful voice:

"Mr. Moore, you go in, and tell 'em what has happened; becaze, fur my very life, I can't."

When the latter entered the parlor, he trembled with pale terror at the scene which met his glance. The weeping mother still lay on the blood-polluted floor, alternately kissing the icy lips of her two inanimate sons, and uttering low moans of immeasurable despair and grief, while her daughters stood near, weeping almost as wildly for their brothers.

The young man hesitated to communicate the additional tidings of crushing woe, but as all other persons, even the slaves had gone, he had no alternative.

"Where is he?" screamed Joanna, bounding to her feet, as if she had been hurled up by the recoil of a broken spring in her heart.

"Near the large sycamore, by the lake at the council-ground," answered Moore.

"I must go to him!" she cried, in accents sad and solemn, beyond all imagination, and rushing from the door, with maniac lustre in her dark eyes, she flew across the field!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JAIL.

SINCE the first settlement of North America, there had never been an organization of thieves and robbers, at once so powerful and so extensive, as that which existed on the western frontier at the date of the foregoing events. They had a regular *cordon* of private posts, running along the line of civilized life, from the prairies of Iowa to the thorny chapparal of the Rio Grande, while travelling agents, as missionaries of murder and robbery, kept up a perpetual communication between the different sections of this vast dominion of coalesced and felonious crime; and district meetings, as well as general councils, assembling annually, bound together the diabolical brotherhood in a close and compact union, enabling them to evade, and sometimes to defy, all the laws of civil society. They had their secret pass-words and mystic signs, and their confidants in almost every neighborhood, and thus, for the most part, they managed to escape punishment.

Two dissimilar causes contributed to produce this deplorable state of things. In the first place, the population was scattered

in settlements, with wide intervals of solitary desert betwixt them, abounding in wild game, and exactly fitted for the hiding-places of rogues and refugees. There were no jails, except insecure log-cabins, and as the courts held their sessions but once or twice in the year, prisoners always contrived to escape either before the day of trial or that of execution, if indeed they did not procure an acquittal through false testimony or some cunning quibble of the law. It was of course impossible to hire a guard, when the only means of payment must be in county scrip, at the current value of ten cents on the hundred.

But a second and still stronger reason favored the robbers. The half-civilized tribes of Indians, from the east of the Mississippi, had been lately removed to the frontiers of Missouri and Arkansas, and the felon, when in danger, had only to cross the line, and find a safe and permanent asylum among these secret enemies of the white race.

As there seemed to be no legal or moderate remedy for such annoying and innumerable wrongs, the people everywhere, and almost simultaneously arose from their lethargy, and organizing themselves into companies of lynchers, took the law into their own hands. And hence, terrible scenes ensued, about the same time in Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas, and in the evils of anarchy rivalled, or perhaps surpassed, the outrages which they had been intended to redress. Every ruthless passion was let loose upon society. The revolver displaced both judge and sheriff, and the bowie knife dethroned Blackstone. However, during the conflict, the prestige and power of the rogues, received a death-blow, and never again assumed a menacing position.

The day after their capture, Carlyle and his friend Curran, with Dublin Jack, were seated on the floor in the jail at Shelbyville, indulging in those gloomy reflections, and terrible forebodings, which their situation could not fail to inspire. They could no longer entertain the least hope, even to preserve life itself, except by a verdict of acquittal at the hands of a jury. Escape from their prison seemed utterly impossible ; for heavy chains had been fastened to their wrists as well as ancles, and a strong force of rangers had been detailed to stand guard around the log-cabin where they were confined.

The appearance of each captive, in the meantime had undergone a remarkable, almost magical, change. The countenance of the Captain was rigid, stern, terrible, unrelenting, as the fabulous iron destiny, in which he so firmly believed as the only controlling force in the universe. His thin lips were immovable as a mouth of marble, and his dark eyes flashed their defiance on the very walls of his dungeon. The amazing power of his will in such circumstances of immeasurable despair realized the sublime of physical desperation.

The lieutenant, on the contrary, looked indescribably sad and solemn. His lips quivered nervously, and from his blue eyes rolled occasionally large silver tears, in single drops, like the first of a thunder shower ; while his handsome features had lost every tinge of their usual rosy color. But yet his visage did not betray any token of craven fear. The emotion revealed there, seemed rather unutterable sorrow for the past—perchance repentance.

The coarse, brutal face of the giant, Dublin Jack, presented a

totally different indication of natural feeling. He scowled continually, like a demon, at the fetters on his hands and feet, and rattled their iron links incessantly, by the restlessness of his motions. Now and then, he yelled horrible curses and bitter blasphemies, such as a lost spirit might be imagined to utter on its arrival in the prison-house of purgatorial tortures. He resembled a tiger lately caught, and could scarcely credit his own senses to find himself within the bars and bolts of the gloomy cage.

At length Curran spoke in a kind, but very mournful voice "Dear cousin, this is indeed a fearful fate, compared with the glorious hopes and morning visions that glittered from afar on the horizon of our innocent youth."

"Well, I care not," replied the other, in severe but tranquil tones. "We have enjoyed our summer of sunshine, and must now confront, without shrinking, the fury of the winter's storm. Everything in nature has its day of doom, how then can man expect to be alone free from the common lot ? The fairest flowers must fade. The tallest pine-tree withers before the thunderbolt, as the mountain-top on which it towers crumbles to atoms at the shock of the earthquake. The very stars die out in the sky ; and, perhaps, at last, as the old myths seem to indicate, all the rolling worlds will return to the primitive chaos, whence they so vainly emerged. All things, empires, cities, philosophies, religions, races, perish at the pre-appointed hour ; for what force or cunning can fight with eternal fatality ? what menaces or idle prayers can move the viewless monster from his

remorseless purpose, pitiless as these metallic links on my fettered hands?"

"I did not allude to the pangs of death," said his companion, with pallid lips, "but to the disgrace of such a final exit from the light of life, as we must make."

"Disgrace!" exclaimed Carlyle, with a contemptuous sneer; what is it? To merely have your name—an empty sound—discussed by the breath of fools. When the final agony is over, it matters not what men say, for you shall never more hear it!"

"But the soul—the immortal intelligence, that thinks in the scheming brain, acts in the working hand, feels in the fiery heart, may it not still bear, through other spheres of being, the bitter memory of its deeds done in the faded flesh?"

"I tell you that there can be nothing in the universe but life, death, and destiny," retorted the captain, in the sternest accents; "for where all is fatality, there can be no room for the reign of a God!"

"O! idle dreamer of futile fallacies," answered Curran, mournfully, "can you not perceive that your argument is a terrible *non sequitur*, and that your own premises warrant an opposite conclusion? Because, for ought you can know, or even imagine, to the contrary, the very fate which you affirm, may have enthroned a Deity, and predestined a future state of rewards and punishment. Before you can be qualified to pronounce a negative on the subject of such mighty mysteries, you must possess facts gathered from the experience of more worlds than one—you must pierce the starry deep of endless space, and

scale the blazing battlements of the highest heaven, before you will be competent to assert the non-existence of a spirit-land!"

"Aye, it may be so," muttered the skeptic, with an awful frown; then raising his angry eyes and chained hands towards the roof of his prison, he thundered, in appalling tones, "nevertheless, eternal destiny, hear me! Thy slave, though crushed to the earth—fated—fallen—hopeless—defies thee here, hereafter, and for evermore!"

At the moment, the door opened, and the brown, withered visage of attorney Rider entered, with a profusion of obsequious bows and friendly smiles.

"What do you want here, old gabbler?" exclaimed the captain, in accents of violent indignation.

"Your examination before the magistrate will commence in a short time," said the lawyer, pecking the air with his beak-like nose, as if to find a fee, "and I thought, perhaps, you would wish to confer with your counsel."

"With my counsel!" echoed the robber, in amazement, "who is my counsel?"

"Who else should it be but myself, your humble servant, the only attorney in the place?" answered Rider, in a pompous manner.

"Ah! you seek a retainer, you think that in such a desperate case the victim will bleed freely," sneered Carlyle, mimicking the other's air, and ludicrous obeisance.

"You do me much injustice," responded Rider, as if wounded grievously by the captain's words, "I have already received my fee, and a most liberal one it was too; I must say that."

"Who the devil employed you?" asked Carlyle, in utter astonishment.

"Your beautiful and accomplished sister," replied the lawyer, with a sly wink, "and any man may well be proud of such a loving and devoted relative."

"My sister!" repeated the bandit, almost stupified by the information.

"Yes, your sister Lucy," said the other, very surprised at his agitation; "did you imagine that she was dead?"

"No, but I thought that she had betrayed me," murmured Carlyle, in saddened tones, almost doubting the evidence of his own ears.

"What madness induced you to believe such a falsehood?" inquired the attorney, warmly. "I have seen many spectacles of sorrow in such cases, during my long practice in the defence of criminals, but I never witnessed before such grief as hers. She paid me a thousand dollars down for my services, and promised as much more if I succeed in attaining your acquittal, as I shall certainly do."

"Eternal destiny! how I have wronged her!" cried the robber, trembling with marvellous emotion, and before the new gleam of hope, which revealed a chance for escape from his doom. He had steeled his heart against fear, and gathered firmness from the very blackest reflections of his own despair. He steadied his soul to dare and endure the worst, and he could have undergone the keenest pangs, the most infernal tortures ever invented, without a groan or tear of anguish; but this sudden smile, this bright glimpse of a more propitious fortune,

unnerved him quite, and he stooped his forehead upon his chained hands, and wept like a child.

At last, he recovered his composure, and asked in a mournful tone; "why does not Lucy come and see me?"

"Oh," answered Rider promptly, "the doctor will not permit her to leave the sick room; she screamed and carried on so when she found that you were taken, as to rupture a blood-vessel and nearly endanger her life."

"Dearest Lucy, what an atonement I will offer you, for my past injuries, if I shall ever again have the opportunity!" sighed the bandit, at the moment all his old affection rushing back in a tender stream to his heart.

"And now," said the lawyer, "since we understand each other, let me proceed to advise you. Be sure that you deny every accusation which they may bring against you."

"But what are the particular charges?" interrogated Carlyle.

"The murder of a Parson Cole and Bob Bennet."

"Who are the witnesses?" gasped the assassin, awfully pale.

"They have only one—Comanche Ben."

"Ha! he is the traitor!" cried the Captain with a stony stare; "then indeed, I am lost!"

"Not at all, my good sir," said the attorney; "for your sister will swear to your innocence, and prove the Comanche himself to be guilty of the deed."

"Oh! Lucy, what a treasure you are in the hour of adversity! I never knew your worth until now!" exclaimed the bandit, in accents of passionate earnestness.

Those who affirm, that the light of love, when once faded can

never be relumed, have never passed through the deepest mysteries of that wild emotion, as lawless as the lightning, as wayward as the wind of winter—that type of fickleness and change. Often when the heart that formerly burned with the heat of a furnace, has grown cold and careless to the divine voice whose lightest tone could once fill it with a frenzy of joy, and to the beautiful lips, one touch of which made the very blood boil in all the veins; and even after long years of absence, some unexpected, and perchance trivial event—a few lines of an old letter—a lock of hair—the sight of a picture—the recovery of a forgotten ring—the presence of danger—the approach of death—or it may be, the vivid, life-like imagery of a dream—will revive the faded fondness, in all the fiery ardor of its glowing prime. And after the resurrection of such a love, though dead and buried in the bosom, its might and magic are even greater than in the most powerful spell of its first existence.

The investigation before the magistrate, was held the same day after the lawyer's visit to the prisoners. Comanche Ben appeared as the only witness, and testified positively that Captain Carlyle had murdered the two persons, as charged, and that Dublin Jack, with a number of others, had assisted to bury them.

Attorney Rider urged a most determined opposition against the committal of his client, and furiously assailed both the competency and credibility of the Indian. But as the corpses of the victims had been found, in confirmation of the Comanche's story, and the excitement of public opinion was entirely unfavorable to the accused, they seemed to have little chance with so ignorant and prejudiced a court.

The chief robber listened with a calm, disdainful air to the evidence, and at its termination, before the final decision of the magistrate, he interposed, "May it please your honor, is there any proof to implicate Mr. Curran in the affair?"

"Not as yet," replied the justice. "Witness, did the lieutenant here, aid in either the homicide or the burial of the body?"

"Not as I know of," answered the Indian.

"Then I must discharge him," remarked the court, in accents which showed such a duty to be quite painful.

"I object to that," said Curran rising; "unless you also liberate Mr. Carlyle; for if he be guilty, so am I too."

"Do you then, confess the crime?" inquired the magistrate eagerly.

"No sir," responded Curran, with a look of extreme severity; "I will repeat my declaration, that if the captain be guilty so am I; and if you send him again to jail, I wish my name to be included in the same *mittimus*."

"Well, I will be happy to accommodate you," said the court, with a malicious smile, and seizing his pen, he wrote the order remanding all the three to prison.

As soon as they went back to the dungeon, Carlyle asked with almost angry surprise; "In the name of common sense, Curran, what folly caused you to make such a qualified acknowledgment, and furnish that spiteful magistrate a pretext for putting you once more in chains?"

"Dear cousin," replied the lieutenant sadly: "did you have such a faint idea of my friendship as to imagine that I would leave you alone to face death, if it must come to that bitter end?"

"Yes, but you are innocent of the charge," suggested the Captain.

"Then I will not be the first innocent man, that ever suffered unjustly," answered the other.

"Oh! what a blunder, you have perpetrated," exclaimed the chief, frowning; "if you had gone free, it would have enabled me to escape also."

"How?" asked Curran, in surprise.

"You might have become a witness in my favor."

"Cousin," responded the lieutenant, in accents of extraordinary firmness and solemnity; "you have a thousand unquestionable proofs of my devotion to your welfare, and of the fatal fascination which your power has held over me. I will even contrive to hang by your side if you shall be executed; I would die to save your life at any hour. But there is one thing that I will never perform for you again—I will never more do a voluntary wrong; and I would not swear a falsehood, to rescue a hundred such necks as yours and mine from the halter!"

"Why! you have all at once grown wonderfully virtuous," retorted the captain sarcastically.

"I deem it time for the reformation of us both," said Curran, in tones of unutterable sadness; "now that we hover on the breaking brink of the dark river, whose swift waves will waft us to some far off shore, we know not whither, or to what an awful doom!"

"But the lawyer affirms that we will be cleared without difficulty," urged Carlyle, in agitated accents, shocked in spite of himself by the other's melancholy voice and manner.

"I am certain we stand on the verge of eternity," answered the lieutenant, with death-like features. "My angel mother came to me last night in the pale starlight, before the battle, and warned me of my approaching fate. It was her second visit since she has been an inhabitant of the heavens; and the first was the evening before our flight from New Orleans!"

"Optical illusions!" muttered the sceptical robber, with an unquiet countenance.

"It seemed evident to my senses as any form of either sunshine or shadow," said the other with a sigh.

"I cannot believe it," returned the chief, shuddering in all his muscles; "it would be too dreadful for me to die now, when I know what agony it would inflict on the heart of her who loves me, with such unfading fondness."

And thus by the inevitable operation of an ordinary psychological law, with the bandit's old affection had revived his desire for life, and his horror at the idea of that most lonely solitude, that deepest darkness—the sunless night of the grave. Previously he had been unwavering as an iron mountain, that thunder itself might not shake. But now the wind of a zephyr could move him like the lightest leaf of the woods. Before, he was prompt to perish, he cared not how or when; now, he would have gladly bartered the wealth of worlds for one brief month of mortal being. He had stood firm as a giant in the wild sands of despair, with the stormy billows up to his neck; in the green field of flowery hope, he was weaker than an infant.

Every day Attorney Rider came to the jail with tender mes-

sages from Lucy, and assurances of a final acquittal. At length he announced that she had so far recovered, as to be able to pay a visit of her own on the subsequent morning. It may well be imagined that in the present excited state of his feelings, the robber did not close his eyes during that night. Throughout all the darkness, the guard of rangers could hear the incessant clanking of his chains, and his muttered apostrophes to the woman that he now loved with a wilder passion than ever.

A little after sunrise she made her entrance, apparently quite pale and feeble; and immediately threw herself upon Carlyle's neck, weeping and sobbing, as if her heart would break with a mingled tempest of grief and fondness. Had her own frantic affection indeed regained the mastery of the woman's mind? Let us wait and witness.

"Oh ever dearest, and now only dear, forgive me!" cried the bandit, mixing his tears with hers.

"There is truly nothing to forgive," she murmured in whispered music; "my heart, my love, my life—all are yours! but speak not of that; I have come to tell you glorious news."

"What is it?" he gasped, as if fainting from anxiety.

"I have bribed the sheriff, and here is a list of your jury," she said, handing him a small roll of paper.

He snatched it hastily from her fingers, and devoured the names with a smile of triumphant joy. "Good!" he exclaimed, "they cannot hang me, at least the first trial; for half these men are my friends."

"The officer could do no better," she replied; "because all

the rest of your band has fled, and these are not even suspected; but it cost me all my jewels to pay for so much favor."

"Never mind, Lucy, you shall be rich as a queen yet," consoled the captain with beaming looks.

"I could buy up the remainder of the panel, if I only had the means; I have felt them on the subject," she remarked in a mournful voice.

"What do you say?" asked Carlyle, wildly rattling his chain, as if he doubted the evidence of his own senses.

She repeated the assurance. "Oh!" he whispered, "if that be all which is necessary, I can tell you where to find wealth sufficient to ransom a royal head!" And he gave her directions how to discover his hidden treasures, the spoils of a hundred robberies and murders.

"The jurors only require a thousand dollars to each," she affirmed.

"Well, be sure that you do not give them more than half, until after the trial," he urged by way of caution.

"Trust me, they shall not have a chance to betray us," she answered confidently.

"And now," he insisted, "hurry away, and finish the good work which you have so auspiciously commenced."

They then separated with many ardent tears, and mutual protestations of eternally fond fidelity. A brief space, after Lucy had gone, Attorney Rider was admitted.

"And so she told you the fine tidings," said the lawyer, chuckling; "I see it in your eyes. Well, she can beat me all

hollow at the game of bribery, though some envious pettifoggers accuse me of being a cunning hand myself."

"Counsellor, I want you to draw up a legal instrument for me," observed Carlyle, eagerly.

"What is it!" asked Rider, pecking the air with his beak, for a fee.

"A deed of gift, bestowing on Lucy all my property, money, slaves, land, everything, so that in case of accident, she will not be penniless."

"An excellent idea," replied the attorney, with a countenance of unqualified approval; "I will go to my office, and write it instantly."

"Make it out to Lucy, the widow of Juan Gordo, of New Orleans," directed the robber.

"Aye, I thought so," remarked Rider, with a merry wink.

An hour subsequently, the counsellor returned with duplicate deeds of gift, which Carlyle signed, and had witnessed in due form, and which his attorney hastened off to have recorded.

On the Monday of the following week, the prisoners were placed at the bar for final trial, and never did the countenances of supposed confederates in murder, appear more remarkably contrasted. Carlyle, at first looked smiling, confident, undaunted; Curran was pale, resigned, penitent; while Dublin Jack scowled at judge and jurors with the aspect of a despairing fiend.

An immense, noisy multitude, almost amounting to a mob, collected in and around the court-house, thirsty as wolves for

human blood, and only restrained from tearing the captives in pieces, from fear of the rangers, composing the guard.

"Where is Lucy?" asked the chief robber, in a most anxious whisper, as the case opened without her attendance.

"She will come with my wife, when wanted," answered Rider; "it would be unpleasant to expose her to the gaze of such brutal spectators longer than necessary."

The same proofs were detailed as had been presented before the committing magistrate, and the prosecution closed the evidence for the Republic.

"May it please your honor to indulge me a moment, while I go after a witness for the defence," said Rider, bowing. The judge signified his assent, and the attorney departed on his mission. He remained absent, however, so great a while that the court became restless, and showed a strong disposition to proceed without him.

All at once he rushed in with a wild look, exclaiming:

"Our witness has been taken suddenly and dangerously ill!" At which announcement, there was a general laugh.

The case then went on, and was soon submitted to the panel, who retired to deliberate upon their verdict. But they could hardly, at that hour, be considered as free agents; for the mob gathered around their room, clamoring loudly for the blood of their victims, and uttering frightful menaces, provided that they should be cheated out of their expected prey.

At last the jury returned to the hall of justice, and the prisoners, with pallid features gazed into their eyes as they

entered, to read if possible their fate before it should be uttered.

The foreman handed in the verdict of the doomed men, containing that awful word, which has frozen the very marrow in so many brave bones, and sent unknown thousands of haughty necks to the halter—"Guilty!" The sound of itself is enough to make the strongest knees quiver.

Dublin Jack gave a wild yell, like the war-whoop of a savage; Curran burst into bitter tears; and Carlyle staggered as if he had been shot in the heart!

The court immediately pronounced the appalling sentence, that they should be hung a week from the following Friday.

The next morning Lucy dressed herself out as a bride, and sparkling in all her gold and jewels, with eyes flashing unutterable joy and revenge, entered the prison-house where all was horror and despair. She paused in the door, and said with a merry ringing laugh:

"How are you to-day, dearest?"

"Away! hag of unfathomable hell!" roared Carlyle, leaping the length of his chain, and falling heavily on the floor.

"What! does it want to bite!" exclaimed the cruel woman with her music-murmuring laugh; "poor thing! it has tumbled down and hurt itself! Come here, darling, and let Lucy kiss the place, and make it well!"

"Will nobody take that queen of all the devils away?" shouted the robber, with the bloody foam flying from his lurid lips, as he still struggled in vain with his fetters to reach her.

"I will go myself," she answered, with wilder glee; "if you will honor me with another deed of gift!"

"Oh! if there be a God, he will burn you for this, to all eternity," yelled the wretch, biting his own blasphemous tongue in a tremendous agony of impotent rage!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST.

"GOOD-BYE, sweet creature," Lucy said or rather sung, for every tone of her voice was the richest music, and she turned as if to leave the jail. But she came immediately back, saying, "my dear, I forgot something. As you are about to start on your travels, I wish to send a message to Juan Gordo. Give his ghost my compliments, if you should happen to meet him in Fire-island, which is doubtless your port of destination!"

The miserable man only answered with a groan of despair.

"Have you forgotten all that I have done for your interests?" she asked in mocking accents.

"Avaunt! she-fiend!" he yelled, with the roar of a wild beast.

"I employed Comanche Ben to exchange your letter to General Houston for one of my own, representing your real character and conduct!"

"Eternal destiny!" moaned the robber.

"I sent the Indian with a note to your Mary and her lover, warning them of your designs against his life, by which means he effected his escape," she continued.

THE LAST.

381

He uttered a cry, terrible as the howl of a mad wolf.

"I induced the Comanche to act as guide for the rangers, and lead them to your camp."

Again, that howl of rage rent the air.

"And I lodged the information against you, for the murder of Parson Cole and Bob Bennet," she added, laughing with more diabolical merriment than ever.

"Oh, how I will tear and torture you, when we two meet in hell!" he shouted, smiting his forehead with his chained hands.

"And for all this delicious revenge I have sold my body to the Indian; but I have not yet paid him—ha! ha! ha! what a glorious rival you have!" she exclaimed with wilder peals of appalling mirth.

And this time Carlyle himself laughed like a maniac.

"Farewell, for the last parting," she said in withering tones of irony "and be sure that you do not forget my compliments to Juan Gordo!"

She turned, and met the awful eyes of Comanche Ben gazing, with a look of suspicion, upon her countenance, within a few feet of the door. He walked off in silence by her side. When they had advanced some hundred yards, the Indian attempted to take her hand, but she repulsed him with an icy shudder, observing; "you must remember, Ben, that our compact will not be perfect until the Captain shall be hung."

"But suppose that he should commit suicide, what then?" asked the savage, whose doubts of her fidelity increased, as he noticed the horror with which she shrunk from the contact of his fingers.

"Why, then I will not wed you, that is all," she replied with a look of disdain and hatred.

"How can I prevent the act?" inquired the Comanche, now certain of her falsehood, and trembling with terrible thoughts.

"Watch the jail, and see that none of Carlyle's friends give him any sort of weapon to do the deed," she urged with her usual art.

"And will you then surely marry me?" interrogated the monster, piercing her very soul with those horrible Indian eyes.

"Yes," she gasped, growing pale beneath his glance.

"I will do it," he muttered seizing her hand, and dealing it a kiss that almost amounted to a burning bite. He then went back to guard the prison.

The moment when Lucy departed, Carlyle called one of his jailers, and offered eagerly; "induce Comanche Ben, to come and see me, and I will give you five hundred dollars."

The man assented, and half an hour afterwards the Indian was brought in.

"Well, Ben," said his former chief, in accents of friendly commiseration; "a woman has fooled you and me both."

The savage gazed at him with a bewildered look, unable to articulate a single sentence.

"And so she promised to marry you!" exclaimed the Captain, laughing loud and long; "why she has made you a greater dupe than even myself! She has managed to get all my wealth, and now she will be off to Europe, and soon have a nobleman for her husband—not you, Ben; you were a goose to dream of such a thing!"

"Then I will have her heart's blood!" cried the Indian in frightful tones.

"Do not fly into a passion, and commit any rash act," urged Carlyle; "go, and request her to wed you outright; if she intends to keep her word, she can do it one time as well as another; and if she refuses, you will then be satisfied, and come back to me. I will then tell you how to avenge us both."

"I'll hew her in small pieces! I'll roast her heart, and rend it with my teeth!" yelled the Comanche with glaring eyes.

"You must be careful what you say, or do," cautioned the chief; "for she has now money to buy friends; and if you fail to follow my advice, she will outwit and escape us yet."

The Indian acquiesced in this prudent view of the case, and took his leave to seek another interview with the cunning woman; but when he arrived at her boarding-house, they informed him that she had already gone away, none knew whither, in company with a son of old Jack Miles, the brother of Mary's father. The Comanche sprung instantly upon his horse, and galloped off with the speed of the wind.

In the meanwhile, let us return to other and more interesting characters in our story. Young Bolling, with his beautiful beloved and Lucy, went on, the night after the battle, with General Houston to Shelbyville. Here they unexpectedly met with Jack Miles and his six gigantic sons, who having learned the situation of their fair, and favorite relative among the robbers, had shouldered their rifles, and hastened to the rescue. Their delight was extreme to find her safe from the danger, mingled however with sad regret for the fate of her unhappy father.

whom all concluded to be drowned, and as the fact turned out to be, as the dead body was discovered the following afternoon.

The corpse of the colonel was buried with the usual ceremonies, and the two young lovers, having placed a suitable person in charge of the farm, attended by the faithful Cæsar, went home with their uncle, determined after a suitable lapse of time, to celebrate their bridal, in the same neighborhood where they had plighted their hearts, by the first burning vows of undying love.

The re-union of these friends, with the hunter, Sol Tuttle and his joyful family, may be far better imagined, than it can possibly be described. As soon as the mutual feelings and congratulations had been exchanged with the other members of old Jack's household, Bolling and his affianced bride hurried off to see their neighbors.

It was a delicious afternoon in the virgin prime of spring ; and their souls harmonized well with heaven's own stainless blue—that divine tint, the sacred one of love, among all the radiant colors of the rainbow ; and the angel hope sung in their hearts, sweeter songs than any bird of the forest. They passed beneath that tree with snowy flowers, which had flung down its bright blooms upon their mingled hair, at the moment of their earliest kiss, nor is it recorded that they did not repeat this pleasant experiment.

"Here, y' are at last !" exclaimed Sol, rushing from the door to hail them ; but he broke suddenly down with his intended compliments, and burst into tears of uncontrollable rapturous joy.

"I'd give y' both my hands," said the hunter, mastering,

at length his emotion ; "but the brutes roasted 'em so that I have to keep 'em bound up."

Are they much injured ? " inquired Bolling anxiously.

"Oh, they'll git well arter a while," answered the other carelessly ; "I hurt 'em wusser, howsumever, strikin' the lynchers in the fight, than they did in the fire. But step inside and see the old 'oman and the little folks."

Susy and the children immediately crowded around them with boisterous delight, and the beautiful babe, the common idol of the household, was duly presented for its share of attention. As the two lovers kissed its little smiling lips by turns, Sol remarked, "it's quite well to practise that sort of jewty ; fur ye'll likely have plenty on it to do arter a spell, on yer own account."

"La ! Tuttle, how ken y' run on so !" reproved the laughing wife, while a pair of other faces turned to a burning crimson.

"Why, Susy," persisted the hunter, with the old merry devil of mischief in his twinkling black eye ; "what else are people made fur but to marry and hev children ? A cabin without children, is wuss nor a field and no corn, or a night without stars. To buss babies comes as nateral to young folks, as fodder comes to a hungry hoss."

What farther lofty and philosophical views Sol might have predicated as to the final purpose of man's creation, I am unable to register ; for at the instant Bolling interposed cunningly with the question ;

"Where is Jack Randolph ?"

"O, he's out somewhar, shootin' at a mark, I'll warrant," answered the hunter with a look of parental pride ; "he thinks

hissself a man now, since he killed one. I guess as how, I'll hev to take him down a button hole lower."

As he spoke, footsteps sounded at the door, and Dave entered, accompanied by the huge form of Mose Miller.

"How is this, brother?" exclaimed Sol, his black eyes blazing with sudden wrath; "why did y' bring that cussed feller here fur, what tuk us prisoners?"

"Becaze, he's a good critter arter all," replied Dave, casting on the saddened visage of Mose, a look of profound sympathy; "and I've just brung him home, with me to cure his sore hand what I smashed orfully.

"How?" cried, Sol in amazement.

"Why! y' see, I cotch him with old Morrow, in the holler sycamore," commenced Dave.

"Old Morrow! where is he?" shouted Sol with the voice of a Lybian lion, and gnashing his teeth with rage.

"He's in tother world now!" responded Dave in low solemn tones; "all scores are settled at last!"

"Did y' shoot him frum the brush?" gasped, the hunter, almost stunned by the intelligence.

"No, I fout him a far jewel, with revolvers, and plugged him in the forehead as this ere chap can witness," said Dave earnestly; and he proceeded to detail, at length, all the facts of the case.

"I'm glad on it," affirmed Sol, at the close of the thrilling tale; "becaze I allers hate fur my wurst enemy to be shot, without hevin' a shake fur his life."

"Well, brother, ain't you guyin to make friends with this

poor feller? He wurn't so much to blame arter all; as they telled him sich bloody lies about you," observed Dave.

"Sartiuly," answered Sol kindly; "Mose, you're welcome to stay with us as long as you please, and the longer the better. We'll try to doctor up yer sore hand, and if it can't be cured we'll support ye. Thar will be a couple of us on the sick-fingered list, fur my own paws are bad scorched, I'll swar."

"Oh! you two are so generous, and I don't deserve it!" murmured Miller, weeping tears of gratitude.

Just then young Jack Randolph entered, crying out eagerly; "Well, Daddy, I've druv the centre a dozen times!" He halted an instant, and then rushed to the arms of his smiling uncle, but still kept his eyes on Mose with a gleam of ferocious revenge.

Dave narrated briefly to the boy, what had occurred; and then remarked, "now go and shake hands with our new friend there;" and he pointed at Miller.

"I wont do it," replied Jack with a sulky look; "unless he'll fight me in a jewel!"

"What do y' mean, rascal?" ejaculated his father laughing; "you ort to remember that it ain't in the old Pocahontas blood to be malicious."

"Oh, daddy, I only want him to fight me with paper bullets, as me and you does sometimes of a Sunday," said Jack.

The hunter dropped his glance, with rather a sheepish look upon the floor, at this unexpected revelation of his childish pastimes.

Mose Miller, however, assented to the proposition, and was

immediately installed very high, in young Randolph's favor, who soon loved him as a brother.

As William Bolling and Mary walked home to her uncle's, they paused in the golden light of the setting sun, beneath their now favorite tree of the snow white-blossoms, and agreed upon a day for their union. They also settled that they should invite the family of Judge Moore, with several others to witness their bridal, and that the itinerant, Hiram Baker, should perform the nuptial ceremony.

"Can you think of any more guests, whose attendance would be desirable, dear Mary?" asked the youth.

"Yes, there is one other," faltered the fair girl, with a blush, "but I fear that you may object."

"Who is it?" inquired Bolling, with much surprise.

"Poor Lucy!" murmured Mary; "she was so kind to me in my misfortunes; and indeed we owe our very lives to her, as well as our present and future happiness!"

"Noble, generous heart!" exclaimed her lover, with a countenance of beaming enthusiasm; "it shall be as you say. We will not prove ourselves ungrateful, however, it may shock the whims of public opinion; for the holy instincts of our nature, and the divine dictates of conscience, are safer guides than all the cold calculations of prudence and self-interest, although illumed by the dryest light of reason."

Bolling spent the intervening time, before the day of the union, alternately at the houses of the two neighbors. Now he would hunt in the green woods, or grassy prairies with Dave, and then engage in mock duels with Jack Randolph. Again he

would wander in the sweet isle of forest, culling flowers with his beautiful bride and the fair cousin Flora; and every bloom then was full of glory, every leaf flashed like gold; for the rose-hues of happy love lay on the land as celestial light, and added even a deeper dye to the boundless blue of heaven. All the universe seemed to these young souls, like the fabric of a divine and gorgeous dream, and the wide world held nothing but radiant pictures. He who has never known the immortal magic of such blissful hours, has never truly lived. It is the flowering of the fruit-tree of real existence—the first music of the *Æolian* heart-strings, stirred by the breath of God!

At length the wedding day, bright and beautiful as the coming of an angel, broke on the eyes of the lovers. Their guests had arrived the evening before, and indeed they were so numerous, that the humble log cabin could not contain them.

In this emergency, when every person wished to witness the ceremony, old Uncle Jack proposed that they should adjourn to the neighboring grove, and they all soon gathered beneath the dear old tree of the sunny snow flowers; so that by a singular chance, the same queen of the forest which had listened to their first burning vows, now saw their fulfilment.

It was truly a most enchanting scene, to behold these young lovers, in all their youth and beauty, standing side by side in the open air, with the minister of the Almighty before them, to record their mutual oath of eternal tenderness and truth. What bridal hall, what holy cathedral, could be for a moment compared to this, the great temple of nature? What pillars of monumental marble

might equal those Titanian trunks, formed of living fibres, and crowned with snowy blossoms of their own creation? Where could you find a magical dome fit to be named in the same breath with yonder blue arched temple, bent by the hand of God? Might the wealth of the world itself, though rifled of all its gems and gold, furnish another flaming chandelier, like the mighty morning sun?

Sweet was the murmur of their vows, like the sound of silver-singing rain on house-tops, and burning beamed the love-light in their eyes, as the sunshine that gilded green leaf and glowing flower; and when their rosy lips trembled to the first chaste kiss, according to the dear old custom so common yet in the back-woods, a thousand musical birds sung their marriage-hymn, in music richer than ever rung from any choir of human voices, ever breathed from the most cunning instrument framed by mortal art!

Lucy was the first to congratulate the happy pair, and she did so with blended smiles and tears, such as the sunbeam and falling pearl-drops of the summer-cloud, mingle in the rainbow of heaven. She looked, at the instant, transcendently beautiful. The snowy whiteness of her flowing dress of muslin presented a fine contrast with her long ringlets of raven hair, with the golden, gorgeous tint of her complexion, and the dark light of her bewildering black eyes.

But as she uttered her wishes of joy, at the very moment that she clasped the hand of the bride, she suddenly shook with an awful tremor, and turned pale as her own stainless robes; for she saw a couple of demoniac eyes gleaming before her in the

border of the green bushes, and the horrible hand of Comanche Ben, beckoning her towards him!

She endeavored to approach him, fearing that he would become maddened, and proclaim their frightful secret to the assembled spectators; but if her very life, if the salvation of her soul had depended on the deed, she could not have moved a muscle, such a strange terror had possessed her bodily. Her heart seemed changed to ice, while the weight of an avalanche lay upon her half-frenzied brain.

The Indian, scowling like a devil, advanced to within three feet of the horrified woman, and said, in a voice calm as the air before the first clap of a thunder-storm:

"Lucy, I have come to claim my reward. Here is the priest; will you now be my wife?"

"No," gasped the miserable girl, with features white and rigid as those of a marble statue.

"When shall we be wedded?" he hissed, like a furious serpent.

"Never!" she cried, in appalling tones.

"Never?" he echoed, with an accent that startled the woods like the wild howl of a wolf.

His countenance was so terrible, so fearfully infernal in its wrath, that Lucy almost repented her negation, and faltered:

"He is not hung yet!"

"And that is the reason, why I have come to demand you as my bride now," replied the Indian, more tranquilly; "for the captain never will be hung!"

"Why? what do you mean, ugly imp of hell?" she screamed, like a lunatic.

"Last night, the band from Arkansas, overpowered the guard, broke open the prison and liberated Carlyle," answered the savage, with a fiendish smile of joy.

"You lie!" shrieked the wretched woman, rolling her eyes, as if in a frenzy.

"Here is the proclamation of the President, offering a thousand dollars, by way of reward for his apprehension," affirmed the Indian, holding out the document.

She snatched it from his fingers; saw the name of Sam Houston; devoured the contents with a glance, like lightning; uttered a wild, wailing cry, mournful as the last lamentation of a condemned soul; leaped high into the air, and fell back upon the earth, like a stone!

They raised the dying woman in their arms; but a torrent of warm blood gushed from her mouth and nostrils, and within the minute, that fiery spirit, so terrible in its love and hate, passed away forever, like a dream!

"Dog of an Injun!" exclaimed Dave Tuttle, seizing the Comanche by the throat; "has Carlyle raley got outer jail? Tell the truth, or I'll cut it from yer hellish heart!"

"No," answered the savage; "the captain forged the signature of the President, in order to kill Lucy, and it has done it, I trust!"

"Away! and never show yer ugly face in Texas agin!" roared Dave, flourishing his bowie-knife, and hurling the Comanche from him, who disappeared in the thicket, and was never more heard of.

The beautiful bride flew to the body of her fallen friend,

exclaiming wildly; "wake up, Lucy dear; he owns the falsehood! Oh! arouse; it is Mary calls you!"

Alas! that dull ear of death shall never more hearken to any sound less than the final call of the archangel, and the last loud trump of God! Those dark eyes shall never beam again with love or anger, till they look upon the lightnings of the day of doom.

And they buried the once beautiful, but erring clay there, beneath that Texan tree of the snowy flowers, the silent witness of so much love and hatred, of such infinite joy and amazing sorrow. But still the bright birds sing as merrily among its green leaves, and the bees hum as busily around the honey-dew of its radiant blossoms, as if no wild heart had ever broken under its sunny branches. Only the night winds moan a melancholy dirge above the head of that pale sleeper, and the large-eyed owls repeat again and again, that last lingering wail, the shriek of measureless despair, the death-cry of her pale spirit.

On the following day, with saddened hearts, the new husband and wife, accompanied by their fair cousin Flora, returned to their home, the block-house of the late Colonel Miles, and the faithful Caesar was immediately installed in the office of general overseer, a post which he filled with as much profit to his indulgent master, as humanity towards his fellow servants.

Bolling, indeed, at first, proffered him a paper of manumission; but the African tore it in pieces before his eyes, with the disdainful remark; "this ere chile has seen enough of bobolition!"

The two Bartons and their sweethearts, the sisters Ewing,

were married the next evening, after their liberation from the clutches of the lynchers, and the widowed mother of the girls lives alternately at the dwellings of her children, and still amuses the young generation with the nightly music of her somniferous intonations.

Jonathan Hutson, the moment he was freed from his captivity by the Texan Rangers, fled from the unhealthy atmosphere of the Tanaha to parts unknown.

Lawyer Rider yet flourishes in Shelbyville, and has not been cured of his old bird-like habit of pecking the air, with his beak at the sight or even smell of a fee. He has lately been a member of the Texan legislature where he electrified the natives by a furious speech in favor of the next war !

Parson Johnson recovered from the severe blow, which he received in the block-house of Major Morrow, during the fight with the rangers, and both himself and his brother Carter, have since eschewed the perilous practice of lynching, and prosper well in life.

The fanatic minister Dodson, despairing of the millenium, after the defeat of the regulators, turned Millerite, fixed a day for the final conflagration of the world, and succeeded in frightening many people almost out of their senses, by setting the prairies on fire, while a fierce norther was blowing ; but it all ended in smoke. Subsequently he became a spirit-rapper, yet I am sorry to say, that the trumps were usually loudest on the counters of groceries, and that the legs of the operator commonly reeled more than those of his tables.

The itinerant, Hiram Baker, wedded the beautiful and accom-

plished Jenny Moore, and mainly through his influence, instead of the moral desert, which it once presented, the country now may be favorably compared with any section of the western world, either as to the orderly conduct of its inhabitants, or their observance of all ethical and christian duties.

Alfred Moore selected for his life-partner the lovely Flora Miles, and changing his wild habits, became the model of a good citizen, and successful planter.

Captain Carlyle was hung pursuant to his awful sentence, and exhibited under the gallows a reckless yet lofty daring, which astonished every beholder, for all his power of will revived as soon as he learned the fearful fate of Lucy. His last shout in a voice of thunder, before the appalling leap, was, "Eternal destiny, I defy thee still !"

Curran received a full pardon, from President Houston, contrary indeed to his wishes. He afterwards joined the church, was ordained a minister, and is at present a missionary in some far foreign land.

A month or two subsequently to the occurrence of the bridal of William Bolling and Mary Miles, they paid another visit to their relations in the prairie ; and the same day hurried to the house of Sol Tuttle, taking Uncle Jack along with them.

They found young Randolph and Mose Miller, who had now nearly recovered the use of his wounded hand, eagerly engaged in fighting sham duels in the yard, while the hunter stood laughing at the scene from his door.

"Well, I'm powerful glad to see y' both," cried Sol, wringing the fingers of the new husband and wife with a will, that almost

caused Mary to scream with the pain of the griping pressure ; "walk in and kiss the baby."

As soon as the kindly greetings ended, Bolling remarked, with an affected solemnity of voice and manner ; "Mr. Tuttle, you owe my present visit to business rather than pleasure. I have come out to take a look at my land."

"You have bought Judge Moore's big parrary track then I suppose," suggested Sol.

"Yes, thirty-three leagues," answered the other ; "and I thought, perhaps, that I might sell you a piece of it."

"Not onless you'd hev payment in deerskins, at a monstrous high valeation too ; fur you ort to know that I'm not able to buy enough to bury me," said the hunter with a gloomy and somewhat displeased air.


"But I will credit you," insisted Bolling.

"No, I wish I may be turned to a toad if y' do," retorted Sol warmly ; "fur I won't promise what I can't pay, that's short metre. None of my family ever owned the sile whar they hunted ; becaze, though we were of the ginuine Pocahontas blood, I guess we take arter the old injun grandmother, while the balance on ye are the grit of the white great grandaddy. But, howsumever money won't stick to our paws, no more nor rain on a goose's back.

"Well, Sol, I was only joking," observed Bolling with a smile ; "I cannot sell you the homestead, for it is yours already. Here is a recorded deed to a mile square around your house ; and here is another of the same sort for Uncle Jack ;" and he presented the documents to their true proprietors.

The hunter gazed on the undeniable evidence of his new acquisition as a real land owner of the country, at first with a stupid look, as if unable to believe his eyes, and then seizing the hand of his benefactor, he essayed to express his gratitude ; but the emotion proved too mighty for his utterance. His bosom swelled, his lip quivered, and bursting into tears he left the room. He returned, however, in a few minutes, with the old merry twinkle in his eyes, and remarked ; "Mr. Bolling, I guess ye'll think me a fool, and you'd be about right fur that matter, but when my heart gits high here in my throat, cuss me, if my tongue don't allers hang fire. Howsumever, y' know well enough my feelins."

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Suspicion Aroused.
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The Scene Changes.
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Force Resolved Upon.
Trouble Ahead.
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The Brother and Lover.
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A Wily Counsellor.
Suspense.
The Town in an Uproar.

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Don Ambrosio de Cruces.
Catalina.
Midnight.
The Crouching Serpent.
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Carlos in Peril.
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Joaquin the Priest.
The Buffalo Hunters.
The Man-Hunters Start for their Prey.
The Cave.
Night.
The Suspicious Trail.
Carlos Returns.
The Wounded Friend.
The Ambuscade.
The Cactus Thicket.
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