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# CEDAR CLIFF; OR, The Haunted Acre.



By **ROBERT F. GREELEY, Esq.**

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CEDAR CLIFF:

OR,

THE MYSTERY

OF

THE HAUNTED ACRE.

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BY ROBERT F. GREELEY,

Author of JALA JALA, THE PARTIZAN'S OATH, &c.

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# CEDAR CLIFF.

## CHAPTER I.

### ENCHANTED GROUND

On a bright afternoon in the early autumn a small skiff, containing two persons, shot out from a small embowered cove upon the quiet bosom of Lake George. There was already in the taintless air of the Adirondacks a tone that stirred the blood, and told of a merrier season yet to come. In the forest the leaves were dyed in their loveliest tints, each cluster standing sharply out against its background in the pure, clear atmosphere. The spotted roe came down to the streamlet's brink and drank its fill undisturbed from the purling waters. Only at intervals the brooding silence was disturbed by the sharp twang of an Indian arrow, or the crack of the white hunter's rifle. There was scarcely a passing fleece in the firmament; and hardly a ripple broke the broad expanse of the lake, the bed of which might be seen at the depth of many a fathom, studded with silver shells and milk white pebbles. No wonder that the proud Frenchman and the ambitious Saxon struggled for the possession of so brave an empire; no wonder that the plumed and painted Indian abandoned with reluctance so glorious a heritage!

The locality in question was full of reminiscences of those primeval days. Huge mounds and earthworks, squares and parallels, at other times assuming the forms of

serpents and various reptiles, permeated the depths of the underwood and occupied the hillsides to an extent which proved the existence there at some former period of a populous and powerful nation, more advanced in the arts than the still warlike race by whom they were succeeded. At intervals other vestiges occurred in hieroglyphic tracings on the rocks, some of which evinced a considerable amount of ingenuity in the execution.

The perfect peace which brooded over the scene was not without its effect upon our two voyagers, who exchanged scarce a syllable until their frail batteau grated the beech at their point of destination, when they sprang ashore, and were soon lost to view in the intricacies of the forest.

This vicinity was, even at the period of our story, the nucleus of a flourishing settlement, owing its origin to the enterprise of an obscure but well meaning brotherhood of enthusiasts, gathered from numerous points along the northern border, bent upon self-emancipation from the conventionalities and restraints of life as developed in the more densely populated districts, and upon correcting the abuses of society as manifested in the artificial tendencies of overpeopled cities. Years have rolled away since the axe of the first husbandman, under the leadership of that indomitable priestess of a new-born faith, Jenima Wilkinson,\* disturbed the echoes of those sylvan solitudes with the sound of civilization—a prelude to the stirring events of which

that locality was ere long to become the theatre; the nymphs and dryads have fled, the fauns and satyrs have departed, and in their stead we have a race of spirits more ethereal and of fancies more supernatural than any which gild the mysterious pages of old

Our immediate business, however, lies not with prophetesses or their persecutors, although it transfers us to a weird locality in the very heart of the district alluded to. Made up of cavernous rocks and gloomy hollows, patches of scrubby dell and tangled forest, the solitude of whose retreats was heightened by the sullen echoes of many a miniature cataract, it had long since been ruthlessly assigned by tradition, and not without reason, to all sorts of wickedness and diablerie. Independently of the numerous Indian forays by which it had been signalized, it was marked by a series of less romantic episodes, in which fortune-tellers, counterfeiters, and smugglers from the great lakes were jumbled indiscriminately together.

Less romantic we have said, for a nymph with the beard of a Silenus, and a dryad armed and equipped as the law does not direct, make at least but a sorry substitute for the airy sprites, an intimate acquaintance with which, at the expense of many a thimble-thump and ferruling, the majority of us were so unfortunate as to contract at an early period of our individual histories.

One spot, in particular, appeared so utterly irreclaimable in its wildness as to have thus far resisted all attempts to render it inhabitable. Here the ground was broken and obstructed by rocks that had the aspect of having been suddenly spouted up from the bowls of the earth during some terrible throes of nature, and fallen promiscuously where they lay—their surface overgrown by a forest of cedars and birches and sombre pines, within whose impenetrable shades the roar of many a waterfall resounded, like the mighty hum of a distant city.

## CHAPTER II.

### MAGISTRATES AT FAULT.

Not unfrequently it happens that a particular locality may fall under the ban from the operation of causes with which the inhabitants are entirely disconnected, but in this case there were good reasons for believing that the suspicions which had obtained so wide a currency were not without foundation, the more especially as the attention of the authorities had at last been seriously directed to the vicinage in question. Whatever the truth might be, the general aspect of the district tallied well with the lawless character acquired by its inhabitants.

Instances, it cannot be denied, there were to the contrary, but they were few. For, though for industry and thrift these worthy people might not be surpassed, yet gave they so little attention to such trivial matters as assessments and taxes, as to occasion a well-grounded suspicion that they never paid them at all. The first regular surveyor who found his way into those parts came very near being impaled upon his own staff and it was not until they had learned by a few such experiences to provide themselves with an escort of officials well armed and equipped for any emergency that these knights of the tripod were allowed to carry out their incendiary designs—as the populace styled them. Gradually, as the lands thus opened were thrown into the market, numbers of greedy speculators, having informed themselves of the capacities of the country, hastened to invest their funds in so promising a speculation, and up went the prices of land accordingly.

Until the period at which our narrative opens no general opportunity had been offered the people of the valley for a public discussion of these matters, but now, as the existing occasion known as Court Day was approaching, when a number of influential official characters were expected to be in attendance, preparations were made by the inhabitants to acquaint themselves with the actual prospects and present state of affairs as regarded their side of the question—hitherto always represented in the worst possible light.

On this occasion large numbers of persons of all ages, sexes, and conditions, many of whom had never met, yet who appeared to fraternize at the exhibition of a signal which even the most insignificant understood, would come thronging from every quarter into the valley; the finery of the women, the brilliant accoutrements of the soldiery who attended to guard the officers of the law, and even the florid trappings of aborigines imparting quite a gala appearance to the little village which served as the centre of trade. Bright scarfs and bodices, silk and satin gowns, and even jewelry, flashy calicoes, rumpling and crinkling in their newness, gay uniforms, scarlet blankets from far Mackinaw, flaunting plumes, glistening bayonets, and barbaric weapons, wrought with a degree of taste and skill which testified to the ingenuity of the makers, were mingled with the sober costumes of the farmers and civil functionaries, the gold laced uniforms of the officers, and the showy garments of many a rustic bell whose parents were, perhaps, the high dignitaries or wealthy landed proprietors of adjacent townships. Here and there a booth, had been erected; flags flaunted from the peak of every tent and every house top, traders and peddlers displayed in the most jaunty manner their stocks of goods and trinkets, and there was no lack of good rye whisky to tempt the fancy of the more fastidious.

Among the scattered groups who rode into the valley that morning, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, accompanied by a delicate, pale-cheeked damsel, who rode an Indian pony, and who, in her turn, was attended by a youth of twenty (he might have been the younger occupant of the boat, so strong was the resemblance), were honored with rather more than their share of attention from the bystanders, as well as the stragglers on the road. The stature of the elder personage as much exceeded in height as his body exceeded in corpulence the usual proportions of the human frame. His eyebrows were dark and bushy, and their constant habit of contraction, added to the determined expression of a pair of close pressed lips, imparted a forbidding look to a countenance of undeniable austerity. The

damsel, whom he might almost have carried in one of his pockets, was his daughter, and the youth, who seemed only too happy to be allowed to hold a bridle and walk by the side of her pony, in spite of the unromantic fact that a bag stuffed with legal documents hung from his shoulder, a simple amanuensis in the law office of Arthur Cameron, a well-known county justice, who was now on the way to open his court for the quarter's session.

It was not the custom of Justice Cameron to travel thus encumbered, but his fair daughter, who had never witnessed the novelty of an encampment, and whose health seemed to require a short journey, having plied him with entreaties until his patience was fairly exhausted, won her suit, and was handed over, along with the law papers, to the care of young Ezra Hueston, the clerk who trudged so contentedly by her side.

The Justice, absorbed in contemplation, paid little heed to the sensation created by his appearance, but the lowering looks and whisperings of the different groups which they encountered as they rode up the vale did not escape the young man's notice.

"This morning is full of bad omeas," he quickly observed in a low tone to Mr. Cameron; "you had better be on your guard, sir, while you are here, for, unless I misjudge these people, their actions bode you no good."

"The scoundrels! Is it possible they could have the hardihood?" rejoined the magistrate. "But why should you suppose that they have any animosity against myself? Speak out, and don't mind Aggie, here; she's no milksop."

"Why, then, sir, so far as I have heard, they don't like the manner in which they say you have dealt with them in respect to the recent ejectments, and as it is on this day that one of the most important of these trials is to be decided, it is not improbable they may be tempted to offer you an insult. The landholders can't be made to understand the title of the Patroon to so many millions of acres won by a clever trick of one of his ancestors from the aboriginal possessors, and openly renew their threats of resistance."

"Pray, sir," retorted the Justice, sharply, "do I look like a man unfit to take care of himself?"

"Pardon me, sir; it was for the sake of Miss Agnes that I ventured to speak of caution. These people may be cozened, but, being of the mountains, they can never be driven like those of the plain. I fear, sir, you do not estimate them at their value."

"What should you know about such matters—a raw lad of twenty! Some fifty years of experience in the ways of the world has taught me that there is nothing so effectual in bringing such fellows as these to a sense of their duty as a volley or two of cold lead."

"May heaven avert such a consequence," ejaculated his companion.

"They have it in their own power to avert it," rejoined the magistrate, bluntly; "but here is the court-house, and yonder a pack of the precious rabble toward whom you seem so friendly. This is no place for Agnes to-day; a ride down the valley will bring the roses back to her cheeks more quickly than the matter-of-fact disputations of an excited court-room. There, take her along with you, and see that you don't keep me waiting for my supper, that's all!"

And as the magistrate, exchanging greetings with the bystanders, ascended the steps of the little court-house before which they had reined up, the young couple rode off in high spirits, Master Ezra bestriding the gray mare from which Justice Cameron had just dismounted.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE TRIAL OF MARTIN HUNGERFORD.

The "edifice" consecrated by long usage to the shifts and expedients of the law, as exemplified in the proceedings over which Justice Cameron and his associates presided, was certainly not a very imposing affair, having been built to suit a number of purposes—the stated meetings of various religious denominations being held there, as well as the conferences of the Board of

Trustees, who superintended with lynx-eyed vigilance the affairs of the township.

The court-room as Mr. Cameron entered it was a picture of confusion: carpenters were busy replacing the bars used for the purpose of separating the crowd from the court, others were putting the finishing touches to a canopy which a gilt eagle held suspended from his beak above the Justices' seats, and a short-sighted man in a green baize jacket was furiously sweeping away the shavings, and tripping up every one that came within the reach of his broom. Some of the functionaries, being chilled by their morning's ride over the hills, had ordered a fire kindled in the stove, and were sipping hot negus. The room was full of smoke, clerks were scattering books and documents over a large baize-covered table, and the wrangling of disputants without, and the conversation of learned gentlemen within, blended with the sounds of hammer and saw.

Nevertheless, out of this chaos order was finally evolved. The workmen disappeared, the dust and the smoke subsided; officers had silenced the unruly and removed the refractory; the magistrates and the different counsels, with their subordinates, had taken their seats, and twelve half-scared individuals, after the usual process of swearing-in, had assumed their places in the jury-box.

In opening his court, the presiding magistrate referred in deprecatory terms to the growing license of the times—the general disregard of principle which characterized "the masses," (it was only by the purchase of votes that he had obtained his office, but that he did not think proper to mention), and, in particular, the alarming prevalence of agrarian principles and the tendency to riot throughout the district over which it was his arduous lot to preside. In disposing of the numerous cases which—he regretted for the sake of the community's reputation—would be brought to their notice during the present term, he admonished the jury as to the importance of leaving behind them all motives of a personal or pecuniary nature, and to deal with their fellows as rigorously and impartially

as circumstances might require, and without fear or favor.

A tall, well-built man was then put to the bar, charged with a heinous offense; he had been detected with others in the act of tar-ring and feathering a brace of constables, who had been dispatched to his farm some two weeks previously, with the friendly design of dispossessing him thereof. A most incorrigible character, according to popular account, was Martin Hungerford—the most troublesome intermeddler and the most reckless dare-devil in the country.

The prisoner, who was a wild enough looking fellow, certainly, did not appear to be at all disconcerted, leaning coolly over the box in which he was cribbed, and revolving an enormous roll of tobacco in his jaw, when the magistrate ordered the prisoner to stand up—and nodding quite familiarly to friends among the jury and the audience—one or two females honoring him with a wave of their handkerchiefs. For Hungerford was, undeniably, a handsome fellow, and was as much admired for his gallantry among the country lasses as he undoubtedly was for his prowess among the men.

The charge now brought against him was a serious one: he had not only resisted the officers of the law in the execution of their duty, and illegally persisted in retaining the property in question, which the father of the accused had held before him, but he had gone so far as to assist in ignominiously ducking in a horse-pond the officers charged with the execution of the process, and afterwards in inflicting upon them a suit apiece of boiling tar intermixed with feathers—bristling with which, like a couple of no-descript animals, they had retraced their way on foot to the legal stronghold from which they and the writs they bore had emanated.

An attempt at a "hurrah" among the spectators was promptly put down by the officers of the court, whose zeal in enforcing order was rewarded by all sorts of opprobrious epithets among the unruly.

"Now, prisoner," said the Judge, with dreadful solemnity, as he rose and displayed his ample proportions to the proportionally awe-stricken court, "I have acquainted you and your friends with the grave char-

acter of the offense, and several witnesses have been heard who seem agreed that you are guilty of the offense imputed to you. With that, at this stage of the proceedings, I have nothing to do; but although there appears to be, from the evidence, very little doubt with regard to your character, the law in its leniency would still give you an opportunity of being heard in your own defense. What have you to say?"

"I don't suppose it would make much difference whatever I might say," replied Martin, carelessly; "if I should insist upon my innocence, you've already said enough yourself to convict me. So, where's the use?"

"Prisoner," quoth Mr. Cameron, in his sternest manner, "I must turn you against this reprehensible exhibition of levity. My doubts concerning your participation in this outrage grow weaker with every word that I hear from you."

"Well, what if I did it?" was the surly rejoinder.

"There's arrogance for you!" exclaimed the most portly of Cameron's associates, in high dudgeon. "Let the fellow go loose, and, upon my word, I should not wonder if he next attempted to tar and feather us all."

"No, Dominie," retorted Martin, who applied the title to all lawyers indiscriminately; "you'd have to get yourself taken in a little first, feathers are too dear to waste on you."

The counsel for the prosecution now commenced his herculean labors, cutting and slashing on all sides with so much fury, waving his arms and gesticulating before the jury at such a rate as to completely exterminate the few unclouded ideas they might have possessed on entering the court-room. More than once Martin Hungerford clenched his stout fist and bit his lips till the blood almost ran from them, in the impatience of his anger on hearing himself accused of everything that was vile and unprincipled; represented, in fact, as a hardened felon, for whom a year's imprisonment with hard labor would be only too gentle a punishment.

"O, my friends," exclaimed Mr. Bartholomew Gryppe, in his most pathetic manner, "think of the barn-burnings, the shooting-affrays, the untold destruction of life and

property that accompany every such case of high-handed proceedings. Heavens! toward what an abyss of ruin are we hurrying, when in the midst of a civilized community like this, a man can't enjoy his own!"

"There you hit it!" shouted Martin, starting suddenly up again, and bringing his sledge-like fist down upon the edge of his box with so much force as to jar the whole court-room, and awaken a couple of dozing justices; "that's exactly what I would have said long ago if you'd let me. Is not what we have made and created our own? More than thirty years since, sirs, my father, old Timothy Hungerford, took hold of that property, a barren, untenanted waste; in that thirty years he and I made it just what you see it. To leave it, gentlemen, is my ruin, and to pay what is asked for it now, far above my means. There were two alternatives left me; one to defy the law; the other to seek its protection. In the face of all that has been said of me by this little wretch here, your Honors (Mr. Gryppe here tried to look indignant), I am a good citizen and a law-abiding man, and the circumstance of my having surrendered myself into your hands should be taken as proof that I seek no unfair advantage."

Mr. Gryppe now dashed into the arena again, with a slight change in his tactics; for, whereas, before, he had been violent and abusive, he was now not less happy in the use of taunts and sarcasms—his object being to provoke the accused to do or say something which would prejudice his cause in the minds of the jury. The little orator was perfectly successful; Martin listened to him for a time, until the swelling cords of his neck and forehead and the heightened color of his countenance indicated that his anger was fast becoming uncontrollable. Gryppe, just at this moment, being careless enough to come near him, was shaking his finger opprobriously at the culprit, when the latter, all at once grasped the outstretched arm, inflicted upon it an awful wrench, gave the lawyer several smart blows with a cudgel which he snatched from one of the officers, and waving his hat, leaped over the railing with a bound, and disappeared with a shout of defiance among the crowd. In vain the magistrate rapped his desk and

commanded silence. A stunning cheer burst forth simultaneously from an hundred hearty pairs of lungs. Equally in vain was it that the scanty force of constables attempted to recapture the fugitive. The dense throng grew denser, and the court-room throughout was in an uproar. Some reckless hand hurled a knife with great dexterity at the cord which sustained the canopy, which being severed, the whole mass of crimson curtains fell like a pall over the heads of the outraged justices, putting them completely hors du combat. The constables, instead of being able to obey their orders, were hustled and borne along with the delighted concourse, until they reached the open air, where all their endeavors to silence the tumult were fruitless.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### HOW MARTIN HUNGERFORD TOOK HIS RE-

##### VENGE.

Availing themselves of the privilege accorded them by Justice Cameron, Agnes and her companion in the meanwhile had made the tour of the village—her merry laughter and exuberant spirits increasing by contrast the evident uneasiness of young Hueston, whose ears, wherever they turned, were saluted by expressions which did not tend to diminish his anxiety for those in whom he took so deep an interest. Notwithstanding the seeming gayety of some, the countenances that met the young man's searching glance did not wear their accustomed holiday look, and the very fact of the populace being divided into so many scattered groups, many of them having guns on their shoulders, or a pistol at the waistband, and others wielding huge cudgels, and of so few women being visible, was indicative of a coming tempest. "Hungerford will never cross the threshold of a prison," thought Ezra, who had not trifled when he told his protector how thoroughly acquainted he was with these people; "they will tear the court-house in pieces, and make a bonfire of the fragments before they will allow him to be arrested."

Coming now to the rise of a hill, from

which of a sudden a view was afforded of a broad landscape, with the tents and streamers of a military encampment visible at what seemed only a short distance beyond, young Hueston, after they had tarried a moment for the sake of the prospect, was urgent for returning.

"Not without a canter through the encampment, surely," said Agnes, with a look of disappointment.

"We shall hardly have time, I fear," replied Ezra, looking up at the sun. "We were to be back by noon, you remember, and the morning will glide away without our observing it."

"Why, it is but a stone's throw from us. My pony can canter it in five seconds," said Agnes, as, with a liveliness foreign to her disposition, she started off, leaving Ezra at some distance behind. "Good-by to you, if you won't come!"

Thus challenged and defied, her companion had no resource but to follow; and, after all, if they were diligent, they could return in time to rejoin Mr. Cameron before the court took its recess. The encampment, however, proved to be farther off than it seemed, and, once on the spot, there were so many objects to interest them (for booths for drinking and vending of wares and knickknacks had been erected just beyond the encampment, and a small party of Indians, the remnants of a fading tribe, had pitched their tents of skins in a field across the road, and the scene had the aspect of a fair) that when they turned to retrace their steps, Ezra found to his alarm that the sun was declining.

"A fine lecture I shall get for this folly," he said, as he hurriedly led Agnes from the field—while her beautiful countenance only broke into smiles the more for his pretended chiding. They had not gone far before he discovered that they had lost their way—no very hard matter at any time in such half-settled places—and so much time was lost in the endeavor to regain it, that the dusky hues of twilight were beginning to settle over the landscape almost before they were fully aware of their predicament.

About the time when Agnes had arrived with her companion in sight of the encampment, and at the moment when Bartholomew Gryppe was holding forth in his most

withering style upon the enormities of which Martin Hungerford was alleged to have been the perpetrator, the valley was thrown into a commotion the noise of which at length reached the ears of justice itself, and a special messenger had been sent out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. It was noticeable also that at this crisis, the populace, whose preoccupied manner had already attracted the attention of Mr. Cameron's adherents, suddenly shook off their lethargy, as though they had been waiting for some such interruption, and began to crowd the open space in front of the court-house. Then messengers were seen to issue from the edifice, and, mounting horses, to gallop off with great precipitation. Men tore great stakes from the fences, and there was every indication of a violent outbreak.

The thronging was most dense at a point of the road where a man of tall and imposing presence and of saturnine aspect, to which a heavy iron-gray beard lent additional force (he might have been the elder of the persons introduced in our first chapter), was seen mounted upon a mule, and coming in the direction of the court-house. This person did not appear to suffer from any of the infirmities attendant upon age, but had rather the air of one grown prematurely gray. His dress partook in an equal degree of the hunter and the civilian, for ever the sober and square-cut garments of the pulpit orator, he wore a blanket, and a pair of Indian moccasins protected his feet, while only a circlet of black leather, embroidered with beads, like wampum, and falling in tags behind, confined the locks that fell in wavy masses down to his shoulders. No one could look upon this personage, and note the fierce expression of his restless, coal-black eyes, without coming to the conclusion that he gazed upon one unsettled in his intellect, or at least who had suffered much from the world's neglect and injustice.

Such was the singular character known throughout those parts by the more censorious or less reflective, as "the mad preacher," while others who knew him only by his many acts of kindness, his unwearying devotion to the sick and the needy, and above all for the free and outspoken manner in which he was wont to inveigh against wrong and oppression, saw in him only the

fearless apostle of humanity, the declared foe of injustice, and the sworn friend of the poor and afflicted under whatever circumstances their sufferings might present themselves to his notice. Accustomed almost from infancy to regard Gilbert Hueston as their father and champion, the simple people of the valley rarely ventured upon any important movement without his advice or consent, and the prospect of being at length relieved of the indecision which had fettered their tongues as well as their actions since the convening of the magistrates, caused them to welcome his appearance with even more than ordinary enthusiasm.

It was singular to observe the extraordinary effect which the words of this man appeared immediately to exercise upon a people lately so passive and unimposing in their demeanor. Taking his stand upon a little eminence over against the court-house, he began, in a voice well calculated by its full and musical quality to wield a great influence over the minds of large assemblies, to upbraid them for their faint-heartedness—his immediate followers, among whom were several converted Indians, and not a few rough characters gathered from their hiding places in the woods and swamps for many miles around, crowding closely about him, and forming a group not unworthy an artist's pencil. There was not an attempt at interruption during the brief but eloquent harangue with which he addressed them—evinced in its delivery an amount of talent and an intimacy with the most secret springs of our nature which would even have shamed into insignificance the professional gentlemen who had been all the morning belaboring each other's clients in the public forum opposite. The close attention bestowed upon the orator was an evidence of the esteem in which he was held.

Many a more cultivated man than Gilbert Hueston has been, ere this, accused of insanity for engaging in the advocacy of doctrines in which, with perhaps a great deal of error, there was involved more than one reasonable project for the alleviation of the troubles under which society is laboring, and if at times a personal sense of its injustice imparted to his gestures a species of frenzy, and to his words a fire that made his hearers shrink beneath his denunciation, a

reference to his own past experience was always sufficient to account for the mystery.

The present was one of those occasions when Hueston, departing from the general tenor of his conduct, thought fit to arouse his listeners by a violence of language and gesture which rarely fails of its object when exerted upon a concourse so miscellaneous as that he now addressed—for there was hardly a man among them who did not feel, while drinking in his eloquence, as though he had some wrong to be righted, some slight to be atoned for.

In the midst of this harangue took place within the precincts of the temple of justice that tumult which we have described as following close upon the high-handed action of Martin Hungerford. As the crowd disgorged itself from the premises, the author of all the trouble—his coat almost torn from his back, his hair tossing wildly in the breeze, and his cheery voice ringing out a clarion cry of triumph and defiance—darted through the throng that opposed him, and, his eyes alighting upon the preacher, he crossed at a bound the intervening space, and the next moment was enfolded in the embrace of Hueston.

"I am safe now, at any rate!" he exclaimed, out of breath with his exertions. "Wild cats and catamounts! let them bring on their soldiers now, if they dare. We can meet them—hey, Gilbert, boy!"

The shout that went up at this speech even more effective than anything Gilbert had uttered, shook the court-house to its centre, and jarred unpleasantly the nerves of those within. Counsel dropped their domineering manner, and all eyes were turned in anxious expectancy toward the passage through which the culprit, Hungerford, had just made his exit.

At this crisis the clear notes of a trumpet echoed among the hills. Another and another. Many a heart now palpitated painfully with suspense.

"Stand firm," said the preacher, in a subdued but resolute voice, that penetrated to the outskirts of the crowd. "They are for the most part neighbors, who will not harm us, and if the worst should come, your cause is sacred and success is certain."

A troop of mounted riflemen appeared at

the crest of the nearest hill, headed by a government officer, and drew themselves up with a great clatter in front of the court-house. An ominous silence followed as Cameron, appearing bareheaded upon the balcony, demanded, in an agitated voice, the restoration of the escaped prisoner and the surrender of the ringleaders in the riot.

"Depart yourselves!" said Hueston, coming to the front, "and a scene of turmoil and bloodshed may be averted that must inevitably ensue if you remain. As for these people, they are here solely with the view of protecting their violated rights, and the magistrates may be thankful that no greater excesses have been committed."

"Who is this insolent fellow?" asked Cameron of an officer.

"The worst firebrand in the pack," was the reply; "a mad perambulating preacher named Hueston. If we can only lay him by the heels the rest are easily managed."

"See to him, will you?" rejoined the justice between his clenched teeth; "once in my hands, he shall not complain of a lack of attention." Then turning again to the throng he added: "You have intimated to me through your leader your final intention. It only remains for me, in pursuance of my duty as a magistrate, to read the Riot Act; and upon your own rash heads be the consequences."

The magistrate then proceeded to the reading of that solemn address, of which it is not probable that five pairs of ears in any disorderly gathering ever heard the first syllable, and during its delivery the people were moving away with Hueston and Martin Hungerford in their midst. The last words had hardly fallen from Cameron's lips when he became aware of the movement, and in a furious tone commanded the troops to fire. A stunning report followed, and several were observed to fall; a bullet at the same instant grazed Cameron's head and buried itself in the clapboards behind him. He was about to return the compliment from a weapon of his own when his hand was arrested, and turning to see who had taken so bold a liberty, he found himself confronted by the officer in command of the troops.

"Sir, for heaven's sake forbear! They

will tear you in pieces if you are seen to perpetrate such an act of madness."

"I suppose, sir, I know my own business," replied Cameron, confused at being detected in such a display of temper.

"You may know your own business, but you evidently do not know of what an inturiated mob like that is capable. I have come to ask you once more to exert your authority before proceeding to extremes."

"No, curse them!" replied the magistrate, "they have sowed the tempest, let them reap the whirlwind."

The next demonstration of the troops was received with a yell of mortal hatred, and as the maddened crowd turned in fury upon their pursuers, numbers of respectable gentlemen might be seen crawling out of the court-room windows and dropping into the shrubbery by which it was environed. Even the disciplined troops, being few in number, and their opponents well armed, could do nothing to restrain the onset, and were quickly dismounted and overwhelmed in the outpouring tide, or put to flight, the long horse-tails of their helmets streaming behind them as they fled.

In a very brief space of time the court-house was invaded—the prisoners were torn from their keepers, and even some of the magistrates themselves made captives in their turn—the persons engaged in these proceedings having covered their faces with masks to escape detection. Books and the papers in important cases were torn into shreds, and given to the winds remorselessly. Yells and peals of laughter went up as article after article was tossed from the windows. Unfortunate practitioners caught lurking among the bushes thought themselves fortunate in escaping with a few cuffs and bruises. Everything portable having been disposed of, the casements and flooring came next, and finally a torch applied to the rotten building completed the work of destruction.

It was now dusk, and the glare of the flames arising from the burning timbers mingling with that from countless beacon fires began to crimson the heavens. All these sights Ezra Hueston and the now affrighted Agnes observed from a distance; what they had noticed during the morning in the conduct of the people accounting for



everything that had followed. They had regained the road, but it proved to be full of intoxicated and noisy savages, and their position was perhaps more perilous than it might have been had they remained in the camp.

Then came audibly toward them, borne upon the breeze of night, the noise of horns, the shouts of a multitude, and the trampling of innumerable feet. The glare of lights soon followed from a point in the road beyond, and a great concourse of people, some wearing masks, others bearing torches, and all singing, or shouting, or blowing horns, or beating pans, came straggling confusedly along, bearing in advance two prisoners, one of whom—no other than Bartholomew Gryppe, now dreadfully chop-fallen—was comfortably seated astride of a rail.

The young people sought to avoid this rabble by turning aside once more from the beaten path—but to no purpose. They were intercepted at once and carried along with the tide, having been recognized by several hard-looking characters as persons in some way connected with Cameron's household. On learning that the magistrate himself was a prisoner, and not far behind, they became, however, more reconciled to their fortunes.

At a certain place where two roads intersected, the cortege made a halt, and all prisoners were ordered to the front, where just beneath the spreading arms of a guide-post, which had been in mockery surmounted by a cap of liberty, a great fire had been kindled. A barrel of oat-bonks knocked to pieces, and a portion of its contents rapidly transferred to a kettle suspended above the flames. Bags containing feathers were brought forward to be ready for use. Mr. Cameron was speechless from rage, and Gryppe in the same plight from terror.

The luckless attorney was at once denuded, and in a few moments turned forth from this new-fashioned tailor shop in a suit that might have set all the geese of the barn-yard cackling out of pure jealousy. He was then escorted with great civility to the head of a column of maskers disguised as Indians, who followed him, drumming and booting, for a mile down the road.

The judge's turn came next, and he was accordingly seized upon, but before any

further steps could be taken, Agnes had sprung forward and flung herself, weeping bitterly, upon his breast.

"Never mind her," said one of the men in masks, whose voice resembled that of Hungerford; "pull the young dam away, and let the old reprobate suffer."

"Reprobate!" hissed Cameron, with a struggle which intimated a strong desire on his part to inflict bodily harm upon some body, and which his captors immediately repressed by a series of kicks. A rope was then thrown across an overhanging limb, and the noose end thrown loosely over the magistrate's neck.

"Beware, beware, Martin Hungerford!" exclaimed a voice which proved to be Ezra's, who had been recognized by some of the party, and, being released, now boldly advanced into the midst of the group:

"You may pursue this outrage to the bitter end if you will, but think well of what you are doing; for, although as a friend of my family I have thought well of you heretofore, I will say that which will place your own neck in a halter before you are twelve hours older."

"You only prove, my young gentleman, that a man can't sojourn among Philistines without himself becoming one," replied Hungerford, coolly. "A son of Gilbert Hueston should keep better company. What are you waiting for, tools?" he added, impatiently addressing his companions, who were apparently hesitating as to the propriety of carrying out their threats.

"Stay!" said a deep voice, almost at Hungerford's side, as another masked individual joined the group. "It is enough if our object is accomplished, and from what he has seen this night, Arthur Cameron will no doubt have a care how in future he ventures to tamper with the feelings of freemen. The lion is a generous beast, but he who trusts to his forbearance may do so once too often."

"Whoever you may be, sir," said Cameron, as they relieved him of his bonds, "I thank you for your timely interference, and should feel doubly grateful if I might only know to whom I am indebted for my life."

The new-comer seemed half inclined to gratify his curiosity, but apparently changed his mind.

"It is of no consequence," he replied, coldly. "Suffice it that I am one with whom in times past you have not been unacquainted. When the proper hour has come for a renewal of the intimacy, you will find me less backward. Let some of you escort Judge Cameron and his daughter safely to the village," he said to the bystanders.

"O, sir," said Agnes, taking the hand of the last speaker, in the excess of her gratitude, "you have a kind voice, and must needs have a kind heart. Through you it is not impossible that these relentless foes of my father may become his friends."

"And you have an innocent heart, my pretty maiden," replied the mask, quite gently; "intercede, then, with your father, and pray likewise that Heaven may dispose him to act justly, for upon his decision depends our friendship or our enmity."

Agnes paused to exchange a few words with Hueston as they turned to depart, but, warmly pressing the little hand she held out to him, he bade her dismiss at once all fears for his safety.

"Shall we let them all go?" asked one of those who had been the most eager for Cameron's punishment, as the magistrate and his daughter passed through the throng.

"It is better," said the person addressed, "and it is not impossible that the forbearance may be interpreted in our favor. Let all depart but him." And he pointed to Ezra.

"Lord, sir, what should we do with him?" asked one of the simple rustics, in great bewilderment.

"I have need of him," was the answer. And then, as the lad was brought before him, he removed his mask and exposed to Ezra the features of his own father.

"Traitor!" said Hueston, reproachfully, as the youth shrank beneath his glance, "is this the result of my teachings? Had you not witnessed enough of this day's proceedings, but you must thrust yourself as a spy into the camp of my brethren?"

"I am no spy," rejoined Ezra, boldly, "and there lives not the person beside yourself that dares call me one. As for your punishment, I do not care much what shape it may take, for you could not have inflicted upon me a sharper pang than by acknowl-

edging yourself a leader in such a movement as this."

"Get home, sir," said Gilbert, sternly; "I have matters for your ear that should deeply concern you. It when you have heard me you should choose to return to your friends, I shall not oppose you."

Ezra took his way—rather dejectedly, it must be confessed, for a hero—in the direction indicated by his father, and, after pausing a moment longer to give some directions, the latter followed him.

Deprived of their full revenge, the rioters constructed hastily a dummy figure which they labeled with the justice's name, and, hanging it above the fire, danced around it as it was consumed, with a degree of enthusiasm that surpassed even the rejoicings of their copper-visaged neighbors encamped in the adjacent fields, whose noises, joined with those of the figure-burners, were prolonged till the next day-dawn.

On the next morning the inhabitants of several hamlets on the great route of travel to the outlet of the valley were terrified by the sudden appearance among them of a sort of man-monster, covered with plumage similar in texture to that which bedecked the feathery denizens of their barnyards, who clattered by them with lightning-like rapidity upon a bare-backed steed, driving live stock of all descriptions before him like chaff before the whirlwind, and sending women and children pell-mell into their houses for protection. It was Gryppe, who had borrowed a farmer's horse, and was thus bidding an eternal adieu to the valley.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SPIRITUALIST AND HIS PHILOSOPHY.

We have alluded to one particular portion of the district signalized by these occurrences as being not generally frequented, and less open to schemes of settlement than other spots of more inviting aspect lying within the same boundaries. Only one human being, more adventurous, or perhaps caring less for fairies and dryads than the rest, had ventured to fix his residence within these enchanted borders. This spot



had formerly borne an old Indian name as full of poetry and sylvan reminiscences as its antithesis was of trite and commonplace suggestions—a name in which the glancing of sunbeams, the glad escape of waters, and all the emblems of external nature were sympathetically portrayed by a poet whose inspirations needed not the applauses of civilization to fan them into life. The innovating mania of the age has wrought sad havoc with our Tuscaroras, our Onondagas, our Oneidas, and our Senecas—names how musical in song and story!—while the public taste revels in Tompkinsvilles, Pumpkin-towns, and Sixteen Corners, and, in place of the older titles which they have usurped, indulges us with its stereotyped multiplications of Rome and Romulus, and Jones and Jenkins.

The solitary being alluded to had selected, as it in defiance of tradition, the most forlorn bidding corner of the district for his abiding place. He loved the sound of the waterfall and the voices of nature, did Gilbert Hueston, better than the harmonies of the most accomplished orchestra, or—but in this he was partly wrong—better even than he loved the voice of his fellow-man; a cold, retired, worldless person, about whom lingered ever the impression of one who had taken part in some great tragedy.

Hueston had enrolled himself among the followers of the prophetess at an early stage of her miraculous career, devoting fortune, family, and all the inviting prospects of a future teeming with promise, to the cause of her who had become, in some sort, the mistress of his idolatry. A strong vein of religious enthusiasm had for ages characterized the family of which he came, and had been inherited by him to a degree which at times imparted to his actions the coloring of lunacy. Yet, if mental aberration was there, it certainly manifested itself in a very commendable shape, as Hueston's many acts of charity and self-denial had gained him a reputation throughout the adjacent country.

It is not our purpose to detail here the many vicissitudes through which destiny had ordained that the prophetess and her followers should pass before the final disruption of their growing community. Suffice it that fraud and chicanery on the

part of some of the members accomplished once again the customary result; the funds and lands of the association were by degrees absorbed from without, dissensions arose, Jemima herself fell ill and died, and the league that had once given such signs of permanence fell to pieces. In the general scramble which ensued, Gilbert Hueston lost nearly everything. His mind had nearly forgotten its worldly teachings, and he was no match for the tricks of the law and its abettors. Abandoning all he possessed to his enemies, he pushed still further into the wilderness, and, avoiding even the sight of his fellow-man—concealing even his name—became a confirmed misanthrope. On the small remains of his property he erected, with his own hands, a rugged cabin, in which he took shelter with his wife and infant son. Here once more the illusive phantom that had so often cheated him, became the ruling spirit of his life, and he began to cherish anew those dreams of happiness in the shadow of which he had ever been wandering. Then, to cap the climax of his misfortunes, his wife—whom he had always treated with the fondest indulgence—abruptly deserted him. The blow proved too heavy a stroke for the wretched recluse, and he never recovered entirely from its effects, but from the growing boy the bitter truth was carefully concealed, and, even until manhood had fully asserted its sway, Ezra believed his wretched mother to have perished in his childhood—the victim of some harrowing calamity.

In that lonely retreat Gilbert Hueston still watched and prayed for the wretched remainder of his ill-starred life—revenging his injuries and sufferings upon society at large, and occasionally going about the country disseminating his dangerous views and theories among a class only too willing to be benefitted by his teachings. In his solitary cabin he still pondered over the doctrines of his departed leader, but missed more than ever the companion whose ministering cares and soothing words had lightened his burthen in many a bygone trouble. His boy was now the only tie that bound his crushed and battered spirit to the earth, from which it was longing to be severed, and over him Gilbert watched, as he grew to man's estate, with the most intense

anxiety. That anxiety increased until, about the time of the occurrences just narrated, even the youth himself had observed the agitation and abstraction of his parent, and had more than once thoughtlessly asked its meaning without receiving anything more than a rebuke for his pains. The part sustained by Ezra in the late demonstration warned Hueston when too late of the error he had committed. His tones were unusually harsh and bitter as on that evening he followed his son—now quite as determined upon receiving an answer to his oft-repeated questions as his father seemed to be upon setting at rest the apprehensions which had been so suddenly aroused within him—across the humble threshold of that dwelling consecrated by so many sleepless vigils.

For some minutes after entering the cabin of the spiritualist, a deep silence prevailed. The elder Hueston, with folded arms and knitted brow, paced to and fro with long impatient strides, as though he had forgotten the presence of his son, who was hesitating between his dread of his father and his desire to learn the fatal secret which overshadowed the destinies of his race with its baneful influence.

"Ezra," at length began Hueston, "you have greatly offended me; first, by leaguizing yourself with the covert enemies who seek my overthrow, and next by contracting a romantic passion with the daughter of a man whom, above all others, I have reason to detest. There is only one method by which I can wean you from this course. The means I propose are desperate, and the revelations of which I must make you the depository in order to accomplish my object, may be ruinous to your peace of mind, and may destroy your father. For myself, in that event, I should not care, but for you! Ah! many a time I have brought my resolution to this point, yet abandoned the at-

tempt because I feared to make you undergo the ordeal."

"I understand you, sir. My love for Miss Cameron has become a part of my life, but if you can prove to me that the indulgence of so innocent a passion endangers your interests, I will abandon it, however loth."

"You will do this?" asked Hueston, grasping his son's arm eagerly.

"I will do more, sir. If, as, you have lately hinted, harm shall come to you from any member of the township, I will be your avenger."

"It is thus I would always have my son discourse," said Hueston, gazing upon the handsome youth with a look of fatherly pride. "Ah, boy! were such abilities exercised in a field that I could indicate—"

"I have said, sir, there is but one way to attach me to you more firmly. Cease, then, to regard me as a mere stripling, and give me your unlimited trust. It shall never be violated."

"To-morrow, then, your wish shall be gratified," replied Hueston.

It may be imagined that sleep was a stranger that night to poor Ezra, and it was with the utmost impatience that he awaited the dawn of day. He had long cherished a desire to fathom the secret of his father's strange absences and wanderings, and now the great riddle was on the point of being solved. Perhaps, even, he was about to learn something definite respecting his mother—of her whose history had been a blank to him, and whose very name Gilbert could never hear uttered without manifesting anger.

Little did the importance of those simple words of his father occur to him at the moment, but, in after years, when manhood had brought maturity to his thoughts and vigor to his frame, he learned to value only too well their deep significance.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE SACHEM'S FOOTSTOOL.

On the morning following this conversation, the Huestons found themselves, after a rapid pull through the chilling logs of the lake, disembarking at the cove to which, but not beyond, young Ezra had on many an occasion accompanied his father. The spot presented no features worthy of special notice, only that here the scenery was wilder and more broken by rocks, while a small brook disembogued itself with a purling sound into the lake. As soon as the boat grated the two sprang out. Hueston took in his hand the fowling piece with which they had come provided, while a pouch containing food of a simple character depended from his neck.

As they journeyed up the dell, with all whose intricacies Ezra was well acquainted, the scenery became more sombre and the solitude more intense. High banks and masses of rock hemmed in the little brook, through whose uneven bed they were obliged to pick their way, and at length these natural walls and the tangled foliage which overhung them until it literally over-arched, completely shut out the daylight. A tramp of less than five minutes brought them to a circular opening, sunk by nature in the natural sandstone like a monstrous well, forming a basin supplied by the spring which fed the brook. Steer up from the narrow strip of sand which surrounded this pool, the rock rose almost in a precipice for some hundred feet, and was covered with the hieroglyphics and picture writings of the ancient possessors of the soil. Opposite the head of the little stream was a depression in the wall, resembling, and, in fact, answering all the purposes of a seat, even a smaller piece of sculptured rock, by way of a rest for the feet, not being absent. This was the Sachem's Footstool, so christened by the first white inhabitants of the neighborhood; the spot alluded to by Gilbert Hueston in his previous day's conversation with his son.

"We are, at any rate, in good time," said Ezra, lightly, as he flung himself into the sache's seat. "Our friends, the spirits, are not over-particular in the matter of keeping their appointments."

"Never speak lightly, Ezra, of things you comprehend not," said Hueston, gravely. "Is it necessary to see or touch in order to be convinced that there is a creator?"

"No, surely, sir," was the reply; "we have evidence of a beneficent deity in everything that moves and breathes around us."

"Why, then," pursued Hueston, "should we treat with contempt the grand idea that there are beings of inferior station, but of a like ethereal mould, even in the days of the patriarchs, deputed by that creator, in all kindness, to encourage our better promptings, to chide our misdoings, and in some degree to direct our earthly course?"

"It is a subject, sir, that I am little fitted to discuss," replied Ezra, wishing by degrees to introduce a topic having a more permanent interest to his thoughts; "and, in truth, I cannot think that it will benefit either of us."

"It may be so, Ezra, but you will not doubt my word when I tell you that I have good reasons for putting faith in the theory. Yes, Ezra, spirits have visited me, and from them I know that my hour for leaving you approaches. One duty—a solemn one—remains for me to accomplish; that done, I am ready for that long journey upon which the richest as well as the poorest must enter, and from which none may return. You do not believe in such manifestations, Ezra?"

"Candidly, I do not, sir. Our modern spirits are, but prank-playing spirits, I apprehend, and have never, that I have heard, accomplished a tittle of good. Pounding and moving tables, and sounding instruments, with, it must be said, a most human vigor. I can't abide such juggleries; and yet—"

"Ezra, Ezra—you are of the same blood with all the Huestons, and already I feel that some of their strange experience has been vouchsafed to you. Listen, then; Ezra, I have again seen your mother. In the lonely night vigils, angel forms have hovered about my couch, and every question has been answered. I am about to confide to you the results of these visitations. There is yet time to retreat. Do you shrink from the ordeal?"

"Put me to the proof, sir, if you doubt

my courage. They must be bold spirits indeed, and something above the ordinary run, that would shake my firmness. No Hueston was ever more obstinate when bent upon mischief than you shall find me."

By this time they had reached the footstool, and the rocky dell which environed it was growing purple with the shadows of coming twilight as both cast their packs upon the ground. Dimly and full of mystery the old hieroglyphs still loomed out from the natural tablets on which they had been inscribed—who might tell for what purpose, or how many ages ago?

"It is growing cold, I think," said Ezra; "shall I light a fire, sir?"

"You may kindle one if you wish, but let it be such as will not attract observation, for what we are here to perform no curious eyes should witness. Ezra, look up: the mystery you complained of shall be such no longer."

The elder Hueston took from his pocket a small whistle, and blew three times upon it in a peculiar manner. Before many minutes had elapsed, Ezra's attention was called to a grating noise, such as might be caused by the friction of masses of rock, and, turning his eyes in the direction of the sache's seat, he found it occupied, to his amazement, by the upright figure of an Indian, clad in the scarlet blanket and other trappings of a chief.

Ezra started to his feet, surprised at the unexpected vision, but a word from his father checked his momentary alarm, and, looking again, he now perceived, what in the darkening shadows had escaped his notice, a huge orifice at the back of the sache's chair, through which the intruder had obtained ingress to the dell. Another glance revealed to him the fact that the person whose sudden appearance had so astonished him was no other than Oniscasset (more familiarly known as George), a Seneca chief who had long served his father in several subordinate capacities, and to whom he had himself been indebted for whatever knowledge of woodcraft he might have attained to. The momentary delusion was occasioned by a striking difference in costume—the Indian usually affecting a habit as remarkable for its squalor

as his present attire was for its novelty and splendor.

"Fear not—this time it is an apparition in the flesh that we have to deal with," exclaimed Hueston, with a sickly smile, as he witnessed the lad's surprise. "You see, the sache's chair has an occupant yet, and one who deserves to fill it, too, albeit the honor has grown, as you said, somewhat rusty. Here, George," he continued, addressing the Indian, as he tossed to him a small leathern purse, filled with white pebbles, on each of which a sign of mysterious import was graven, and from which he had previously taken one of the number. "Bear this to those that are nearest, and be speedy."

The savage kissed the packet, and disappeared as silently as he had come.

"If not a spirit, he has some of the attributes of one, at all events," said Ezra; "a most trustworthy messenger, I should say, but somewhat too material to hold a communication with anything less substantial than himself. Putting this and that together, I must conclude that the spirits we have come hither to meet are men like ourselves, and if I am not wrong again, it is for the purpose of attending one of those singular conclaves said to be held periodically in this forest by a body of men calling themselves Regenerators, and by everybody else Disorganizers, that we have come so far."

"Say, rather, men who, holding a proper appreciation of the objects for which humanity was created and the mission it was sent hither to fulfill, have been so stigmatized by an uncharitable world. This night you will gaze upon wonders of which mere dreams, though in some manner connected with them, can give no adequate idea. Arise, and follow me."

He strode toward the orifice as he spoke, and Ezra, losing all thoughts of himself in the wonders of the place, silently obeyed him, until they had climbed the seat and passed into the small cavern at its back. The stone being once more restored to its position, the elder Hueston knocked three times upon what appeared to be a wooden door, which was immediately opened, as Ezra judged, by a sudden current of air and

by a movement of his father, who had grasped him by the hand and bade him step boldly forward. All was intense darkness, and, in spite of his attempts at self-possession, a sensation of awe began to creep over the young neophyte.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE MYSTIC CIRCLE.

The occurrences of the past twenty-four hours had followed each other in such rapid succession that Ezra had but little time for reflection. The rambling and seemingly disjointed observations of his father had hitherto exercised but little effect upon him; for, like most persons who are confronted for the first time with a subject so strongly at variance with all our preconceived notions of the relations subsisting between mind and matter, his immediate impulse had been to view the entire doctrine as an absurdity, originating in the heated fantasies of a mind deranged by incessant brooding over domestic troubles, as Hueston's long had been. Now, however, that he stood hesitating upon the threshold of those mysteries to which his father had so often alluded, an emotion strongly allied to dread took possession of his frame. He felt that a new field of action was opening before him, and, as he was thus far in ignorance of Hueston's motives, he halt strunk from incurring a responsibility which might embitter the remainder of his own lifetime. In this he was actuated by a natural principle common to all properly balanced minds, which prompts them to look with aversion upon deeds that require the darkness of midnight for a cover.

Curiosity, however, was gradually getting the better of all other emotions; for he knew that he was on the point of being introduced to the secret deliberations of that mysterious assembly, his father's connection with which had long been known to him, and to a participation in whose rites and ceremonies he had often been taught to look forward as an inducement to exertion, and one of the highest principles to which human nature might aspire.

They had advanced in this way for some

distance, and Ezra was beginning to feel the irksomeness of his position, when a voice, whose every accent was as distinct and clear as the vibrations of a bell, came struggling through the inky veil that seemed spread before and around them, commanding them to pause and declare their errand. Ezra was about to take the reply upon himself, had he done which there had probably been an end to all further developments, as far as he was concerned, but a fierce pressure of his father's hand had restrained him in time. The tones of the voice they had just heard, subdued and soft at first, rose upon the murky blackness like the increasing diapason of an organ, and Ezra, who was remarkably alive to magnetic impressions, felt that the owner was a man to be both dreaded and respected. The answer was given by Hueston in a few sentences incomprehensible to Ezra, when the same voice bade them "Welcome in the name of God and his prophets, and of that Word that may be thought, not uttered. Yet, once again," it continued, "if your purposes have in them aught of evil, withdraw from hence while you are free to do so. To those who come in amity the hand of emity shall be freely tendered, but to those who come as traitors death were a mercy to the punishment in store."

A silence almost painful in its intensity succeeded, when another voice, issuing apparently from a different quarter, proceeded to rehearse a sort of ritual, binding the respondent to the fulfillment of certain duties toward his fellow man, his country, and his Creator; to resist oppression and injustice in whatsoever shape they might appear, without regard to laws or governments; and, in particular, to avenge such injuries as might have been inflicted upon friends or kindred, or even upon the State, and ending with a solemn injunction to secrecy in all matters relating to the Nameless Brotherhood. To these obligations, there being nothing very objectionable in them, Ezra responded in the affirmative, and in tones as impressive and as free from trembling as those of his questioner. Some other ceremonies followed, which were similarly disposed of, when the voice which had first broken the silence exclaimed:

"It is well! The candidate has answered the preliminary requirements of our Mystic Circle, and may enter at once upon his probation."

Three smart strokes from a gavel operated as a signal for a hymn of rejoicing, which burst forth simultaneously from at least a hundred voices; and at this instant a brilliant light irradiated the gloom, disclosing an immense dome-like cavern, glittering with innumerable stalactites, with arches and corridors stretching away in the dim vista beyond. At first the neophyte could distinguish nothing, so startling was the effect of the sudden transition from night to day. When he had recovered the use of his eyes he found himself in the presence of a numerous assemblage, all of whom, however, were cloaked and masked. In this circumstance there was nothing at all singular, the youth having before heard of such ceremonies in connection with fraternities of a less questionable stamp than this; and, in fact, after some additional forms were gone through with—such as quaffing a goblet of wine to the prosperity of the cause, signing his name to the regulations, and acquiring the signals by which he might know a brother, whenever and wheresoever he might encounter him, without attracting the suspicion of others, though a crowd should surround, and receiving an explanation of the graven pebbles—these masks were removed, the robes only being retained by some of the officers, and the Brotherhood, among whom were Martin Hungerford and many whom our neophyte recognized as old intimates of his father's and men of good standing in the northwest country, immediately surrounded him with their congratulations.

Thus, then, was solved in part the mighty mystery which, impregnating his minutest actions, had always rendered Hueston so great a bugbear even to his son. Here in the secret recesses of the mountain, hitherto unexplored except by those unknown races whose footprints are so deeply buried in the sands at times that, were it not for some straggling traces of their occupancy still remaining, we should not even know of their having existed. Hueston and his chosen familiars had often met in conclave, and here did Martin Hungerford and his

copartners in iniquity lie deftly hidden, the while a lynx-eyed search was carried on by the myrmidons of justice above their very heads. Not merely to temporal affairs, however, were the objects of these enthusiasts confined. Out of this nucleus—out of these seeds thus sown in darkness and obscurity—was one day to rise a mighty kingdom, the glory of whose splendor, with the aid of its spiritual ministrants, was to penetrate to the remotest corners of the earth. Based upon the principles of justice, love, and truth, it should one day upheave the present fabric of society, whose cornerstone was corruption, and diffuse, in place of the accumulated falsehood and error of centuries, a universal knowledge of those truths by which alone can groveling human nature earn its passport to immortality. Ezra could not avoid acknowledging the sublimity of the conception, although to him it seemed rather more visionary than practical—especially as some of the members had boasted of having received their instructions from the Deity or his angels in proper person. These thoughts, however, did not occur in time to dissipate the illusion under which his senses began to labor, and it was not until a subsequent occasion that he became fully aware of the extent to which, in the frenzy and excitement of the hour, he had involved himself.

The light becoming less painful to his eyes, Ezra betook himself to an examination of this wonderful cavern, of which he only knew through the uncertain traditions of strolling Indians, and in which he had never reposed the slightest confidence. It was one of a great combination.

"A forest of great walls and antres vast," this chamber in which he now found himself, with passages leading to other caverns stretching away from the vision on either hand. The lighting of the place had been effected by means of torches placed in the clefts of the rock and suddenly illuminated; causing the overhanging dome, with its myriad of stalactites and stalagnites, to glisten like a vast vault inlaid with diamonds and precious stones supported by pillars and abutments, coignes, buttresses, and fretwork, seemingly of crystal, cased in silver. A little beyond the centre of this

hall, the drippings of ages had formed what seemed, at a little distance, a rough-hewn statue, under the shelter of a rounded canopy, and at the feet of this statue was placed a rude stone seat of Indian workmanship, which served as a throne for the presiding officer.

The gavel sounded the signal for order, and Ezra, imitating the general example, joined the circle that was now formed about the throne. To his surprise, and agreeably to his satisfaction, his father, advancing to the statue, with a slight bow of recognition to the hall and its officers, took the seat of the Grand Sachem; when the Indian, Quiscassett, coming noiselessly and suddenly from behind the figure, cast over Hueston's shoulders a crimson robe, and then remained standing, as devoid of animation as the statue itself, by the side of the chief."

"Brothers," spoke the Grand Sachem, in tones which, though low and gently modulated, reached every ear for which they were intended—"before taking up the business before us, there yet remain to me some minutes which may be profitably employed in the giving of advice such as may occur to us for the behoof of our young convert here, who has yet to learn the sublimest and most unfathomable mysteries of our sacred order, before he can become an active participant in its privileges or its benefits. He is already aware of the solemnity of the obligations which he has taken upon himself, and, in some degree, of the fearful penalties that await all who violate their compact. He should further be made cognizant of the extent of our influence, and the power we exercise of fulfilling the duties assumed by each member of this mystic circle—duties, from the discharge of which, when once assumed in faith, death alone can absolve him. For his trustworthiness I myself will vouch. Should he, at any time, be placed in a position in which those duties performed in his own favor by others may disembarass him, let him remember only to raise his voice in a peculiar key, pronouncing aloud these words—(here the speaker pronounced in the Indian dialect, some words which he termed the minor key of the order)—when,

though he were a thousand leagues away assistance shall be rendered him."

The speech of the Grand Sachem was followed by a silence broken only by whispers, when the deep sonorous accents of Hueston once more filled the cavern, but this time in prayer.

Notwithstanding the apparent impiety of some of their proceedings—which were carried so far as to wear the appearance of tampering with the sacred prerogatives—such as summoning the presence of supernatural beings to aid in their deliberations, extracting answers from the dead, and other miracles equally wonderful, and all of which Ezra was to witness, it was impossible to look upon the countenances of those men, lighted by a positive glory of religious enthusiasm, and not to give the majority of them credit for sincerity. The almost unnatural excitement, the frenzy, anguish and despair of these wild worshipers of an entirely novel faith had in it something so impressive that the spectator felt involuntarily impelled into a like exhibition of zeal. Some, who professed to have been great sinners, smote their breasts and cried aloud, as if in agony; others crouched upon the earth and wept as unrestrainedly as if they had been alone; not one of the entire assembly remaining unmoved except the Sachem, who stood erect in his place, with his face upturned, and his eyes tightly shut, his hands crossed upon his breast, pouring forth a flood of prayerful supplications, every sentence of which fell from his lips in words of burning import, moving his hearers in proportion to their intensity. For Hueston possessed the most thorough and magical command of that "wonderful organ," the human voice, and knew what key was best adapted to move the hearts and control the minds of his hearers. For his son he also besought, and that he might so grow and thrive apace as in the future to wipe out the deep stain that had settled upon his family—at which Ezra became as strangely agitated as the rest, although but dimly construing his father's meaning even yet.

When the Grand Sachem had concluded, there was a general cry throughout the hall, "The mysteries! Let the mysteries begin!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MYSTERIES.

At once there came swelling upon the air a strain of low, sweet music, rising gradually, as though it came from afar, yet never harsh or discordant, to which the sachem kept time with a sort of muttered recitative, having all the effect of an incantation—such of the circle joining in the cadence as were so minded. This weird sight exercised a thrilling effect upon the young neophyte, who found all inward power over his sensations fast leaving him. Every nerve was in a state of violent agitation, although to outward appearance he was as unmoved as a block of marble—a phenomenon peculiar to certain temperaments. The venerable aspect of many of the enthusiasts, in their long beards and robes of sable hue, contributed to keep up the illusion. Presently, a march was commenced around the hall, headed by Hueston, the incantation continuing, and soon Ezra found that they were leaving the grand apartment through one of the vaulted passages he had noticed—the Indian, George, bearing a torch in the van of the column. The procession continued until they had reached a chamber still lower in the rock, where, the worshipers paired off, defiling around a circular depression in the ground, upon gazing down into which Ezra was horrified to perceive a corpse, yet clad in the habiliments which the deceased had worn during life, and to all appearance as sound and perfect in every member and lineament as at the moment of decease. The costume was that of the last century, however, and the features were those of a long-departed younger brother, who had been a leader of some noted sect peculiar to his time, in defense of which Ezra had often heard his father say the young preacher had lost his life. Here—here, then, was the secret of his father's long and mysterious absences from home.

"Yes—look well upon him, Ezra," solemnly exclaimed Hueston; "it is all that remains of my poor, martyred brother, Cyril. Although the world, in its blind intolerance, deprived him, by a murder as foul as it was unprovoked, of the privilege

of thinking and instructing according to his belief, Providence, more merciful and more discriminating than presumptuous man—has shown its sense of his worthiness by preserving him in all the beauty and freshness of his youth, an imperishable monitor and guide in the principles of our sacred order. Your kinsmen, lying here, was the founder of this circle, the first interpreter of those mysteries concerning which we ourselves know but little, and rather than discover which he felt, a victim to the headlong fury of a superstitious rabble. One of their number having disappeared, and being known as a follower of the precepts taught by our Grand Master, the instincts of his enemies selected my brother for an expiatory sacrifice. Expiatory! Alas! the crime has recoiled with tenfold violence upon the heads of its perpetrators, for, from his ashes, Ezra, has sprung a hydra-headed monster, with a never increasing power that shall one day make the earth tremble to its centre. Modern Christianity refuses him, though unconvicted of sin, a Christian's grave. His followers laid him here, where Nature has taken upon herself the task of embalming the body of a son she well loved. The fruits of man's injustice to his fellows are before you. The atonement is yet to come."

Ezra made no reply, but gazed with interest upon the corpse, whose countenance was that of a very young and handsome man, of whom the living Ezra seemed the counterpart. Then and there arose in the breast of the wondering youth a vehement desire to be, like him, a leader in the wild theories of which his father had been the expounder, even at the risk of participating in his martyrdom. From the moment that this ambition, or rather this frenzy, took possession of him he was a different being.

His reverie endured for some minutes, the bystanders respecting, as they participated in his feelings. It was broken by the voice of him who was called the Keeper of the Secrets—an office answering to that of Scribe. His duty it was to narrate the incidents of the interval which had elapsed since the last convocation, and Ezra was astonished and absolutely alarmed to find how many fires, deaths, and lesser calamities had been accomplished or hastened through the

keeper of the seals are justified by anything of recent or former occurrence in the conduct of the man accused."

"Ezra, fixing his earnest gaze by an impulse he could not control, on the features of the corpse, put the question as directed by his father. To his surprise, the bloodless lips were parted, and then issued from the mouth of the dead a full confirmation of the charge.

Hungerford, thus convicted, challenged proof, but this time in a voice broken and flattering, and with a downcast look. He felt that if he glanced toward the crypt he should faint outright.

How was he staggered as well as Ezra Hueston, when from out the darkness advanced a portly figure, cloaked and masked, which, the disguise being removed, proved to belong to a judicial associate of Cameron—in short, the fat justice who had exhibited so much indignation in the court-house when told by Martin Hungerford that he was not worth the trouble of tarring and feathering! It was to him that the first violation of trust had been made, and he now stood there, most unexpectedly, an incontrovertible witness of Hungerford's guilt.

"So," asked Hueston, with a long breath, and a significant nod at the brethren. "Ask, further, in what form the next danger threatens."

"I am directed to say," replied Ezra, with a subdued voice, more agitated than that of the accused, though not from fear, that Hungerford has been tampering also with the signs and secrets of the Brotherhood in other quarters, and that he has found his most willing instruments in a family named Cameron; but that," added Ezra, immediately, "is impossible. I know them well, and would answer with my own lips for their honor. Besides, what motive—"

"Have a care, sir!" said Hueston, with all the olden fire flashing from his sunken eyes. "Does an inexperienced and beardless boy think to substitute his puny opinion for the voice of the infinite! A lesson so badly conned must be oft repeated ere got by heart. Martin Hungerford, you have heard what has passed. Enough has been elicited for the present to satisfy all of the guilt of our late associate, Martin Hungerford—our late associate—for he is such no

longer. Yet, for the sake of satisfying such as still manifest a tendency to discredit the instrumentality through which we receive our information, I may add that our faithful Ouixasset has been a listener to conversations in which the guilt of the accused is established beyond question. For his sake, also, I am willing, with the consent of the Circle, to proceed still further, though in this dreadful trial that is to come my own heartstrings should be rent asunder. Ask, Ezra, against whom the evil influences of this family, of whom you speak have been chiefly exerted. In order to be satisfactorily answered it will be necessary for you to join your hands in mine, and to repeat after me certain words, and for your own sake and mine, say nothing, see nothing but what is before you until all is over.

The same sweet music, and the same low chant again. An odor of peculiar fragrance diffused itself over the place, a bluish cloud or exhalation hovered above the crypt, and in the centre of this glory floated, or seemed to float, a figure rich in all charms and graces of early womanhood. An expression of sadness rested upon the beautiful features of the phantom, and her finger was pointed upward, as, with a mournful look, her gaze rested upon Ezra. It was the counterpart of his mother.

The proselyte could contain himself no longer, but, breaking from his father's grasp, with a sharp cry, he rushed frantically toward the illusion, which receded as he approached it, and finally vanished altogether. At the same instant a sudden shock from an invisible source smote the neophyte to the earth, and sense and feeling deserted him.

When Ezra regained his consciousness he found himself reclining, in broad daylight by the margin of the Sachem's pool, while Hueston, with an anxious countenance, was sprinkling his countenance with water.

"Heaven be praised, it was then but a dream," muttered the lad, looking round him rather wildly. "God send I have no more such visions!"

"It was no dream, boy," rejoined the enthusiast, excitedly, "but only a foreshadowing of what you are hereafter destined to undergo. The inevitable—any of our

race may not be averted. But of this hereafter. But let me caution you; avoid all entangling alliances with the Camerons. They are our bitterest foes. And now let us back to my cabin. The sun is up, and God's cheerful presence is everywhere, chiding us for our want of action. Come."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FAMILY FEUD.

Ezra had not yet forgotten the solemn injunctions of his father, but still his heart, with the fond impressibility of youth, clung to its idol. It must be remembered, that our hero was as yet a mere stripling, and that he was endowed with an unusual share of natural talents, which the world was already tempting him to exchange for its honors. He determined upon a final interview, and in order to do this, some finessing was necessary.

The next evening appeared to the ardent youth's impatient fancy to recede instead of approaching, but it came nevertheless. He dispatched a hasty meal at Gilbert's cabin, and retired early to his room, under the plea of fatigue. After a while, satisfied that his father had sought his own deer-skin, and was at rest, he silently slipped away, and, in a very few moments, had gained the lake.

The skiff was still lying undisturbed in the little cove where, under cover of the brash, Hueston was in the habit of leaving it. Inspired by his purpose, Ezra launched fearlessly and in silence upon the moonlit expanse. Many a night before had he taken the self-same course since he had first gone a wooing, and had paused to rest on his oars while he gazed upon the star-gemmed streamlet or upon the glowing waters of the lake, shining like a field of frosted silver set with jewels beneath the rays of the lady moon. When his mind was filled with a calm and holy quiet, and the very spirit of happiness had its abiding place in his soul. But now his heart was troubled, and his brow was clouded, and his eyes reflected not back the same soft spirit that dwelt in those placid beams.

The rude and almost uncultivated district in which our scenes are located had been peculiarly favored from the first with the attentions of a numerous body of evil-doers, and had so frequently been made to suffer from their want of discrimination between the laws of men and tum that they were ready in their desperation to hang from the nearest tree every chance straggler whose pursuits were in the least enveloped in mystery. One of the most active, apparently, in the ferreting out of these worthies was a man who, though himself not entirely above reproach, when judged by the standard which regulates the conduct of men in more settled countries, had still, from the cheer force of wealth, and a stern, uncompromising character, risen to the most important position in the little community of which he was a member. There were sundry allusions to sinister deeds of his in days gone by, and report attributed to him the ruin of at least one family whose worldly wealth he had, as their legal adviser, contrived to manoeuvre into his own hands, and whose ruin he had still further accomplished by the betrayal of a lady whose domestic virtues before her acquaintance with Arthur Cameron had been the theme of comment among her friends.

After accomplishing all the mischief that lay in his power the respectable villain absconded to parts unknown; the lady whom he had betrayed, discarded by the most indulgent of husbands, was reported to have perished by her own hand, and Gilbert Hueston, deprived at once of family and fortune, became a half-crazed wanderer, whose spectral figure and sepulchral tones of warning became gradually familiar to the inhabitants of the district. An only son remained to Hueston, who had, by some strange fatality, found a lodgment under the protecting wing of the magistrate against whom his erratic parent maintained such a violent hatred, was all that now remained to Gilbert Hueston. The first unfortunate step of young Ezra had been to fall desperately in love with this very Cameron's daughter—a young lady of gentle disposition and accomplishments suited to a much more civilized state of society than that in which they were compelled by the force of circumstance to move. Of her



instrumentality of the order, that he and others had attributed to chance, but which now appeared to be the direct results of that system which he himself had just sworn to adopt and to defend!

To counterbalance this was a lengthy record of charities and benefactions, conferred upon the suffering and oppressed, which accounted for the manner in which many of the poor and helpless in that region were enabled to sustain themselves—the rich inhabitants, as usual, getting all the credit. As a sort of committee of vigilance, discussing and undertaking to punish all the wrong doings of the day without regard to outside influence; a corrector of judicial malfeasance, and an avenger in general of the wrongs and injuries sustained by the members themselves, the formidable results of which, for good or evil, this organization might be productive could scarcely be overrated.

The privileges and protection of the order were open to all, in fact, who had a wrong to redress or an injury to revenge, and the severe principles of retaliation upon which it was partly based were carried out to the letter by all who had taken its obligations, no matter at what hazard or personal risk. When the spirit of evil, or the devil, as they more bluntly phrased it, was supposed to have taken possession of any person within the knowledge of a member, the accused was tried in secret conclave with the most imposing forms and ceremonies, and his punishment adjudged according to the degree of harm which the possessed had proved himself capable of inflicting. To aid in the sustention of his influence over his brother fanatics, it is not to be denied that Hueston had had recourse to trickery, but this was rarely resorted to by him, and chiefly on occasions like the present. The duty of executing the several commands of the order was awarded by ballot, the names of all the members being placed in a box upon a slip of paper provided for the purpose. All this was explained to Ezra Hueston in due course.

The reason why the speculators in lands and traffickers in public interests could make no advance in any of the townships covered by the operations of the secret

league was now apparent—even magistrates themselves being often connected with the fraternity, and being compelled to obey its mandates while they seemed to be vigorously carrying out the laws.

The young neophyte was by turns amused and astonished at the revelations made by various members, on being called upon to declare what grievances, if any, they had suffered since the last gathering, or what ever of an untoward nature had transpired within their knowledge. Some had been persecuted beyond their deservings by prejudiced administrators of the law; others had been imposed upon or overreached by individuals shrewder than themselves, and requested that justice might be meted out against their enemies; still others had complaints of oppression and extortion against their natural enemies, the hereditary possessors of the soil; not a few were under the influence of a species of demonology which was manifested in a sudden mortality among their cattle, or the failure of their crops, and desired that persons whom they suspected of being accessory might be punished therefor. Nearly all had evils of some sort to obtain satisfaction for, and some were inclined to attribute even their personal ailments to the effects of witchcraft.

The trial of the accused was proceeded with in the most solemn and imposing manner. A prayer was first pronounced, invoking the Divine assistance in their deliberations. Then followed a sort of chant or invocation around the body, during which some papers were handed to the presiding officer. Next came the decisions, and Ezra, in defiance of his better judgment, was alarmed on observing that all the charges previously enumerated were again specified to the corpse lying in the crypt, as to a living arbiter. The question of guilt or innocence was decided in a low, distinct voice through the lips of the deceased, whose right arm was raised and remained unlifted during the ceremony. The duties for the ensuing month were then allotted in the customary form, and Ezra, with his pulse beating at an alarming rate, and his brain whirling in a manner that rendered reflection out of question, felt like one under the influence of a troubled dream.

In the midst of the deep silence that followed, Hueston quietly asked for a moment's attention. There had been traitor-of late, he regretted to say, in the order, through whom its affairs were endangered and its permanency seriously threatened. The keeper of the secrets and himself had passed hours in consultation, but, although they had had assistance from the spirit world, with a view to discovering the guilty parties, had as yet been able to fasten suspicion upon one member only. The eyes of the speaker wandered round the group of curious faces until they rested upon one that seemed much paler than the rest.

"Come forward, Martin Hungerford," exclaimed the sachem; and at his bidding the young fellow of muscular proportions whom we have met at an earlier stage of our story, stepped out from the circle and, gazing upon his accuser with a look of effrontery, demanded to be told upon what grounds the charge was based. At first he endeavored to return the piercing regard of Hueston, as the latter proceeded to read the accusation, which charged the said Hungerford with being in collusion with the enemies of the order, and with having, for a bribe, betrayed a number of his associates into the hands of the authorities, but long before it was concluded, his defiant glances had quailed before those of his leader.

"These are grave charges," said the sachem, appealing to his brethren; "as a friend of the accused from his boyhood, gladly would I have overlooked any matter less weighty than this, but the interests of the society and the safety of its supporters call for an example that shall avert from us the recurrence of such dangers in the future."

"This is a conspiracy to effect my ruin," retorted Hungerford, furiously. "I challenge proof. Submit me to whatever tests you please, but take care that you stick to the truth. My temper is no secret to the brotherhood, and when once aroused, I am apt to be dangerous."

"Fear nothing. You shall have the strictest justice. If found innocent, you have sacrificed nothing in the esteem of your friends, but if guilty—"

"Well, and if guilty?" rejoined Martin, with a look of bravado.

"Martin Hungerford knows the punishment that awaits the traitor. Does he still deny the offense imputed to him?"

Martin maintained a dogged silence.

"Proceed then!" said Hueston, advancing to the crypt.

A dead silence—the silence of the grave—prevailed as the spiritualist took his place by the side of the crypt.

"In the name of our sacred order, and in no spirit of untimely trifling," began Hueston, solemnly addressing the cadaver, "we would renew that correspondence which in times gone by the spheres have deigned to hold with us, unworthy sons of earth. Will you answer us, circumstantially and fully, that we may know how far we yet retain your confidence and that of your fellow spirits?"

Slowly the right arm of the corpse was lifted from the crypt, and for some moments held aloft.

The cold sweat drops stood out upon the face of Hungerford, but there was no outward tremor. In fact, he seemed less guilty than Ezra, who was more agitated.

"The brethren will select their medium," continued Hueston. "Upon him who is the most unselfish and the most spotless let the mantle fall."

To his own astonishment and alarm (for, though still unconvinced of the reality of what he saw and heard, Ezra as has been said, was rapidly acquiring an interest in the strange drama in which he so unexpectedly found himself a participant), the choice fell upon him.

He accordingly came forward, as directed and, though with many an inward tremor, which shame alone enabled him to hide placed himself at the head of the corpse—about whose livid throat he now observed, for the first time, a deep blue welt.

"This is unjust; it is cruel!" exclaimed Martin, hoarsely, and much disturbed.

"It is not so," rejoined Hueston, quietly; "the medium chosen is one who is a total novice in such matters—who can have no possible cause for enmity or double dealing, and I, as his sponsor, will answer for the general truthfulness of his disposition. You have heard, Ezra, what has been alleged against this person. Ask, in the name of the Mystic Circle, if the suspicions of our

father's former history both herself and her mother were ignorant, and as the name of the youth was a common one, and he, in his turn, knew little of his family's affairs. Cameron never dreamed for a moment that in encouraging the visits of Ezra Hueston he was fostering an intimacy with the son of one who was his sworn enemy for life.

Let us follow Ezra.

Rapidly the space diminished between himself and the intervening shore. His course, however, was not directed to the same spot whither he had accompanied his father a few days previously, but rather to the right of it, where there was an Indian trail, leading for some two miles through the woods, to the spot where the Camerons had taken up their residence. On former occasions there had not been a sound of the forest that had escaped his attention, and he had traversed his way through it so often that he could have followed the same route blindfolded. At present, in his intense pre-occupation, everything except the subject that ruled his thoughts passed unheeded, until his distance had been more than half accomplished, when the crackling of a withered branch behind the leafy ambuscade by his side warned him that his movements were not unobserved. Indignant at the thought of having his actions subjected to the scrutiny of a spy, Ezra turned about abruptly and entered at once the leafy covert, exclaiming, as he played with the handle of his hunting-knife, "It shall be lucky for you, my friend, if your heels prove as nimble as your hearing is keen, for by this fair night you shall meet your reward in advance, if I lay hands on you!"

His muttered threats were suddenly checked by his stumbling over an obstacle, which, when he grappled with it, returned his blows with interest. Our young forester, however, was not to be so easily shaken off.

"Bite and scratch as you please, old fellow, since that is your mode of fighting," shouted Ezra; "I must see who and what you are before I go farther, and if I find you to be the contemptible thing I take you for, doubt not but you shall rue it!"

The obstacle made no reply except a guttural series of oaths in the Winnebago tongue, and fiercely resisted all efforts to drag him to the light. That feat accom-

plished, young Hueston was astonished to find that he had been dogged by no less a person than George, the degenerate descendant of a line of forgotten sachems whose history was lost in the dust that had buried their totems.

"So, sir!" exclaimed Ezra, contemptuously, as he let him go, "a noble employment this for a blustering fellow who boasts of his descent from a Winnebago chief! Does it look like a warrior for a strapping athlete of six feet to go crawling through the woods on all fours like a pig?"

"Fore God, mass' Ezra!" replied George, in the deepest humiliation at being detected; "I tole ole chief, young mass's fader, no like dis business—ole chief no bear reason, jus' like young one—no can trust only George. George obey, as always do—follow young mass'r—get licked—feel very small—serve um right dis time—ugh!"

"Well, George," said Ezra, placing his hand upon the Indian's shoulder, "you are, as the world goes, a good, faithful fellow, and as it was by my father's command that you undertook to play the spy, I forgive you. Now, mark me, George! As I am of the same flesh and blood as my father, why should you not, on occasion, do the same service for me?"

"Ugh! no can say," replied the Indian, affecting a dullness of comprehension that Ezra well knew did not belong to him. "Ouscasset always do his duty,—if not, no hunting-grounds for Ouscasset when Great Spirit send for him. No, never desert the young beaver—never betray the old one. No can!"

"I do not ask you to betray my father, you catamount, nor is there anything to look so grave about. All I have to ask is that, as you will not allow me to have my own way, you will merely help me to an interview with my mistress, and, as it will in all likelihood be the last, you will not have it long upon your conscience. Reflect—I will reward you handsomely."

"Honest Injun above all price," said George, repeating solemnly a proverb that Hueston had taught him.

"Well, then, you old humbug, here's a bribe that you cannot refuse!"

And Ezra held toward him a flask of spirits, whose contents had as yet, to all

appearance, been hardly disturbed, and which he had brought along with him in anticipation of the contingency that had actually taken place.

"Um! whisky is good," muttered George, tasting; "whisky is not money. I will keep my word with the old sachem, and I will serve the young sachem too. Your father said you must not go to her—very well; she shall come to you."

"What—you will bring her here?"

"Have I not promised?"

"But, no—the hope is beyond my poor deserving; she will never take such a risk," murmured Ezra, in great despondency.

"For me, no—but for you, yes," said George, with true Indian brevity, and indicating with his finger as he spoke, a small reed-built lodge which occupied a clearing but a short distance from the path, and within eyesight of the chimneys of Cameron's dwelling, as the place of tryst, he disappeared in the direction of the mansion.

The moments which intervened were as so many ages to the expectant lover. Anxiously he wandered up and down in front of the little lodge, starting at the slightest rustle of a leaf, and full of unpleasant misgivings as to the success of George's mission. At last, getting tired of waiting, he was about to enter the hovel, when footsteps were heard approaching, and in a few seconds more he held close enfolded to his arms, and by no means averse, it seemed, to such imprisonment, a form so light and fairy-like that it more resembled one of those spirit-exhalations which so often troubled his restless fancy, than ought of corporeal mould.

"This was hardly fair to decoy me so far by a trick when the road to my feet was so well known to you," murmured Agnes Cameron, as she disengaged herself with a blush from her lover's arms.

"Alas!" replied Ezra, sadly, "that road I am afraid, I must no longer follow! My father looks with such stern disapproval upon our intimacy that he has forbidden all future intercourse, and threatens to remove me altogether from my post. Only one course that my distracted thoughts can suggest is open to us, and that I have no hope that you will consent to. Yet, dearest

Agnes, if you would take the step, what years of untold misery it might spare us both."

"I understand you, Ezra, and will be as candid in return. You know my father, and what an obstacle his pride might at any time interpose in the way of our union. Even were this consideration removed, and it has never appeared to me to be insurmountable, there is my mother."

"Has she not often told us that our happiness was dearer to her than her own?" replied Ezra, hopefully.

"She said it with fear and trembling, for she is, at best, but a weak and sickly woman, and dares not avow that she has thought or wish of her own. I may not add more, but I have said enough, and, as for myself—"

"Your love, you would say, is mine, and has from the first. Dear Agnes, with other youths those words would be but the spur to all honorable undertaking, for they would carry with them the solace of hope. With me there can be no such incentive, for life, with all its rewards, I should hold in abhorrence without thy faithful heart to share in my triumphs. Ah! Miss Cameron—these—these were not your true reasons, or you would never so coldly advise me to stifle all hope!"

Agnes, who had been looking intently upon the ground, while retaining the hands of her lover, seemed at a loss what to reply. Ezra mistook this indecision and renewed his persuasions—exhausting all the fond arguments common to such occasions, but without avail. She shook her head sadly, but her eyes, as they looked up to meet his, were brimming with an affection that could not be misunderstood.

"I could not leave her," she answered, with gentle firmness; "yet you cannot doubt that my heart is at this moment inclining to every argument you utter. I will even own that there is a difficulty more insurmountable than all I have named. Yet even that may be conquered, and if God in his mercy should give heed to my earnest prayer for his removal, then—"

"You will wed me, Agnes?"

"Then, Ezra, if your heart should retain its old preference, I will be your wife."

"The prospect is sufficiently discourag-



## CHAPTER X.

## THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.

"What is all this?" asked Cameron, who had been hunting in the vicinity and who now came up to them. "Alice, Ezra, explain if you can."

"You'll have to appeal to him," replied the young lover, moodily pointing to Hueston.

"Yes, to me, Arthur Cameron," exclaimed Hueston, in the cold but deliberate tones of deadly hate; "to me, whose life has been rendered desolate, whose life has been turned to gall and bitterness through your incarnate wickedness. Such persecutions, by teaching me the sweetness of revenge, have made me half forego my hopes of heaven."

"You here, and by her side, too!" thundered Cameron. "Then, doubtless, another member of my family is indebted to you for some novel ideas in regard to my private affairs?"

"You wrong me, sir," rejoined Hueston, evidently making a great effort to restrain his passion. "It is reserved for you, her unnatural parent, to blight her young and innocent life by such disclosures. My account, Arthur Cameron, lies with you alone; and it may gratify you to learn that, had it not been for her, the arrears that remain between us would have been settled long ere this. 'The countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil. He will root out the remembrance of them from the earth.'"

"O, spare him for my sake, then!" sobbed Miss Cameron, throwing herself at Hueston's feet.

"Beware, beware!" muttered Cameron, as, with a lowering brow, he thrust her back. "As for you, sir, I owe an acknowledgment for the favor you have rendered, but take care how you further brave my resentment!"

"I know the man I deal with," retorted Hueston. "The arts that deluded me once can deceive me no longer. Arthur Cameron, answer me truly. Why have you been my enemy? Why have you been for twenty years or more—seeming, when I look back, a lifetime in itself, so vast the

gulf between despair and happiness—the indefatigable persecutor of my race? Whence was derived that unjust hate that, obscuring all those lofty aspirations with which I entered life, transformed me into the revengeful misanthrope I have since become? Once, Arthur Cameron, revenge was the sole object of my prayers. Nay, it has even been at times within my grasp, when only an accident intervened to save you. We met as seamen meet, and I forgive you. Well for you had it been you had not come hither, or, at least, that you had come with the words of conciliation on your lips! Better for you that you had been moldering beneath that earth that had so long upborne you, writhing as though it would have rejected the load of guilt it bore, than have returned to place yourself within my power!"

"Your power?" answered Cameron, surveying Gilbert from head to foot with an air of supreme contempt. "Pray when did your circumstances mend that you should hold such language to your betters?"

"After what I have sustained at your hands, I can afford to overlook a mere insult," he answered; "but for every crime that you have committed against myself and others, be assured that I will exact a fearful atonement."

Cameron pushed his daughter rudely aside, and the brow of the outcast was black as night as his old enemy advanced. He stepped impulsively forward; but Agnes again interposed her trembling form, and at sight of her imploring countenance both desisted.

"Father, it must not be! And you, sir, who have been the cause of so much trouble, forbear, I pray you!"

A sudden change seemed to come over the outlaw.

"Arthur," said he, frankly extending his hand, "we have long been enemies—a state of things which has, perhaps, been aggravated by the solitary nature of my ways since the occurrence of certain transactions to which I will not further allude. I have come to say to you that the flame of revenge which I have cherished I have learned to overcome, and am here to offer my hand in token of forgiveness."

"Beggar!" retorted Cameron, angrily.

"You forgive! What sudden change in circumstances makes you thus condescending!"

"Father," said Agnes, feebly interposing, "for my sake let this man's friendship be met in the same spirit in which it is offered. This family feud has caused enough trouble to both."

"You, too, by heaven!" roared Cameron. "This is too much!"

"Let it be so," replied Hueston, endeavoring to quell his rising passion. "I have offered my forgiveness and you have rejected it. Henceforward be the sole sin upon your side. My revenge will come in good time and without my seeking."

"There are witnesses here," said Mr. Cameron. "As a magistrate, I think it advisable to warn you that a threat against life is sufficient cause for arresting the party that utters it."

"Your life, Arthur Cameron? That were a poor revenge that would make you a martyr and leave me here to cherish an unnecessary remorse for the deed. As for arrest, I am here entirely in your power, yet you dare not order it—dare not, Arthur Cameron! Too well you know that every hour I passed in bonds would only add to the dangers that surround you."

"Go, then, in heaven's name, or worse may come of it!" replied Cameron, turning away.

Hueston seemed half inclined to retort, but Ezra took him by the arm (he himself had had a terrible struggle to conceal his own passion; but it was done, and he felt the better for it) and drew him gently aside.

"To prolong this dispute," he said, "can do us no good at present, and may lead to harm. The task of conciliation may yet be resumed, but not now."

"Reconciliation?" hissed Hueston between his clenched teeth. "Never—never! His hands have closed the only avenue that remained open. Upon his head hereafter let responsibility fall. Know, Arthur Cameron, that the youth upon whose accents your daughter hangs with so much fondness is my son. Nay, more, that they are as firmly joined in sight of God as wedlock's bonds can make them!"

Cameron started away from Ezra as if a basilisk had crossed his path. For an instant a curse seemed struggling upon his lips; but, checking the impulse, he dashed Agnes violently from him upon the ground, and rushed from the spot with a cry of agony that echoed fearfully among the surrounding pines.

By the aid of Ezra and his father Agnes was speedily removed to the cabin occupied by the latter, where the youth listened to his father's account of his difficulties with Cameron, with whose daughter, Agnes, a singular fatality had so intimately involved his son. His heart sank within him as he contemplated the consequences of his madness, but it was now too late to apply the remedy.

When Agnes was finally enabled to sit up and converse, it became a matter of doubt whether it would have been more humane to leave her to perish rather than to restore her to a life more than half of which, it became apparent, must henceforth remain a blank to her.

"Poor, sinless child!" said Hueston, taking one small, nerveless hand in his own, and actually quailing beneath the vacant stare with which those eyes, late so bright and full of meaning, rested upon him. "What curse is strong enough to reach that heartless parent whose selfishness would render him insensible to the worth of such a treasure?"

"We must not be uncharitable," said his son. "Doubtless he feels sufficiently aggrieved at his loss."

"Yes, as the creditor sorrows when death has claimed his debtor. And perhaps it is well that her senses will henceforth never discern the mercenary uses to which that basest of villains intended to adapt her."

"Do not speak thus," said Ezra, tenderly supporting her, as he knelt by her side and gazed anxiously in her face, in which recognition of her lover seemed only faintly expressed. "All hope is not yet departed."

"O not your senses, my son, with a chimera that can but add a tenfold poignancy to your misery when the full truth shall dawn upon you. Her reason is threatened forever!"

"Then hear me, heaven!" exclaimed

Ezra, passionately. "I am young, and at that age when ambition begins to move most fiercely the hearts of men; but henceforth and forever, my ambition lies here!"

"You worship an image from which the soul has long since departed."

"I adore a saint," replied Ezra, fervently, "whose being is not confined to either earth or heaven, but lives in both. O, Agnes, pure and stainless—this world, peopled by fiends and madmen, audaciously claiming control over the powers of sea, earth, and air—was no place for thee. But, in spite of all, you shall yet be wholly mine; the more helpless, even so the more beloved and cherished."

Although no sound had yet escaped her motionless lips, a faint smile flitted across her brow, like a transparent ray of sunshine flitting over a landscape through a dreamy cloud of midsummer.

"Speak to me, Agnes—say only there is a hope!"

Her only answer was an inquiring gaze, which showed that she but vaguely comprehended.

"O, how we paltry human beings speak of death," said Hueston, "without a thought that the bath agonies to which the pangs of dissolution are as pastime."

"And what has caused this wreck of all that was most lovely?" asked Ezra, with a dangerous fierceness in his looks. "But for this accursed feud between our families, to which we have even perverted the sacred writings, that we might not lack an excuse for the unrighteous quarrel, this sad calamity might never have befallen."

"What but the hate of him against whose entire race," replied Hueston, vehemently, "your father's wrongs, your mother's injuries, should long ago have aroused the fiercest resentment. See here another item in the long catalogue of his crimes. If my disgrace could not excite your anger, this last must overflow the measure of our wrongs. Yet you burden me with those reproaches that belong only to him!"

"What mean you, sir, by these incoherent words?"

"Are they incoherent? To you they should be plain as the holy writ. You have a weapon and know how to use it!"

"You would have me, then—"

"Use it against Cameron!" shouted Hueston, in the madness of his passion, "or be forever stigmatized a coward!"

At the mention of the name in a tone so threatening, a momentary gleam of intelligence passed over Agnes Cameron's pallid features.

"O, no, no!" she cried in alarm, clinging to Ezra, "he is my father; you must not harm him. O, remember what saith the holy book! 'Render not unto thy neighbor evil for evil.' Remember the example of him who, though born of Heaven, yet devoted his mortal life to the performance of kindly deeds. Although on earth the joys of close companionship may be denied us, by this means we may be united to part no more through all eternity."

"She is right—she is ever right," murmured Ezra, as if unconscious of the presence of Hueston.

"Do you forget, then, thus lightly, boy, the long years of earnest teaching that I have grown gray in imparting to you, under the hope that I cherished a son whose graceful manhood would one day right my heaped-up wrongs?"

"No," replied Ezra, "I do not forget them; and there are even times when, listening to the recital, my pulses throb, the hot blood rushes to my brain, and I am fit for any desperate measure. Happily, upon those darker thoughts a softer spirit will intrude itself, whose warnings, for my immortal soul's welfare, I dare not disobey."

"He, too, deserts me!" muttered Gilbert, wringing his hands in unfeigned distress.

"Father!" said Ezra, who seemed half-distracted between love and filial duty, "this advice has for both of us too deep a significance to be disregarded. We have neither of us reached the fatal boundary, to cross which is certain ruin. Let us reflect that, in following out these plans of vengeance we are transgressing one of God's holiest laws, and strive rather for the reformation than the punishment of our enemies."

"Indeed!" rejoined Hueston, "where did you learn so much? Have the divine denunciations against the wrong-doer escaped your vigilance, or the strong counsel which he has given his followers as regards their destruction?"

"That, sir, concerns those who outrage His laws; our animosity He has promised that He will revenge for us."

"If I listen longer to such arguments, I shall lose the little firmness that remains to me," answered Hueston, whose eyes, filling with tears, showed the effect of his son's admonitions, and how much against his own true nature were the counsels in which he had for so many years endeavored to fortify himself.

"You have touched his heart, and O, my love, what bloody victories in the corpse-stricken field shall equal peaceful triumphs such as this?"

These were the last intelligible words that were uttered by Agnes for days. As if inspired for the purpose, she had regained the full command of all her faculties in the performance of a duty so congenial to her feelings. That done, and success apparently insured, she went into a quiet slumber, a sweet and placid smile resting the while upon her lips, as though no unnatural occurrence had transpired to disturb her mind's serenity.

All revengeful passion seemed to have fled, and for once the angel of forgiveness triumphed over the demon of retaliation.

This second conquest over self proved a terrible struggle for the elder Hueston. He had brooded so long and so incessantly over the one idea, that it had become, as it were, incorporated with his very being, and frequently, after his conversion, he found himself rehearsing mentally the list of his grievances, recalling bitter taunts and frowning answers, dwelling once more upon affronts and injuries, until his brain was in as bad a way as ever. Not at once was his reformation to be accomplished.

But Agnes improved henceforward so rapidly that all apprehensions on her account were dismissed as groundless, and when, on the subsequent morning, Miss Cameron was missed, and only a note found in her place, informing them that she had received a peremptory summons from her father, neither was much surprised, although Ezra was almost inconsolable in his grief, and he could never cease to dwell upon her graces.

"Son, son!" exclaimed Hueston, rapidly and in great excitement, during one of the

pauses in their ineffectual pursuit, "there is but one favor you can add to these praises—take this knife and use it against me if you will, but spare me, O, spare me the pangs you inflict with every word you utter. To have seen the offspring of my loins at the feet of her, the child of my relentless enemy, fills me with an anguish to which all the pains and sorrows of my past life are as nothing. At this moment when, standing upon manhood's threshold, I fondly hoped the time had come when I might make you my eager confidant—the sharer in my plans and aspirations—to find you courting an alliance with one of that hated brood—"

"Why, then, sir, did you reserve the disclosure until the evil had grown beyond the remedy? The fault is all your own, and even yet I am left to guess the cause of the revengeful feelings you have so often manifested against the Camerons. Why this mystery?"

"Son, that man, that Arthur Cameron, whose child you would make your wife, has been through life my evil genius; the destroyer of my peace; the—but words are useless now. Impelled by the hopes of which I have spoken, and thinking the hour had arrived when your mind would be sufficiently expanded to comprehend my views, I had prepared a manuscript in which everything of interest in our personal matters was set down with an unprejudiced and impartial pen. Read that when you are again at home, and everything will be plain to you. Here is the key to my private cabinet—you will learn its secrets soon. At the back of all, in a separate drawer, you will find the papers that are to give you a new idea of life and its duties. I will not say what pangs these revelations have cost me; and, indeed, it was only a few days since, having learned through George the intimacy you had contracted with this fair will-o'-wisp, that I resolved on making them. When the animosity which had slumbered for years was rekindled, then—but, read, and judge me rightly. For two days I shall be absent; on the third I shall return and expect to know my fate."

The fanatic, stern as he seemed, proved by his actions that he had really no heart to cherish anger, for, in spite of his recent

frenzy, he bowed himself upon the neck of his son, and a tear trickled down upon Ezra's hand as Hueston for a moment bent over him. Then disengaging himself, the parent waved his boy an affectionate adieu, and Ezra was left to retrace his steps alone.

When he again reached the cabin, the Winnebago had evidently lost all thought of his ancestry, his duty, and everything else of a similar nature. He was, in fact, "staying drunk," and, in answer to Ezra's interrogations, would only alternately raise the fatal flask on high or press it to his bosom, as he maundered over some unintelligible ditty, which, being in the original dialect of his fathers, might have been a love story or an invocation to the gods. George was not the romantic sort of Indian—we are sorry to confess it—but, perhaps the Winnebagoes were better bred in the days of the Brants and the Pontiacs.

Many a pang did that revelation bring to Ezra Hueston—many an inward struggle between his conscience and the rigid sense of duty which had always been exacted in his family, before he could persuade himself to indorse his father's views. The latter observed his hesitancy, made all due allowances for the impetuous character of his subject, and set himself seriously to work to mould this hitherto untamable spirit to his purposes; for there was that in the youth which, it was plain, would render him an important auxiliary to the cause he had so much at heart, and although it might be effected only at the cost of the boy's future happiness, he was sternly resolved that the boy should perform the part of no half-way proselyte.

To this end Hueston had drawn up a document detailing in all its lights and shadows that portion of the family history of which his son had been thus far kept in ignorance; for he now found that an obstacle—and that obstacle nothing less than a youthful attachment on the part of the youth toward Agnes, the daughter of the old enemy of his race, Arthur Cameron—stood directly in the way of his plans, which he knew could only be removed by decisive measures. Even now, had Ezra made a confidante of the gentle and lovely Agnes, not all the influence of his father's example or his mother's memory could have procured his further co-op-

eration in a scheme which seemed at first flush so unhalloved in at least one of its aspects.

Time and again did Ezra resolve in his mind the question of jugglery on the part of the so-called spirits, until his brain was in a state of the utmost bewilderment. None knew better than did he the rude honesty of purpose, the unswerving uprightness which characterized his father's every action. Might not he himself be laboring under the effects of a gross deception? To this conclusion, however, he found it difficult to arrive.

The association in which Gilbert Hueston held so high a position was but one of the natural results of the failure of that grand scheme of regeneration and reform which had flourished so happily for a while under the auspices of the Prophetess. From that sad experience that human nature was too much given to sin to be benefited by milder measures, he had become in time a convert to the doctrine of compulsory morality, disavowing the services of lawyers and clergymen as such, and holding to a rigorous belief in a system of rewards and punishments. In this he was partly wrong, but, as there is no midway in the conceptions of such a mind as Hueston's, he had gone to the utmost extent in theory and practice. His fellow-laborers in this new scheme of regeneration were principally men of similar intellectual organization, deserters from the camps of various rival but less secret factions—all the eccentricities of religious and moral faith being represented. In the new dispensation the principal argument—in fact the very corner-stone of faith—was the then hardly known and incomprehensible science of spiritualism; a science to the elucidation of which Hueston had paid much attention, and which was daily attracting fresh proselytes to the order. The mysterious signs and wonders which characterized the hallucination, or whatever it might have been called, in the earlier stages of its development were getting to be of such frequent occurrence as to create a great deal of confusion and alarm wherever they were observed, and when Hueston first began to experiment openly upon the theme he was at once set down by the more ignorant as being in league with the devil, and by the more intelligent as a consummated humbug and

impostor—an impression which gained force from the fact that others, for merely mercenary reasons, had instituted a series of juggleries answering to the name, and were already coining money by their bungling operations.

One circumstance gave Ezra inexpressible annoyance, and even pain; since the day of his initiation, nothing had been seen or heard of Martin Hungerford. Although the latter was a lonely man with few or no personal friends, his rough and quarrelsome disposition rendering him an object of dislike throughout the country, his disappearance was noticed at once, and it was by degrees hinted about that the poor fellow had been murdered. At this crisis a letter, purporting to have been written by Alstyne, and dated at Albany, had been received, stating that he had been called away on business, and having no property or family ties to bind him to the place, should probably never return.

For the time being, therefore, all inquiry was suspended.

Days fled before Ezra could summon fortitude to open the manuscript intrusted to him by his father. His hesitancy was terminated in a manner as strange as it was unanticipated. Since his journey with his father to the Sachem's Footstool, his slumbers had been much disturbed, and often when his eyes refused to accommodate themselves to slumber, he would pace the little apartment assigned to him, or sit with his head supported by his hand and the yet unread history on the table before him, absorbed in reflections of the most harassing description. He had as yet but just embarked upon the voyage of life, and for him what a prospect it offered! During one of these reveries he was aroused to consciousness by a singular series of manifestations; a hand seemed at one moment to rest affectionately upon his shoulder; he distinctly heard at the moment several deeply-drawn sighs, and looking earnestly in that direction, the filmy phantom of a sweet human countenance became for an instant manifest to his view, assuming at first the lineaments of his murdered uncle, and then of his mother. This portion of his experience might have been merely the illusions of his heated brain, but if so, they were wonder-

fully distinct. The vision was succeeded by the sounds of sobs and weeping, and a soft hand seemed to press his own, which now lay on the table. The leaves of the manuscript were repeatedly agitated and fro, although the casement was closed, and there was no wind without to move them had such not been the case.

Hoping that it might be a delusion he started up, and began striding across the floor, but as he walked, invisible footsteps seemed to accompany him. Returning to his seat at the table he took up the manuscript, when all sounds ceased. He laid it down, when the manifestations recommenced. Again an indefinable awe assailed him. He was convinced that the spirits of his mother and his uncle had been with him. For an instant he bowed his head to mutter a prayer, and then took up the revelations. A paper dropped from the scroll as he did so, on which were inscribed the words, in his father's handwriting, "Read—interrogate—act."

"It is the fruit of the tree of knowledge which I am about to pluck," he thought; "If so I must incur the penalty. Henceforth no indecision!"

It was a strange and stirring recital, that over which the youth pondered, and as he read he much resembled one of those life-like creations of the painter, Ketzeh, who was so fond of portraying youth and innocence under the influence of supernatural impulses. Only the arch fiend with his piercing eye and his single crow's feather, was necessary to complete the picture. The narrative carried the reader back almost to his father's childhood, when three boyish figures were seen disporting together. These were Gilbert, his younger brother, Cyril, whose lamentable end has been adverted to, and Arthur Cameron. As the history progresses a fourth figure becomes interwoven with the plot. It is Mary, afterward the beloved wife of the elder Hueston. O, what a mountain weight of sorrow and anguish and woe unutterable had been for years close locked within the breast of uncomplaining Gilbert as in a dungeon. What admirable fortitude he had exhibited in concealing the knowledge of his past sufferings even from his son! Only in the night—the lonely, solemn night—did the

bereaved man grieve over his lost happiness, his blighted manhood, and his cheerless youth. For then spirits hovered about him, and held converse with him, and consoled or counseled him. Then, too, he remembered how, in the earthly paradise which Heaven permitted him to create unto himself, a serpent, wearing the features of Arthur Cameron, crept in and stole from him the treasure of the poor fellow's Garden of Eden, his blooming Mary. He remembered how the deceived one had been left to starve, a vagrant, after having sated the infernal appetite of her destroyer; how the fiend's bitter enmity, after robbing him at once of wife and brother, through an accusation, the excuse for which could have been framed only in the mind of one inured to infamy—so quiet and irreproachable had been the even tenor of Gilbert's ways—pursued him to the last, or until the world's chances and changes had drawn them so widely asunder. And now, destiny had once more thrown this Cameron within his reach, and it was Ezra Hueston who had been selected to play the avenger.

## CHAPTER XI.

### EXCELSIOR.

Not far remote from the spot where Mr. Cameron had so nearly fallen a victim to the fury of the misguided mob, which only the uncalled-for severity of his proceedings had called into being, flourished a settlement which its leaders, rejecting the old native nomenclature of the region, had dignified by the name, "Excelsior."

Whether the founders had intended a pun is not quite certain, but certain it is that "Still Higher" was a remarkably appropriate name to bestow upon a place which sat perched among the hills like an eagle looking down from its eyrie, surrounded by gloomy pines and disordered rocks, and cut in twain by a foaming torrent, which was all very well in its way—that is, so long as it turned the wheels of the mills, which first gave the town its importance, but that it had a curious habit of sometimes mistaking its route, pouring itself in a drenching cataract over houses and people indiscrimi-

nately, and making sad havoc with cowpens and poultry yards.

Whatever praise the denizens of this little nook were entitled to for their enterprising and thrifty conduct in other respects had subjected them, it is to be feared, to a great deal of scandal in the outer world, among which it was currently reported that the inhabitants of Excelsior were given over to the most singular delusions and practices.

Even in this remote region the teachings of the Prophetess had left their impression, but they had in course of time become so thoroughly mingled with others that few traces of her doctrines were perceptible. There were Fourierites and Malthusites and Millerites, Mormons, Rappists, Swedenborgians, Vegetarians, Progenitarians, and a long list of similar innovations, of which the peculiar tenets and observances formed the theme for fireside gossip to many a rural family circle during the long winter nights.

Here, from motives which may be gathered in the sequel, the implacable foe of Hueston, Arthur Cameron, with his little family, consisting of his wife, a sickly, meagre woman, known to the neighborhood by her charities chiefly, and the gentle and lovely Agnes had established his household gods, and here he so thoroughly succeeded in winning the confidence of this fraternity that they gave him office, and created him treasurer of the society in which he had enrolled himself.

Agnes Cameron was one of those delicate, ethereal creatures who seemed born for action in some higher sphere, and sadly out of place among the grosser natures by which they are surrounded. The eye of sensuality shrank rebuked from the almost unearthly purity of those angelic features, illumined by a pair of deep, dark eyes that resembled the reflections of sister planets in a quiet pool. Her manner was gentleness itself, pervaded by a refinement of spontaneous growth which might have been vainly sought for in a drawing room, and in her most amiable moments her countenance was stamped with an air of melancholy which at once interested even the most casual observer. It was thought by many that some unexplained mental influence

was the cause of this habitual sadness, which even her own parents professed themselves unable to account for, and spoke of her as one destined to unearthly grace. Over and again her hand had been asked by suitors, whose offers would have met a favorable response from almost any maiden in the township, but she had refused them all, to give her heart at last to the younger Hueston, of whose relationship to his ancient adversary Cameron had little dreamed.

The magistrate, however, had little occasion, at least in his own esteem, to apprehend the malice of an enemy. A large landed proprietor, flushed of means, and bountifully gifted with the goods of this world, he laughed to scorn the opinions of society, and reigned the petty monarch of his little principality.

This state of affairs was doomed to a serious interruption. One morning a messenger rode in hot haste to the magistrate's door, bearing a missive for Cameron, of which the following is a transcript:

"New York, August —th, 186—.

"DEAR SIR:—We regret that, since last advice, an unforeseen circumstance has turned up with regard to your extensive landed estate which seriously threatens the legitimacy of your title. A large proportion of this property is claimed by one of our wealthiest citizens, by name Gershom Calthorpe, who is about filing a bill for its recovery, his family, as he alleges, having been defrauded of the lands at some former period, but, of course, not by you! To counteract this adverse influence it will require the exertion of all that tact, vigilance, and finesse for which our firm is celebrated, but we doubt not that every obstacle may be surmounted. An early interview will oblige both yourself and us, as also your prompt attention to the inclosed document. We remain, dear sir, your's very respectfully, "GORE & GRYPPE.

"Attorneys and Counselors.

"POSTSCRIPTUM.—It is said that the Calthorpes, senior and junior, contemplate paying you a visit. Look out for them."

The "inclosed document" was, of course, a bill for services rendered.

Justice Cameron was a man of tremendous nerve, but, with all his fortitude, he could not repress a feeling of despair as the

consequences of this discovery flashed upon his mind.

"Of what could he have been thinking at that moment?"

His eyes glared with a frightful expression as he took a long and affectionate survey of the far-reaching acres that were visible from his piazza in the plains below, extending on the other hand to the very borders of the lake. And was all this rich domain about to slip from his grasp at the very moment when he fancied himself the most secure in its possession? The thought was madness. He resolved that the Calthorpes, father or son, should never enjoy an acre.

O, Gershom—Gershom Calthorpe—what were you doing as you rode gayly up the eastern slope of the mountains that autumnal morning? Little you dreamed, in the fancied security of your riches, to what an end you were journeying!

For some moments thoughts of suicide, of a sudden flight beyond the seas, and even of alternatives still more desperate, chased each other in confusion across Cameron's heated brain. Just as he had attained an honorable position among his fellow-men, and was preparing to forget the steps by which he had risen to wealth and station; just as he was fondly persuading himself that he had not an enemy left on the face of the earth—to be awakened so unceremoniously from the pleasing delusion!

The messenger who had brought these evil tidings to the Summit had scarcely departed, when, after pacing the floor of his library for a few seconds in deepest thought, Cameron hastily dispatched a servant with a written message addressed "to Dr. Magnus Garstaker;" and in a very brief interval, a tall, cadaverous-looking personage, clad entirely in black, and whose general appearance was that of a man whom it would not be safe to trust on every occasion, was warmly exchanging greetings with Mr. Cameron upon his doorstep.

"You are not ill?" said the visitor, with his usual professional pluntness, as he felt the squire's wrist and looked scrutinizingly in the face of the latter. "No. Pulse not quite right, but as cool as though you had just come out of an ice-house. Ah! the

lever must be looked for higher up, I perceive."

"I am well enough in body," rejoined Cameron, "but ill at ease in mind. Our plans are in danger, it seems."

"The devil!" ejaculated Garstaker, with a frightened look; and his great ears stuck up like the fabled horns of Mephistopheles, or a mule's when by certain sounds he is warned of the approach of peril. "Physic of nouse here, then. What's the symptom? There are cases, you understand me, when the ordinary prescriptions become useless. At such times a change of air—"

"Drop this twaddle, sir, at once!" exclaimed the justice, wrathfully; "I have something in the way of reality that surpasses romances."

"No! a son and heir, I hope. I must go back for my—"

"Would you drive me mad?" fairly yelled Mr. Cameron, as, seizing the astonished practitioner by the neckcloth, to the great detriment of his professional dignity, he actually dragged him into the library.

"Take care, sir—an action may ensue," said Dr. Garstaker, rearranging his tumbled wardrobe, but without exhibiting any traces of resentment.

"An action must ensue unless we are sharp enough to prevent it," rejoined the magistrate. "There, sir," tossing the letter to him. "What think you of that?"

"Umph! an ugly dose," answered Magnus, as he finished the perusal.

"Now, sir, as we are both interested in the result—for our speculations have been so interwoven that there is no such thing as separating them—it appears to me that, unless we can hit upon something to stave off all action in this matter, we are unequivocally lost."

"That's evident enough," responded Magnus, ruminating; "they must never go to law about it."

"They shall not if I can prevent it," said Mr. Cameron, with emphasis.

"I like your spirit," continued the doctor. "If we could manage to—stay, I have it." And he whispered something very cautiously in the justice's ear.

Cameron started from him, and was visi-

bly agitated, while his usually florid countenance was white as chalk.

"No, never—never; it is not to be thought of," he rejoined, at length. "You professional gentlemen," he added, "think so little of bones and cartilage that a little more or less seems to be nothing."

"No more it is; we must all go some time," answered Magnus, glowering.

"I have a better plan, which I think may be brought to a successful issue with your assistance. We must obtain these newly-discovered documents at all hazards, and that may be done by—"

"Out with it," blurted Magnus, observing his colleague's hesitation.

"By waylaying them," whispered the magistrate, looking round him as if he had expected to find a constable at his elbow.

"You are too diffident, my dear Cameron," said the doctor, blandly. "In such little affairs coolness and confidence are above all other virtues."

"I know. You are so used to villainy that nothing can disturb your equanimity; but it is so long since I have done anything to hazard my good standing in society that you cannot be surprised if I am unnerved by the threatened emergency."

"Never blanch, man; the very office you hold is a sure guarantee against detection. Come over to me to-night and we will discuss the business further. Bless me! how time flies! It is nearly five already, and I've a very difficult operation to perform that can be done only by daylight. Be sure you take care of yourself," he added, speaking loudly, and making a great deal of bustle as he passed the office-door, which was on the other side of the passage, in going out. "Follow the prescription I have indicated, and the trouble will vanish."

"Cautious to the last," muttered Cameron, as he watched him sauntering jauntily down the street. "But I'll take good care that the consequences do not rest on my shoulders only."

The magistrate might well have turned pale had he known that every word uttered between them had been overheard by a listener not less interested than either. It was Agnes Cameron, who the moment the door had closed upon his retiring footsteps,

now stood forth amid the darkening shadows of the library—as pale as the marble busts on those teeming shelves where the lore of past ages was slumbering amid the cobwebs. Having gone into the study for a volume just as her father had left it to welcome Garstaker, curiosity to know what could be the nature of that business which so often kept Cameron closeted for hours with his sinister visitor, and the result of whose communications, whatever might have been their nature, was usually a gloomy depression that lasted for days, induced her to step behind the large ornamented screen which stretched across one end of the apartment. She had scarcely time to reflect upon what she was doing before the doctor made his appearance.

About this time Agnes was observed to be excessively agitated. Her mind was full of forebodings, to which she gave constant utterance, evidently for the purpose of discouraging her father from his enterprise, while his family anticipated with pain a return of the malady which had so grievously afflicted her in her childhood—when she was much given to dreams and trances, that had at one time threatened to put an end to her existence. The poor girl was now even more nervous and more sensitive than she had been at any time before, starting at every rumble of wheels and every clatter of a horse's hoofs, as though evil imaginations had taken possession of her. Her step was restless and perturbed, and broken by unpleasant visions in which the personages and events took all the semblance of life.

Several nights after the conversation in the library Agnes was visited by a remarkable dream in which the tragedy she had apprehended passed before her with all its horrible accompaniments. So strong was the impression that on awaking she half arose and listened for some sound in keeping with her dream. Strange noises surrounded her and she distinctly heard a voice which she recognized for her father's. "I have him safe enough," it said; "Calthorpe is dead, the talisman is mine, and the grave gives up no secrets."

It was Cameron, whose apartment adjoined hers, talking in his sleep. Then from a distance came the faint sound of bells, increasing momentarily in distinct-

ness. She listened intently. It was no illusion. The notes were plainly audible, and they tolled as they were wont to toll for the burial of the dead. A strain of Æolian music, accompanied by a choir of angel voices, awakened unspeakable emotions. As she listened a luminous form of exquisite grace and symmetry evolved itself from the darkness, and with a smile, at once sweet and sad, waved her gently on. An irresistible impulse took possession of her. She softly arose, and wrapping herself in a shawl, cautiously let herself out of the house. The night was cold and dark, but a faint starlight guided her steps till, guided by the music, she came to the village church, the door of which she found open. Entering the little porch, she distinguished the sounds of the organ, and peering within unobserved, saw gathered about the altar a small group, cloaked and silent. A prayer was said above the body by a clergyman whom she well knew, and when that was over the little procession filed slowly from the chancel, amid the projections of which she crouched, hidden.

Agnes felt as though she would have given her life could she have obtained a single glimpse of the face, but durst not venture. Stealing out of the edifice as silently as she came, she crouched tremblingly behind one of the tombstones, and awaited the termination of the scene. The remaining ceremonies were rapidly performed; she heard the hollow fall of the clod, and the solemn words consigning "earth to earth, and dust to dust." Then the whole party seemed to vanish into air—all but the gravedigger who, aided by a lantern, was silently plying his task, when a tall presence, draped in white, slowly arose, as he imagined, from the adjoining tomb, and, to his indescribable horror, approached him.

Solomon Gurton was a bold man—nay, a blusterer, and professed to be not afraid of spirits, ardent or other; but this spectacle was too much for him. Finding that his legs would not carry him off, he fell on his knees and began to mumble his prayers.

"Unpack the grave again—dig up the corps; I must, I will be satisfied," exclaimed the spectre, sternly.

Solomon had nothing to do but to obey.

Rapidly the earth that had been thrown in was again shoveled out, and soon the coffin became visible. But at this juncture the sexton was heard approaching; the spirit instantly vanished, and Solomon the valorous fell on his face in a swoon.

The village rang next morning with the story of old Sol Gorton and the graveyard ghost, but not for many days did Agnes become aware that she had been the subject of a sleep-walking trance, during which her life had been more than once despaired of. The burial she had witnessed was that of a patient, dead of a communicative disease, and interred at midnight by order of the selectmen, but none knew of the singular part that Agnes had sustained in the ceremony. She returned in quiet to her room and remained for some days apparently in a stupor, in which the intellect was nevertheless in a full state of action. During this trance Agnes exhibited in their fullest perfection all the wonderful capacities of the clairvoyant—rehearsing events and telling of things which the listeners had supposed were known to none but themselves, and which speedily convinced her father that an important antagonist to his plans had been developed in a member of his own household, to whom were familiar secrets which he had imagined inaccessible to another. On the day succeeding her recovery Cameron questioned his daughter sharply with regard to these utterances, but she replied in a manner which satisfied him that she did not comprehend his allusions, and as these fits of somnambulism were nothing more than she had suffered under from childhood, the investigation was suspended.

As for Gorton, he boasted handsomely of the manner in which he had laid "the churchyard ghost," but as the sexton had found an empty bottle beside him, his story was never quite thoroughly believed.

## CHAPTER XII.

## COUNTERPLOT.

Meanwhile, the time was drawing rapidly nigh when the question so important to the Camerons was to be decided.

Much to her relief, Agnes found, on returning to consciousness, that the expected Calthorpes had not yet made their appearance. She learned also that her father had been absent for several days, having gone to the city on business, the nature of which she was not informed of, but could only too well divine. From Mr. Cameron's altered manner and the few disjointed sentences which he had dropped from his lips in moments when he had supposed himself unnoticed, she thoroughly comprehended his plans, and determined at every risk to thwart them. The task she had assigned herself was an arduous one, even for a more strongly-minded or more strongly-constituted woman, and Agnes was one of the most retiring as well as one of the most delicate of her sex. To counteract his dark purposes without betraying her father and without allowing her agency to come to his knowledge, and finally to lead him back to a sense of Christian propriety, it might be necessary that the young girl should surrender, perhaps forever, the prospect of a life of domestic happiness, and give herself solely up to the sacred duty before her. Yet she did not hesitate—regarding herself as an instrument selected for the undertaking by Omnipotence itself—and, as there could be no opportunity more fitting than the present, she determined to begin at once.

A few days subsequent to these occurrences news was received at the Summit, as Cameron's place had been christened, that the Calthorpes were approaching. Agnes felt that no time should be lost in counteracting the scheme of which they were to be the victims. Her resolution was confirmed at the last moment by the discovery in one of her walks of a fragment of paper directed to "Magnus Garstocker, M. D.," a professional personage of somewhat doubtful repute in the village, being strongly suspected of resurrectionizing practices, if nothing more, and going, on that account, by the popular nickname of Doctor Night-

shade. This paper contained only a few meager words in her father's handwriting but without signature, which to any one else would have been an enigma, but to her were clearly indicative of the writer's meaning.

"Gershom and his son, Stacy, go up from town to-morrow," so ran the letter. "They will take the road which passes through the New Cut, in order to save time, and I myself shall follow them as closely and as surely as hound follows hare. This road is, as you are aware, but just finished, and, being in a bad condition, but little frequented. I will take care that our friends come in sight of the Summit at or about midnight on the day of their advent in these parts. I will be on hand with you to give them welcome. This will reach you by private and trustworthy hands, for the bearer don't read, and is as smart a scoundrel as ever escaped swinging, if he could. Courage! We shall have the papers yet."

This note gave Agnes an additional pang on her father's account, for it indicated that he was not alone in his nefarious transactions, but was connected with an indefinite number of evil doers, leagued together in a common cause for the purposes of fraud. What a fearful discovery was this for a delicate and sensitive girl upon whose tender frame the winds could not blow too lightly!

In this emergency a confederate became indispensable, without which the project must unavoidably fail, and, casting about, she bethought her of Ezra Hueston, deciding to seek him out at every sacrifice of delicacy in view of the importance of her undertaking and to confide to his keeping a secret she durst have intrusted to no other living.

Ever since the night of their last sad tryst, the unhappy youth, surrounded on all hands by perplexities, had grown more and more gloomy. He could do nothing but wander over the old haunts hour after hour, pondering upon the sweet girlish face that peered out upon him, as it seemed, from every leafy covert, each moss-bound recess, and was never absent from him, even in his most troubled dreams. He was not a little mystified, therefore, when that degenerated scion of a Winnebago chief, in this narrative known as "George," but known among

his discarded tribe as Ouiscaasset, came to him one evening with so many signs and grimaces that at first he thought his father's old servant demented or tipsy.

"Ah, George!" said Ezra, smiling in spite of himself at the tricks of his old guardian, the solemnity of whose visage alone showed that he was not joking: "I am afraid that too frequent indulgence in the white man's fire-water has injured your intellect. What does all this portend?"

"Indian no such fool as some tink," replied George, sententiously. "Ah, young chief, when Ouiscaasset been young, many moons ago, he need no messenger to say 'Young squaw' to him. His heart always know when the White Doe was coming."

"Can you mean by that Miss Cameron has sent for me?" asked Ezra, starting out of his listlessness at the thought.

Now, Ezra Hueston was no vacillating fool to be made the sport of every chance glow of passion that might stir him at the moment—partaking, to the contrary, to the fullest extent of the family characteristic, which had promoted the ruin of so many of his race—a fact which this stubborn retention of his heart's predilections fully sustained, since he found it impossible to eradicate at an hour's notice thoughts and feelings which had heretofore made up the better part of his existence. Instead, therefore, of submitting to the idea of a separation, he had been revolving in his brain a scheme by which his duty to his oath might be consummated, and, yet without obliging him to relinquish his idol, when the welcome intelligence brought him by the trusty Indian seemed to offer the desired opportunity.

The spot to which he had been directed was a narrow dell, bordered by banks over-clustered by vines and wild shrubs, and having in the centre an opening, marking the place where a stream of water had for ages welled up from the sandy soil—from which latter circumstance, and the discovery of some whitened bones, arrow-heads, and other relics, it had acquired the name of the Indian Spring.

Obliged to restrain his impatience, he lingered until the tardy twilight had settled; then, seeking the dell, he cast himself down upon the sward, and subsided by



degrees into reverie, in which ensued the usual struggle between conscience and filial duty. For so possessed was his entire soul by his passion for his young mistress that it required nothing short of a high degree of resolution to keep him from breaking the secret compact into which he had entered.

Was it again a dream, or did he indeed hear once more the same strains of spirit music which had so entranced his senses in the heart of the mountain? His present distance from the Sachem's Footstool forbade the supposition that those were the identical strains to which he had listened before, yet the peculiarity of the sounds left no room for a doubt as to their character. Then arose that wild and weird chant—even the words being easily distinguishable, and the youth shuddered as he recognized their application to himself. The thought of human surveillance over his actions was sufficiently unpalatable to a nature so impetuous, but there was in this idea of a supernatural agency, from which his most secret impressions were not veiled, something so dreadful that at times the young man imagined himself possessed by a demon.

Springing from his recumbent position, he walked rapidly in the direction of the spring, but ere he had gained it, the sounds appeared to die away in the distance. In vain he repeated question after question; no answer was returned, and Ezra, finding his brain much overheated, came to the unavoidable conclusion that he had only been dreaming. He went down toward the springlet, and, after a cooling draught, bathed his parched forehead in the limpid waters.

"It must be so," he thought, "and I am a credulous fool, with a brain more disturbed than even my unfortunate father's. Dolt! to yield to such fantasies when my own more material interests are trembling in the balance!"

Some glistening object on the margin of the spring attracted his attention. He picked it up carelessly. It proved to be a white pebble, similar in kind to those used by the secret fraternity, and bore in a single hieroglyph the word "Beware!"

Almost at the moment the rustling of

drapery caused him to look up, and he beheld descending the precipitous path at his side a fragile figure shrouded in a cloak, and seeming hardly more than an exhalation in the moonlight—her features, so classically beautiful, reflecting the transient glow like polished alabaster. The immediate appearance of the faithful Indian in close proximity was sufficient guarantee that, at all events, the form he now gazed upon was not that of a spirit, though sufficiently ethereal in its aspect to pass for one.

"Thanks, dearest Agnes, for this kindness," Ezra exclaimed, starting forward as soon as he caught sight of her; "you have relented in time to preserve the poor heart which, in despair at its forced isolation, must have broken or withered."

"My present visit, whatever my wish, I fear will not greatly relieve it," replied Agnes, sadly. "No, Ezra Hueston—if you suppose that any unmaidenly or selfish motive has urged me to this step you are sadly deceived. But I need not ask you, I am sure, to touch lightly upon a subject the mere mention of which brings pain to both of us."

"Forgive me, Miss Cameron," said Ezra, with great dignity, "I will offend no more."

"Angry already? Ezra, dearest, is this your love for me?"

"I wonder will Miss Cameron be the first to renew a subject that carries such pain with it," replied her lover, sarcastically. Then, seeing her burst into tears, with his usual impulsiveness, he suddenly folded her to his heart, and seeing her face upturned and not reproachfully, imprinted upon her lips a kiss of reconciliation, and next, as promptly sinking on his knee at her feet, besought her forgiveness with an earnestness somewhat at variance with the estimate he had placed upon his own fortitude, while George, leaning against a tree with his legs comfortably crossed, and his arms folded upon his broad chest, seemed turned into a stake—so little attention did he pay to what was passing.

"It is I that have need of forgiveness," she answered, raising him; "but indeed I have acted for the best, and although circumstances make me appear capricious now, a time will come when Ezra Hueston will learn to know Agnes Cameron better."

She then informed him of her singular dream, and of her fears and designs with regard to the Calthorpes.

"You see," she said "that I have some confidence in you, for in the disclosure that I have made I have not hesitated to expose even a father's guilt that I might save him from the commission of a crime. The honor of our name is in your keeping. With a single breath, if you chose, you might disgrace it forever."

"You did right in thus trusting to your judgment, for Agnes Cameron is not one to be easily deceived. Not only is her secret safe in my keeping, but whatever my poor will can do to aid you in your project shall be done."

It was finally arranged that at a certain hour on the following day Ezra should hold himself in readiness, with horses, at a spot agreed upon, where Agnes, disguised in a manner to escape recognition, should join him. Their plan was to overtake the Calthorpes at a public resort, where they must pass the next night, and where in the character of a traveling fortune-teller, Agnes would so contrive to work upon the fears of the travelers as either to dissuade them from proceeding, or at least, to induce them to pursue a different route, trusting to her own ingenuity for all that might follow.

As they talked over these hasty plans, they were little aware that every word of their dialogue had been overheard by a third party, whose interest in the development of the scheme was hardly inferior to their own. Scarce had the confederates disappeared when Gilbert Hueston stepped cautiously forth into the moonlighted space just deserted by them.

"I see it all," he muttered, in deep thought, as he strode rapidly in a different direction from that taken by his son. "Cameron's plan undoubtedly is to waylay these Calthorpes, as they approach the Summit, and to strip them of such documents as they may have brought with them to substantiate their claims. That he shall not effect if I can prevent it."

He blew his whistle, and all at once the glen seemed alive with human forms. They swarmed among the trees, they emerged from behind the rocks, they appeared to rise out of the very ground.

"Disperse yourselves to the best advantage," he said; "let not a rood of soil remain unwatched, for those come here tomorrow morn whose presence bodes us ill. When it is time to act I'll give the sign. Three notes upon my hunting-horn will summon to the rendezvous those within call. Let the scouts report as occasion may arise. You, George, singling out the Indian, remain with me. The rest, disperse."

In another second Hueston and the Indian stood alone in the moonlighted dell.

"George," said Hueston, gravely, "you have betrayed your trust, for the first time, I hope. Show me now by increased attention to my orders, how far your faith may be relied upon."

"It was no George—it was the bad fire spirit," replied the Indian, in the most abject humiliation at being detected. "No can help when drunk. Dam rascal den."

"Then you must shun that bad spirit, and you will have no occasion to part with your self-esteem hereafter." And as they walked on together he instructed the Winnebago as to the part he was to perform in his plans.

Punctual to the hour, Ezra took his position at the point agreed upon. He was not long kept waiting, for only a few moments had elapsed when a rude-looking girl, very commonly clad, and carrying a basket came suffling toward him. Ezra at first did not recognize Agnes in the singular yet appropriate costume she had assumed in the furtherance of her plans, and was in some apprehension that their scheme might miscarry. No time was now to be lost. Agnes had, with great difficulty, succeeded in eluding the suspicions of her mother, under pretense of visiting a friend who resided a short distance from the Summit, and, should her absence be prolonged, it might lead to discovery. Her disguise she had been enabled to assume by making her toilet in the cabin of a trustworthy tenant of her father's, to whom she had rendered many a service in need, and for the rest she depended upon the companion she had chosen.

Amid the silence and the solitude of the forest Ezra Hueston grasped his companion's bridle, and led the way carefully down the slope, not pausing to utter a syllable until



they had reached a ravine known as the Clove, through which the new road or cutting had just been carried. When fully completed and graded this cut bade fair to be a great convenience to the farmers and manufacturers along its line, but at present it was little more than a great ditch or gully, overhung by giant trees and great embankments from which late rains had washed away a sufficiency of dirt to convert some portions of the passage into a formidable quagmire. There were also fallen trees across the path, obstacles which occasioned some difficulty and delay in surmounting. Everything about them was of so wild and lonesome a character that even Agnes, nervous as she was to do anything that might be necessary in the carrying out of her plans, would have hesitated had she been unaccompanied. For some not inscrutable reason, with him by her side she feared nothing.

They got along nevertheless remarkably well, but at length a drop or two of rain caused Ezra to look up uneasily from time to time at the darkening sky. The wind began to sigh heavily through the forest, as through the cordage of a fleet of masts, not steadily, but in irregular sudden puffs, the unmistakable prelude to a tempest. A crashing among the branches attracted their attention, and two or three antlered deer with other of the inhabitants of the wilderness came from the covert, and rushed with headlong speed in the direction they were pursuing. Still Ezra kept silent, accelerating the gait of the horses, and urging them to the utmost of their speed.

"You apprehend something," said Agnes, whose self-possession had not deserted her. "Fear not, Ezra, to trust your forebodings to me. Those animals have not abandoned their usual haunts for nothing. A terrible storm is approaching."

"Yes, it is close upon us," replied Ezra; "but to go back would only increase our difficulties, and by hard riding we may escape them."

"I had no such thought," rejoined Agnes, courageously. "What are the dangers of an earthly tempest, compared with those we are trying to avert from others?"

Her companion threw a hurried glance in the direction from which they had come,

and, sure enough, saw there sufficient to justify his worst apprehensions. A huge black cloud was rolling up slowly over the mountain's crest, looking like a part of the mountain itself about to fall on them, from which ever and anon issued crimson flashes, followed by a groaning and creaking among the branches, but as yet no thunder. Two or three crows, frightened from their nests, flew by cawing above their heads. The rain was gathering fast and furious, a pelting storm, and young Hueston found it a matter of no small difficulty to urge on their horses, his whole mind concentrated upon the welfare of the gentle being who had given him so noble a proof of her preference. At times the road narrowed until it became a mere gully, filled with stones and sharp rocks, but tarried they not in their hurried flight even then. Some miracle seemed to sustain the half-terrified animals, and kept them from falling. The unnatural courage which had inspired Agnes at the outset of the adventure was now fast subsiding, and, despite the high purpose which had inspired her, she began almost to repent having entered upon an undertaking so rash.

The deep bass of the thunder now reverberated among the clefts and caverns of the mountain, while the road they were following was fast being converted from a muddy ditch into a roaring torrent, bearing brushwood and branches of trees and even stones in its tumultuous course. The footing, too, had become insecure for the horses, and they began to slip and stumble in a manner that inspired a dread of their giving out. Added to this, the thunder peals and flashes of lightning were almost incessant, and the imminence of the danger was increasing at every step. The water was rising to the girths, and the destruction of the couple seemed inevitable. Suddenly the ground shook and trembled, a hollow murmur, increasing almost to a human cry, issued from the subterranean abysses, followed by a thundering, crashing grinding, deafening noise. The scene became dark, and a portion of the mountain, separating from the rest, appeared to hurl itself upon the fugitives. A land slide had fallen into the ravine a few feet in their rear, and the waters subsided as suddenly as they

rose. Just then, a bolt falling with a startling crash upon a tree only a few yards in advance, Miss Cameron's steed, becoming unmanageable, broke away from Ezra, and darted away obliquely at the first opening presented in the road. A timid cry escaped her in her terror as the steed dashed away over rocks and through quagmires, up dizzy steeples, and into frightful hollows—Old Roan needed not whip or spur or bark of hound to quicken his footsteps that night. It was as if a thousand furies were goading him on from behind, and Agnes Cameron, with her weak, trembling hand, might as well have sought to trammel a whirlwind.

Still, still they flew, the elements shouting in mockery as they rode. At once a vivid flash, more brilliant than the rest, lit up the scene and disclosed a yawning gulf directly in her path, and, glimmering for a moment, hundreds of feet beneath her, the lights of a village. The adventurous girl supposed her last hour had come, and, with a muttered prayer, was about resigning her soul to its Maker, when a strong arm was twined about her waist, and Ezra, leaping forward, lifted her from her seat just as the affrighted beast which bore her was toppling over the precipice. A single wild cry startled the echoes as the animal disappeared, and then all sense deserted her.

Ezra lifted his precious burden tenderly to his own seat, covering her shrinking form with his cloak, that no rain might reach her, and proceeded on his journey, pretty well exhausted after his chase. His daring, impetuous spirit was in its element, and he could almost fancy himself some bold buccaneer riding for life with the form of the loved one clasped in his circling arms. In this case the reality and the romance were closely allied, and our hero had his hands about as full at that moment as any lover of adventure could have desired.

In the meantime, at another part of the road, another scene of a less romantic, though sufficiently exciting character, was transpiring. Some miles below, a lumbering, mud-bespattered vehicle, containing two persons, had been clambering the steep ascent, and was getting along famously in spite of the elements, when a louder peal than usual stunned the air, preceded by a flash that lighted the country for miles

around. The driver lashed and shouted, the thunder pealed, and the horses, taking fright, plunged at a break-neck pace adown the steep. Such a proceeding could have had but one result, and in less time than it has taken to record it, the vehicle lay a shattered mass at the foot of an embankment, in the midst of a running stream, and our two travelers, with the driver, were wading confusedly ashore, amid such a tintinnabulation of the elements as is seldom heard in any but mountainous regions. Luckily, in the height of their terror, the guide discovered a light, which proved to proceed from a distant hostelry, and to this the tired wayfarers were speedily conveyed.

These were two travelers, Gershom and Stacy Calthorpe, father and son, speculators of note from the distant city, who had just come into those parts with the view of benefiting their pockets by the improvement of wild lands, in accordance with the particulars of a scheme laid down by Judge Cameron and his colleagues. They were men of means, and every action indicated their high sense of the honor conferred by them in visiting the locality known as The Summit. Here a tremendous fire was roaring, for the especial comfort of a number of weather-bound travelers, in the great chimney-place, in one corner of which the Calthorpes, while waiting their supper, were speedily made comfortable.

The inn to which our wayfarers had been conducted occupied a commanding position closely adjoining the old and better frequented road which led to the Summit and the fertile districts beyond, and was the only similar place of shelter within a circumference of many miles. It was an antiquated edifice, built of Dutch brick, and having on one of its ends the year 1690 in great iron letters, conspicuously displayed in the form of iron clamps, which served the additional purpose of keeping the brick-work together. The roof was covered with shingles, and painted red; the barns and outhouses shone forth in the same brilliant color; and even the old well box and its covering had been painted red, too. The window casings were small, having thick, diminutive bull's-eyed panes set in leaden sockets, and the whole was, when viewed from without, the most cheerless looking

tenement for a traveler's rest imaginable. This want of comfort applied, however, to the exterior only. Within everything was as cheerful and inviting as in some of our splendid town enayansaries everything is solemn and forbidding. The rooms were all neatly papered and wainscotted; the beds were old-fashioned mountains of luxury, into which you clambered by the aid of a chair; while the public room, with its good cheer, was a very paradise for the weary and hunger-stricken. Even a city sybarite, as far as essentials go, might find the acme of his wishes realized here, nor ask for more. Trout from the nearest brook, birds from the meadow, vegetable luxuries fresh from a teeming garden, with all that a city table d'hôte can boast, save and except a few superfluous delicacies, distinguished "The Rising Star" at the time we speak of; for it was a kind of centering point in the county, and the palates of railway officials and government appointees en route were amazingly fond of its cuisine. Here company committees ate and drank, and lyceums debated; here politicians discussed, "laid their wires," and made merry; and here on occasions the coroner dispatched his solemn duties or the district judge held his sittings. The place resounded with the buzz of conversation, in which the voice of a certain Professor Grubb, a sort of traveling physician, chiropodist, and clairvoyant, was sharply conspicuous. There, also, was a thick-headed but good-natured farmer by the name of Applebee, who had amassed a handsome competence by the improvements of agriculture, and was about as unpromising a specimen of rustic ignorance and obduracy as a modern philosopher could well have tried his hand upon. The tricks and marvelous legends of the professor not only sold his nostrums but kept the table in a roar. Cards were introduced for the benefit of those who desired them, and all disposed themselves with a view to comfort. The Calthorpes alone were reserved and uncommunicative. Long familiarity with city life and manners had taught them to believe that the exhibition of anything like a feeling of interest in their kind was not "genteel." This noble sentiment had by degrees extended itself to their own domestic rela-

tions, and, accordingly, after their repast had been removed, Stacy and the "old man," as he called him, disposed themselves in opposite corners of the fireplace, where the latter was steadily absorbed in his evening devotions—reckoning for the twentieth time from a memorandum-book which he always carried the current items of expense—while his dutiful boy, with his hands deeply stuffed in his pockets and his chair tilted, sat forming mental pictures, consisting of banks and rouleaus and money bags, and their own sharp-nosed money porter, Grubbing, from the ever changing embers—catching occasionally a fragment of the conversation that was being carried on at the table.

The greatest violence of the storm appeared to have spent itself, and the card-players were grown to be so absorbed in their play, that the snoring of the obese landlord, Zachary Stubbs, and the tickings of the great old-fashioned clock in the passage, which was about to tell midnight, were heard mingling together in happy unison.

Suddenly the elemental uproar rose again with wilder vehemence than ever, and was even outdone by a thundering series of knocks on the door, which had been locked for the night. Such as were still awake looked up from the table, but nobody moved. The supernal influences aroused by Professor Grubb had not as yet subsided and every one seemed afraid to stir. The host either was or seemed to be in a deeper slumber than before. The Calthorpes, of course, would not compromise their dignity.

"Hallo, there, within!" shouted the man who was on the wrong side of the door. "Are you all dead that you don't hear me?"

"What's that?" asked Stubbs, suddenly springing up. "I never open my house at this hour of the night for any one—everybody knows that."

"Don't you?" retorted the voice. "Then I'll open it for you!"

And, suiting the action to the word, he threw himself heavily against the half-rotten panels, which yielded with a crash that almost drowned the peals of the thunder.

"Heyday, heyday!" exclaimed Stubbs, wrathfully. "This is burglary! I'll take

of you—I'll—" But Stubbs stopped short in his frothing as Ezra Hueston, bearing in his arms the dripping and almost insensible figure of a woman, burst into the apartment. At this apparition the tavern-keeper was so entirely deprived of speech that he could only stand and stare with all his might at the intruders.

"Why do you stand there all agape, man?" asked Ezra. "Don't you see I bear a woman, wayworn and fainting? And you, sir, who seem to be taking it so cosily in the corner," addressing himself to Stacy, who glanced superciliously at them through his eyeglass, "you'll oblige me by surrendering your seat for a few moments to this lady."

"Lady—aw!" sneered Stacy, coolly. "Aw've paid for my accommodations and aw sh'll not stir."

Whatever else he might have been about to say was straggled out of him by Ezra, who promptly seized him by the white neckcloth—in this instance it really proved a choker—and suddenly hurled him across the room and into the very midst of the card-players, whose tricks, trumps, and honors flew about the space with a sharp corner for every eye within pellet shot. In a trice Ezra had installed his precious burthen in the seat from which Stacy Calthorpe had been ejected, and was immediately lost to consciousness of everything save her condition and wants. Seeing that a female was in the case, Grubb and his companions began to show their gallantry by proffering their services, the farmer offering to take care of her while Ezra conferred aside with the landlord.

"Host," said Stacy, making a movement to follow them, "is this the manner in which you suffer your guests to be treated?"

"S—ir?" stammered Stubbs, with a wink of intelligence at Stacy.

"Why, landlord, this must be—"

"One of the first gentlemen in the county," replied Stubbs, in absolute desperation.

"A word in your ear, my friend," interrupted Ezra, in a low but distinct voice, beneath which the city youth lost the little spunk that remained with him. "Although the insult which you just offered that lady—that lady, I repeat—is unpardonable, yet,

in my anxiety for her, I should have entirely forgotten the occurrence, had you not persisted in reminding me of it. Attempt to interfere with me now, or in any way to annoy me, and I'll take you by the neck, like the heartless whelp that you are, and fling you forth to finish the night on a dung-hill!"

Stacy instantly became invisible.

Ezra, who appeared to be as much at home here as in his father's cabin, retired a few moments, earnestly conversing with the innkeeper. In the interval the remaining occupants of the place, with the exception of Stacy and old Gershom, were assiduous in their attentions to his young charge—who, by the way, had a very prepossessing countenance, fringed, however, by a quantity of coarse red hair, and was very plainly, even shabbily, attired. It must be admitted that young Hueston's character for morality had not improved by the occurrence, the whole affair being looked upon as an elopement, if not something worse.

As she came slowly back to her senses the girl's mind seemed to wander, and various incoherent expressions fell from her lips. "He will not do it!" she muttered. "He dare not do it! He shall not! He never yet dyed his hands in human blood! Ah! what is that I see?—a corpse—and bleeding, too! Undig the grave, I say; unwind the shroud I am not one of them! That face—'tis Calthorpe's face—and he the murderer!"

"No, no!" shouted Calthorpe, jumping from his chair and nearly tumbling headforemost into the fire; "it's no such thing! I never struck a man in the whole course of existence. She wants to extort money, but she won't get a penny from me."

"Ha! my friend! An assassin, eh?" said Grubb, grasping Gershom by the collar so unceremoniously that the old man's eyes looked as if they were ready to drop out on the floor. Astounded at the complication into which affairs were resolving themselves, Stacy exhibited his filial affection by sneaking into the recesses of a window, where a curtain concealed him from view.

A change seemed to come over the mind of the dreamer. After slowly surveying every corner of the room, she suddenly started up, and, clasping her hands before

her eyes, seemed striving to shut out some terrible sight.

"Let me hence! I will not be the witness of such deeds, even though it were my father."

"What—what do you see?" asked the half-scared Whiffet, breathlessly.

"I see—the awful future!" And a paroxysm seemed all at once to seize her, so that it became necessary to force her back into the chair.

"A clairvoyant?" exclaimed Grubb. "A clairvoyant and a medium, too, I'll bet my money! I know the symptoms. Young woman, if you are disposed to enter into an engagement—"

"Yes—I know you well," she continued, fixing her eyes upon Grubb, who, somehow or other, did not like the scrutiny. "Artemas Frenche, forger and bank robber, for whom there waits an empty cell at Auburn, is not the man to lose his identity so readily."

"How's this?" said a short, stout man at her elbow, who had been one of the card-players. "A clairvoyant, did you say? This is a serious matter and must be looked to—a reward of five hundred dollars. Gentlemen, as deputy sheriff of the adjoining county, I charge you to arrest the person accused!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Grubb. "You're a pack of numskulls to take the ravings of a lunatic woman in earnest."

"Didn't you say just now that she was a clairvoyant and perfectly reliable?" asked the official, reddening.

"Clairvoyant, humbug! She's no more a clairvoyant than you are. And if she was, you ought to be sharp enough to know that the thing itself is a gross imposture."

"Why, it's part of your calling!"

"All humbug, gentlemen. But why shouldn't a man make his living as well by one mode of trickery as another? Is Brutus worse than Antony? or, in other words, is Whiffet worse than Barnum?"

The professor's impudence was about bringing him off in triumph when somebody—another numskull, of course—suggested that the sheriff carried about him a printed handbill, and if he (Professor Grubb) and Artemas Frenche were one it was easy to identify him, inasmuch as he was de-

scribed in the circular as wearing a wig, whereupon the curly locks of the professor were unceremoniously removed, and there, without question, were the iron gray hairs—closely cropped by other hands than those of the fashionable barber—of Frenche, the forger.

Seeing that further concealment was useless, Frenche abruptly broke loose from his timid captors and made an extraordinary dash for the window. In a second he had torn away the curtain, vaulted upon the shoulders of the terrified Stacy, and darted through the sash. One or two shots saluted the daring atrobat as he disappeared from view. At the same moment Ezra and the host returned to the room, and, seeing old Gershom rolling and kicking on the floor, the latter was convinced that he was the victim.

"A man shot! the reputation of my house gone forever," exclaimed Stubbs, wringing his hands.

"Damn me, sir! it never had any," said Stacy.

"There's no life lost, at all events," said Ezra.

"No, but the reward is," growled the sheriff.

"Agnes you are not hurt?" whispered Ezra, approaching her.

"O, such dreams as I have had, Ezra. My head is dizzy with them yet. I thought I had seen the Calthorpes murdered, and then what followed, I but faintly remember, but that there was some trouble about a clairvoyant and a forger, and the report of firearms—ah! there he is again!" she cried, as Gershom rose to his feet, "tis he—the same I saw in my vision—the very same!"

"Don't let that man go, at any rate," said the sheriff, "if we can't catch a bank-breaker, we'll maybe nab an assassin, and perhaps there's a reward for him, as well as the other."

"O, sir," Agnes exclaimed, advancing with clasp hands towards Gershom, "Mr Calthorpe, if that, indeed is your name—do not go by the new cut, as you value your life. There are evil men about, and you are marked for a victim."

"Lord have mercy upon me," mumbled Gershom, "I'm a miserable old man; why

wasn't I born to poverty! A rich man's head nowadays is only a target for pistol practice. It saves the expense of a shooting gallery, I suppose."

"This isn't a murderer, then?" asked the sheriff, angrily, for he saw he was about to be cheated of another official job.

"No; but it isn't your fault, that I'm not," moaned Gershom.

"Gentlemen," said Agnes, in a manner which lent importance to her words, "you may think of me what you please, but that which I say, is true; the lives of Gershom Calthorpe and his son are threatened. Let them take the old road to the Summit instead of the one they propose, and the peril which menaces them may be avoided."

"Stubbs," quoth the pursy little sheriff, wiping his perspiring face with his coat tail for want of a handkerchief, just as he usually wiped his mouth with his sleeves,—"Stubbs, do you know anything of this young woman?"

Stubbs was making up his mouth to deny all knowledge of her, but at the moment he caught the eye of Ezra Hueston, and he stammered—

"Somewhat, sir—that is, yes, very well. Every one must have heard of Jenny Baker, the clairvoyant and somnambulist. You can bet your life on whatever she says. What she predicts will come true as gospel, always."

"It may be all right," grunted the sheriff, "but it as well to make certain—maybe she wears a wig, too."

The peril of Agnes was imminent, it seemed as if nothing could prevent a discovery, when Ezra interfered.

"Was it not through her foresight that you discovered the identity of Frenche, the forger?" he asked.

"Well, I must own up to that," rejoined the sheriff.

"How then can you doubt that she is telling the truth in this instance?"

"Stubbs," said the sheriff, "the events of this night are miraculous; we must look to this business. It is certainly very mysterious and beyond comprehension. Gentlemen," he added, addressing Gershom and Stacy, who both stood trembling before the personification of justice, "you may be honest men or you may be rogues; at any

rate, I have no good grounds for detaining you, so you may go, and in my humble opinion the sooner you do so the better. In this place there's no telling what turn things may take. If you desire, you may have an escort to the Summit, but I wouldn't answer for your escort. If you think with me you will follow that woman's advice and take the old road. I'm down on all new tangled notions, and always opposed the new cut from the beginning. What's her name? Spraker, Baker, Betsy, or Jonny, which is it?" beginning to make a memorandum in his diary.

The Calthorpes pretended to coincide with the sheriff, but, fearing a trap, they decided to stick to the new cut—clairvoyance and animal magnetism to the contrary notwithstanding.

Morning having dawned by this time, horses were procured for the travelers, the host having no vehicle that he would part with except at a price that frightened the economical city; and Gershom and Stacy, having higgled over their reckoning and finally paid it, departed. The sheriff, after doing the polite in the way of a treat all round, departed too, with an enhanced idea of his own importance, accompanied by his cronies, to hunt up Artemas Frenche, leaving Ezra and his fair charge the only occupants of the inn.

Most fortunate did it happen for Ezra and his companion that fate had directed them to a house kept by a member of the brotherhood. A few words of explanation during the short time of their withdrawal had sufficed to acquaint the host with a portion of his designs, nor, much as he was disinclined to mix himself up in the matter, durst the latter refuse. It was this circumstance alone that had saved Agnes Cameron from exposure.

All the next day, did Digby Doolittle, Deputy Sheriff of Wilbriar County, devote to a search for the absconding Artemas Frenche. His exertions in behalf of the course of justice on this occasion were immense, although twenty escaped culprits for whose recovery no rewards had been offered had been known to slip through his fingers at other times, and rumor even went so far as to insinuate that he had received more than one golden bribe for his

apparent stupidity. They were about to abandon the chase after some hours of unremitting but fruitless toil, and had just turned into a well known public house just across the line for something wherewith to refresh the inner man, when whom should they see but the identical object of their search in the very act of paying for his own entertainment.

An officer was down upon him in the twinkling of an eye, and was down upon the sanded floor in another, with a hole in his ribs which he did not get over for a twelvemonth. In the confusion which prevailed Frenche had darted through the crowd, leaped on the first horse he came across, and, dashing down the road like a gust of wind in the equinox, again made off, but this time with half a dozen eager pursuers at his heels, some of whose shots whistled by, but did not touch him.

If there is anything more than another upon which Wildbriar County prides itself, it is horseflesh. There is not a man, from the parson down to the farrier, but knows all about and is deep in the secrets of wind-galls and spasms, and chilblains, and "heaves" and "staggers." In a few moments dozens more were mounted and flying in hot pursuit, not at all out of anxiety to apprehend the culprit, but to see the race. And there they finally paused on the brow of a hill where they had reined in their steeds, straining their eyes to keep in view the movements of Artemas Frenche, whose seedy cloak was for a long time seen flapping in the breeze as he thundered down the slope, through a patch of scrub oak, across a field of wild oats, over a small bridge with a single arch, and was finally lost to view in a wood which skirted the river lying beyond, his pursuers fast gaining on him as he flew, and the crowd of spectators hurraing and shouting, and betting and waving their hats, as at a genuine race.

"I'll go you a dollar he wins it,"—"I'll go you five he don't,"—"Suppers for the party, Frenche is taken,"—"The sorrel mare forever,"—"I'll bet all my money on the bob-tailed horse!" and such sportsmenlike sounds followed the chase, like the running accompaniment of an operatic orchestra.

When the pursuers gained the forest they found the "winning horse," but they found no Frenche. He had to all showing taken to the river and was by this time either safe in the woods on the opposite side, or stretched on his back with an open countenance at the bottom.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### IN THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES

Their first experiences among the "honest yeomanry of the country"—as their favorite Conservative newspaper delighted to term them—had somewhat disheartened Gershom and Stacy Calthorpe, who, in resuming their wearisome journey, were more than half-inclined to abandon the expedition at once and to leave the task of inspecting the lands to their lawyer—their chief object being to see whether they were really worth going to law about, before entering upon an ocean of expenditure that, after all, might not be warranted by its value. To tell the truth, too, they were beginning to entertain an idea that the country for leagues was in the actual possession of a people who would receive every new comer as an intruder, and treat him accordingly. As the "cut" became narrower, the forest more dense, and the sky more threatening at every step, the little show of courage with which the travelers had left the tavern became more and more faint. Their guide was a villainous-looking fellow, the services of the Celtic gentleman being dispensed with whom they had engaged at the suggestion of Stubbs as a last resource, with the equivocal recommendation that he was "just the one for their purpose if they looked sharply after him," and much could not, of course, be expected in that quarter.

"It was very foolish of us, after all, to slight that old booby's offer of an escort," said Stacy, after a silence that had continued many minutes, "although it is doubtful if they would not have been the first to turn against us if they had thought we possessed enough to render it worth their trouble. I wish we were well out of this scrape, at all hazards."

"It was your doing, the whole of it," replied the repentant Gershom. "If it had not been for your youthful impetuosity and romantic disposition, I might at this moment have been seated in my own quiet office, leaving others to do the work that I pay them for doing."

"Now, governor," said Stacy, "if you persist in such aspersions against my character, I shall be off, and leave you to your reflections for the rest of the way up the mountain."

"I did not mean to accuse you, Stacy," replied the old man, meekly.

"You didn't mean to, but you did it!" was the bullying response, which came natural, considering the nature of their surroundings. "Ever since we started you've been raking up some fault to find with me—to quiet your conscience, I suppose. No one has ever thought of representing me as romantic or enthusiastic before, sir!"

"Rudian! this to your father!" whimpered Gershom, with his face in his handkerchief.

Indeed, no one had ever perpetrated such an absurdity as to accuse his son of sentiment. Reared only in what is called the lap of luxury, and accustomed to nothing more arduous than the duties of a fashionable automaton, everything bearing the semblance of natural emotion had been so well crushed out of Stacy Calthorpe from his birth that had even if the car of Juggernaut rolled over him it is probable he would have sat up and looked after it with his quizzing-glass—in that vacant, open-mouthed way of his—had he been able. The asking of a simple piece of information, if the questioner were a stranger, drew from him a supercilious stare, and the exhibition of any weakness but a talent for making money he regarded as highly ungentle, and, therefore, to be avoided. As his parents had reared him so he had proven—so faithful to their teachings in every respect that at the age of twenty he had no superfluous affection to bestow on them, having concentrated it all upon his own delectable person. With these "advantages" Stacy was now about as heartless and as insensible to outward impression as one of his father's pen-wipers.

They had not proceeded very far on their way before the clatter of hoofs behind them caused the travelers to look round in fresh alarm. A rough-looking personage carrying a pitchfork and a scythe over his shoulder, was rapidly coming up, apparently using every exertion to overtake them. As he came alongside he saluted them courteously, but gruffly, and was passing on, much to their relief, when their guide hailed him. The stranger stopped with a word of surprise. He and the guide were old acquaintances; they had whipped off many a stalk of wheat together. The offer of a draw from the flask of the guide cemented the friendship at once. The great satisfaction with which this reunion seemed to inspire them put the Calthorpes on nettles, especially as, from the fact of the new-comer looking back occasionally, the conversation evidently ran upon them.

The day wore along without any unusual occurrence, and there was every indication of another storm, while the inner man put forth strong signs of dissatisfaction at the prolonged fast. The road was now little more than a narrow ravine, overhung by tall trees and choked by dead limbs, until they came to the barrier formed by the debris of the landslide which had so nearly overwhelmed Ezra Hueston and his companion. Stacy liked the look of things less and less. At length he ventured to reprimand the guide for his tardiness.

"You told us," he said, "that we should be at the Summit by noon, and here it is nearly dusk and no prospect of being near one's journey's end that I see. Don't you suppose people have stomachs, fellow?"

"Perhaps you're dissatisfied," retorted the guide, in a manner more uncivil than he had heretofore used toward either.

"It's not a question of possibility, my good fellow; we are decidedly displeased at the idea of being kept so long upon our road. Can you tell us now when we shall be at the Summit?"

"Have you the time about you? Mayhap I could guess."

Without thinking, Stacy drew from his fob his rich gold repeater. "Five o'clock on my conscience!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"You're quite wrong, Stacy," said Cal-

thorpe, who prided himself on being correct; "it wants full ten minutes of it by my Tobias," producing it as he spoke.

Quick as the thought their time-pieces were snatched from their hands, Gershom being nearly dragged from his horse in the struggle. The guide and his confederate hearing footsteps approaching, rode quickly off with their booty.

"Confusion!" muttered the leader, as they stopped at some distance to compare notes and examine their booty; "we have had all our trouble for nothing. Where are the papers?"

"Safely strapped to the horse of young Calthorpe, in the other portmanteau, and by this time Heaven knows where," replied a voice which sounded like Garstaker's. "A precious couple of blockheads we have proved ourselves."

Hardly had Stacy and his senior been left to themselves when some two or three persons emerged in great haste from the opposite underbrush. These were no other than Hueston and some of his friends, with whom he had hastened to the spot for the purpose of defending the travelers and exposing his old enemy, Cameron—a double stroke well worthy of his long-cherished desire for revenge.

"I fear we are too late," said Hueston, looking round him with great chagrin; "they have either not been here, or have passed on before. Yet I thought I heard outcries from this direction."

A grunt from Gershom at this moment drew attention to the victims, who were lying upon their backs among the briars, unable to make an exertion.

"The deed is done, then. Poor wretches! their first experience in backwoods life is not of a very agreeable kind. Unbind them some one. I trust they are not hurt."

Immediately on feeling himself touched Gershom began anew to shout and roar, while Stacy, speechless and shivering from fright, submitted more quietly.

At this stage of the matter Digby Doelittle and his posse arrived to add to existing entanglements, for, seeing Gilbert in act to unbind the travelers, and led by Calthorpe, cries to suppose that he had perpetrated the outrage, he fancied himself at last secure of a "job" that would pay.

"What do you stare at, man? Cannot you come here?" asked Hueston, with an astonishing degree of assurance for a guilty man.

"In the name of the law," said the deputy, cautiously, "I—that is we—summon you to lay down your arms, peacefully."

On the following day Squire Cameron made his appearance, as unexpectedly arrived from a tedious journey, and was, of course, dreadfully indignant on being informed of the mishaps that had befallen the Calthorpes. On this occasion he obtained great credit for the magnanimity of his disposition, for, although the errand upon which they had come was not of the most friendly character, yet they should receive the amplest redress that it might be in his power to afford. He took them from the dismal hotel in which they had found shelter, and insisted upon their becoming his guests during the remainder of their stay, pending the settlement of the legal claim, offering either to compromise or surrender the property immediately on being convinced of its justice. In short, he acted his part with such consummate tact that both the Calthorpes were constrained to pronounce him a gentleman.

On the following day the missing valise, papers and all secure, was returned to them through a mysterious source—just in time to obviate the necessity of offering a reward—having been found by Ezra Hueston, who, misguided by Gershom's cunning, had followed up the old road with a view to his protection.

Mr. Cameron wished to testify his sincerity by attending at once to the little bit of criminal practice which chance had thrown in his way. He proceeded at once to the jail, expecting to find some of his confederates in quod, but nothing can depict his astonishment and delight when he found the elder Hueston and two of his intimates there instead.

"Now, sir, this is a somewhat high-handed proceeding," he said, as the prisoner was ushered into his private office. "A most audacious robbery, and blood might have been shed, too, had it not been for the timely interference of that worthy officer who prevented the consummation of your plans. What do you say to all this?"

"You play the bully well, Arthur Cameron, when no one knows better than yourself which is the real culprit."

"Bully, to me!" exclaimed the magistrate in unfeigned indignation. "Well, well! this is hardly the way to secure our leniency."

"Your leniency, like yourself, I despise. This astonishment may change to a more lenient feeling when you learn that the whole secret of your base designs against the Calthorpes is known to me, and that it was for the purpose of thus confronting you that, although I had force at hand sufficient to defy arrest, I suffered myself to be taken in custody."

At this unexpected denouement, despite his bravado, the guilty magistrate quailed before his denouncer; but he had still one refuge—as yet all was mere guess-work with regard to his participation in Calthorpe's misfortunes, and was not Gilbert forgiving?"

"You go too far, Gilbert, indeed you do," he managed to stammer; "my visit at this moment, while you are so freely loading me with reproaches, has but one object—your own liberation."

"Yes—in order that you may screen yourself from the inevitable consequences of your own rascality. Suppose I should refuse."

"Things must then take their course," said Cameron, regaining his assurance.

"Before the respectability of the township who would be believed between us? Remember, it is by my sufferance that you have still a home within the district, and that you have a paramount interest in preventing the intrusion of settlers who would a foothold once gained, drive you forth of the district a houseless, homeless beggar. As for me I have but just returned from a journey, while the circumstances under which you were found in the forest would justify more than a suspicion. Come, accept my offer, and as there may not be friendship, let there be peace between us."

"Be it so. Time has softened the asperity of feeling. Let the hatchet be buried until there is need to resume it."

"We understand each other. Henceforth, in me you behold a coadjutor. With out, there! Restore this gentleman and the others to liberty," he said to the officer who entered. "I am satisfied upon examination that they have been unjustly suspected."

An uproar in front of the jail drew the wily magistrate's attention to the window. A crowd had collected, and Hueston was received with an enthusiasm amounting to frenzy. It was the work of Ezra, who had determined, if other means would not answer, to tear his father by force from the cell in which he had been incarcerated.



## CHAPTER XIV.

## A SEANCE AND A WARNING.

A crisis had now arrived which would call for the exercise of all the wily trickster's ingenuity, and he set about the concoction of new schemes to meet it with coolness and deliberation. "This is failure the first," he reflected that night, as he paced his library, revolving new plans for the overthrow of Calthorpe's designs against him. "We must now essay another policy. This suit may be manoeuvred as it is, and then, it may not. Let us see if some means may not be devised to keep it from coming to a trial at all."

All his arts and blandishments were now exerted to lull the suspicions of his guests and induce them to postpone the execution of their purpose, until he had succeeded in possessing himself of the documentary evidence which they guarded with such jealous care. It was not long before the lawyer had become acquainted with a peculiar trait in the character of each. This was, on the part of Gershom Calthorpe, a decided leaning towards superstition; the old man, shrewd enough in ordinary affairs, being observed to swallow even the most marvelous stories that might be leveled at him, to the great amusement of his tormentors, who took a delight in playing upon this weakness. On the part of Stacy the failing lay in a very susceptible little fragment of heart, which led him to suppose that every woman who looked at him was inspired with a tender passion which he felt it to be his immediate duty to return. Upon these idiosyncracies Mr. Cameron proceeded to work.

For some days the Calthorpes were not able to go about at all, and this afforded Mr. Cameron an excellent opportunity to begin his operations. Gershom was attacked with a severe fit of rheumatism, and Stacy, in their late unhappy adventure, had received a sprain, which did not prevent his talking a great deal of nonsense to Agnes, in whose bosom he thought he was creating a decided sensation. Her thoughtfulness and abstraction, her frequent involuntary sighs, unobserved even by herself, and the languor of her looks whenever she addressed him, were all, in his silly conceit, so many signs of love. At that moment it is not likely he had any idea of marrying her, he was only playing her, as the angler played with the trout before landing his prize. Alas! for human shortsightedness. Agnes had the real diversion on her own side, and while he fondly fancied that he was disturbing her peace of mind, she was in earnest creating sad havoc in the bosom of her persecutor.

As she sat pre-occupied equally with her meditations and her needlework, or occasionally thrummed upon a guitar for his gratification—at such moments who would say what she would not have given to have

wandered unrestrained through the old woods and pastures, so much beloved, with one human being, it may be, alone by her side, and that one not Stacy Calthorpe. There might have been a Hieronymus in the background, but it was not he that played the part of the student.

For Stacy, however, love-making in earnest was a solemn sort of amusement not at all to his fancy, and the increasing frequency of missives from home, as well as the numerous hints received from his father, admonished him that he must be up and doing, if he would woo at all.

As soon as they were able to go abroad the Calthorpes were conducted over the wildest parts of the estate by the most roundabout roads, and introduced to the most disagreeable features, with an eye to cheapness in case of a forced compromise, every quagmire, precipice and mantrap being the subject of an especial dissertation. But what cared the Calthorpes? Did they, in their city instincts and high-wrought sensibilities, intend to sojourn there themselves? Assuredly no; but the lands had a specific market value, which Wall street might carry up with a little stretching into the thousands, and that was sufficient.

"It's a will-o-wisp sort of place, after all," said Stacy, "but certainly we shall not be able to complain of a lack of timber."

"Well remarked, my dear sir," replied Cameron, "there is a colossal fortune here in firewood, alone. All that will be necessary to make it available is to construct a railway of a thousand miles or so, and some half dozen flourishing cities along its route, —a trifling objection in this go-ahead age, sir."

This was exactly the tune that Cameron had sung for so many years with such success that he had actually succeeded in attracting a considerable colony,—mostly of Germans,—to the least inviting and most remote portions of the State. There they might be seen, day after day, with their clumsy break up plows, their awkward tools which they preferred to all labor-saving machinery whatsoever, their ugly mob-capped fraus and apple-cheeked fraileins, their balloon-like children and their unconquerable preference for their native tongue, patiently undergoing an amount of labor that in any other climate the human frame would have sunk under.

"Those stupid beer drinking and pipe smoking Germans" were objects of much levity in the eyes of Stacy and his sire during a casual visit which they paid in company with their host; and yet that settlement has by this time increased to a town; long, slab sided geniuses from the eastward have invaded the soil, and have taken unto themselves wives whose verbal peculiarities and quaint expressions are Egypt-

tian mysteries to their husbands, until two or three roly-poly children make their appearance to unravel the problem.

All this time Cameron was congratulating himself upon the admirable success with which he was contriving to throw dust in the eyes of the Calthorpes, who, on their side, were chuckling over the manner in which they had humbugged the Camerons. The time was now drawing nigh when the visitors must depart, and yet Cameron had made no decided advances in the accomplishment of his scheme.

Something must be done that he had resolved upon, and if matters came to the worst, why then—he would fight it out, that was all.

But old Gershom, strange to say, had no mind to go, having lately, for certain reasons, come to a different conclusion; nor had Stacy either. The Summit was a very desirable place to sojourn in, after the heats of summer, and the Camerons were growing in their estimation as quite a nice sort of people. It was evident that both father and son had come to the conclusion to enjoy their visit up to the latest moment. It was shrewdly surmised that a termagant wife and an extravagant daughter had something to do with this on Calthorpe's part—perhaps an idea of another kind was germinating in the not over fruitful minds of Mr. Cameron's guests. However that might have been, on a certain mild evening of the Indian summer, Stacy was considerably "upset," to use his own phraseology, by an incident that brought forcibly to mind the strange occurrence of the night they had passed at the Rising Star. He was seated upon the veranda of the mansion, and in the deep shadow of the trellis, with his feet sociably tilted on the balustrade and a mild Havana glowing between his lips, when a voice, almost immediately beneath him, he thought pronounced his name.

He listened. Was it the wind, just beginning to stir among the leaves, or was it fancy? It must have been the wind. The fallacy was abruptly put to flight by what followed.

"Stacy Calthorpe," said quietly the voice—"tarry not here a moment longer than you cannot avoid. There is danger about you everywhere—perhaps death!"

"O, come—that won't do, you know," stutted Stacy, feeling a cold streak bristling all the way down his backbone and nearly falling from his chair—"I'm not to be scared by such tricks."

"As you please, Stacy Calthorpe. You slighted my warnings once, and you saw what followed. Have a care how you spurn the well-meant counsel again! Adieu, I shall warn you no more."

Stacy waited for no further disclosures, but, jumping up suddenly and making for the door, with a chill feeling pervading him, as though he had been wrapped in a

spiritual embrace, he dashed into the parlor, where a sort of informal levee was being held by Judge Cameron, as the autocrat of the village, so suddenly as to excite a general alarm. His story, however, although corroborated by his agitated manner, was laughed at—especially by the young ladies, who admonished him against drinking.

"O, you may laugh," said Stacy, somewhat nettled to find his veracity questioned; "I don't believe in spirits, but when a sepulchral voice comes and says the same horrid thing in my ears twice hand running, and nobody near—"

"Are your ears much longer than those of other folks?" asked Mr. Cameron, whose features were beaming with good humor and pleasant satire, although the consternation and the blackness that were in his heart no man might read.

"I can't say, sir," replied Stacy; "all I know is that I heard it."

There was one other person in the room who was startled by this occurrence, although fully comprehending its import. This was Agnes, who had been all the evening the most entertaining among the younger portion of the company, although her eyes did not for a moment lose sight of the game that was going on between her father and Mr. Calthorpe. Mr. Paul Arden came in shortly afterward, and being good humoredly rallied by the company, in particular by the merry Miss Leah, as the perpetrator of the practical joke, he as good humoredly took the sponsorship on his own shoulders. "At least," said he, "it was either that rascal, Paul Arden, or the spirits." This settled the question at once.

"Confound the fellow's self-sufficiency!" thought Stacy; and up went the eternal quizzing glass again, as Arden plumped himself down on the divan between Agnes and Leah—"if he has not placed himself beside her on the lounge, and is examining the veins on her hand, by all that is gracious! Humph! little coquette! has a good word for every one. I'm sure its nothing to me though."

But a nod from Agnes brought him at once to her side, and his natural vanity soon made him forget his jealous fears.

Presently other guests began to drop in, and the rooms assumed a very lively appearance. Among the visitors was Doctor Magnus Garstaker. The philosophical presence of the doctor immediately suggested mischief.

The conversation having taken a spiritual turn, a proposition was started for a test of the spiritual theory, as demonstrated by raps and table tipplings. The suggestion was hailed with acclamation, as Cameron and the doctor were famous for their success in a private way at manipulating the invisible messengers and go-betweens. The long extension-table was accordingly drawn out, and the guests crowded eagerly around

it, just at the moment that Mr. Applebee unluckily made his appearance. It did not require much pressing to enrol him among the disciples.

"I mind once," said Mr. Applebee, who was always saying something ridiculously out of place and was yet perfectly unaware of the diversion he so often furnished others, "I rec'leck once interduced to a Foorierite who promised to put me up to the rappin' arrangement, but somehow or other, I don't know how 'twas, 'twas no go."

"By the way, sir," remarked the doctor, always on the alert to display his learning, while the guests were getting ready—"did you ever see the phalanx?"

"No; what's it like?" asked Applebee.

"Well, really," replied the doctor, "it would be hard to describe it correctly."

"Perhaps an elephant or a hypotheruse," suggested Applebee, innocently.

"Elephant, sir? No, sir! I spoke of the phalanxiery," retorted the doctor, with learned indignation.

"O, yes, of course, ye-es," said Mr. Applebee, feeling well enough, but as the guests were by this time nearly all seated and were beginning to listen to the dialogue, nothing would do but he must go farther.

"That phalanx, as you call it—a most curious, now I remember. I'd a brother once got bit by one."

"The company stared.

"Bitten?" replied Doctor Magnus. "O, I see; you mean, as we say in the vulgate, burned his fingers—lost by them."

"No, sir, I don't," obstinately persisted Applebee, "I mean what I say; he did lose his fingers, but they was bit off—not burnt."

Here there was a general roar, which somewhat interfered with the angry doctor's explanations. When he had concluded—

"Well, then," said Applebee, "if 'twasn't a phalanx, 'twas a peccowary, or a cassowary, or some such outlandish thing. Any way, 'twas at the menagerie I saw it."

Of course, nobody sat down with the idea of being in earnest—even Cameron, in conjunction with his friend and ally the doctor, having never made use of his skill at the new science, or whatever name it then went by, except for the purposes of diversion. They, however, professed to be satisfied that such things as spiritual manifestations did exist, whereas the majority of the company, including Applebee, were profound skeptics.

For some time the "disciples" sat round with their hands upon the table, and with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, "You must be sharp if you suc-

ceed in bamboozling me!" The younger portion of the party had their mouths all of a pucker with fun, and seeing Applebee looking very solemn just opposite the doctor, whose eyes appeared to have fascinated him completely, they thought it about time for the spirits to begin. As soon as the light was lowered, Mr. Applebee, accordingly, became the recipient of various supernatural favors, manifesting themselves in the shape of pinchings, pin-sticking, little pellets of moistened paper profanely called spitballs, and big slices of card, dexterously filleted from the finger nails of diverse mischievous sprites. In vain he wriggled about and shifted his position—in vain he dodged; the instant he turned his attention in one direction, a piece of bristol board or a soft pellet was sure to come sailing through the air in another. Finally, Mr. Applebee got very red and fussy. "Now look a-here—just quit, will ye!" he had just remonstrated, when the room was apparently filled all at once with cards, pellets, pebbles, corks, balls of yarn and bits of cotton, while a slight shower of feathers rained down like a snow storm on the table. The spirits had taken to their gambols in earnest, and even the jokers were astonished—for, although everybody was particularly sharp, no one could detect the source from which these favors proceeded.

"We shall have a successful seance," said Mr. Cameron; "the spirits are more lively than is usual. Doctor, suppose you inaugurate the ceremonies."

"With pleasure," said Nightshade. "The spirits, ladies and gentlemen, when in the proper mood, are in the habit of answering all questions that may be put to them—provided those questions are not put in a spirit of irreverence. The privilege is not, therefore, confined to any individual, although it is not every temperament that enables its possessor to become an interpreter—that is to say, a medium. Miss Babbet, there, seems to fulfill the conditions."

Miss Babbet giggled and wished to be excused, but finally acquiesced.

"Miss Pimpernickel, also—"

Miss P. was "afraid it was tamperin' with forbidden subjects," but she, too, consented, and the circle was considered organized.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CIRCLES AND TANGENTS.

"Before commencing, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor—"young ladies, your attention, if you please, the spirits don't like snickering; it may not be improper to demonstrate by actual experiment the existence of a class, or a series of classes, of ethereal individualities, moving harmoniously in arches through all eternity,

revolving evermore in progressive spirals, propelling in circles, diverging in tangents, couched in rhomboids, imbued with the immortal essence of which, it seems, mankind are, in part, Com-Pounded." (Mr. Appleman was deeply interested. Stacy thought better of the spirits for moving in circles, and listened also.) "When the golden pippin from its overladen bough fell upon the sagittated head of Sir Isaac Newton, he remarked to Kepler, who was standing by—"

"A mistake, doctor," interrupted a listener. "Kepler was a man of a different age."

"O, aye, to be sure—thank you for the correction—ages do make a difference; I must have meant Spurzheim, but you see, sir, this is only one of the tricks which the spirits resort to for the sake of confounding us. As I was observing, when Doctor Gall—I should say Spurzheim—"("Lavater," suggested a voice; "Tom Paine," said another, sotto voce.) "Well, really, ladies and gentlemen, I have lost all recollection of what he did say, but one thing I can say, when we see chairs and tables, by the performance of a series of eccentric motions of which chairs and tables are generally supposed to be incapable, contributing to the support of a theory which so many have seen fit to question, the most skeptical must acknowledge that there is something in it."

"Look here!" said Mr. Applebee, boldly, "I don't want to say that such things ain't been done, but here's five dollars agin nothing you can't do it."

"Done," said the doctor, quietly handing his share of the stakes to Cameron. "The spirits, if they are in the apartment, will manifest their presence by paying particular attention to Mr. Applebee's chair."

Spontaneously with this Applebee's chair was shaken violently to and fro, then bounced fiercely up and down two or three times in succession, and then again betook itself to rocking, so that Mr. Applebee was deprived of his breath, and only got rid of his uncomfortable seat by falling on the floor, where, as things were going round, he seized Miss Babbet by the ankles, who gave vent to a frightful succession of screams, imagining that she had been clutched by a ghost.

When the doubter got upon his seat once more he looked sharply about him for the springs and pulleys which he was sure must have produced the phenomenon, but he could detect nothing but the doctor putting the stakes in his pocket in a manner quite the reverse of spiritual.

"Now, come, that ain't fair," objected Applebee. "You said chairs and tables." "To the victor belong the spoils," rejoined Magnus, composedly; "but you shall be satisfied in the fullest manner. I wish my listeners to be guided only by the evidences of their own senses."

Dr. Magnus desired the company to accommodate him by drawing back and

placing the tips of the fingers of both hands upon the table, it immediately tilted, and actually waddled like a duck to the farthest and most contracted end of the apartment. Much applause, and "bravo!" from the excited Stacy. As for poor, weak-headed Mr. Calthorpe, he had been blessed with a superstitious turn of mind from infancy, and having read all the spiritual testimonies of the day, whether in the form of books or news sheets, was in a state of high mental agitation. He observed these proceedings, which were not the first he had assisted at, with fear and trembling. His excitement did not escape the notice of Magnus or Mr. Cameron, who exchanged significant glances.

"Neow, folks," said the still unsatisfied Mr. Applebee, with his hands in his pockets and standing out upon the floor, the rest of the company having retreated with their chairs to the wall. "that's all very amazin', I confess—O, yes, I don't want to strip any man of his larrels (the ladies, not knowing what was meant, looking proportionately offended at the bachelor who was thus defiantly arraying himself against the powers unknown), but I ain't by no means convinced as yit as to these manifestations being ginooine. Therefore, if our friend the doctor, will bet me five dollars aginst ten, and put 'em up fair and square, I am willin' to bet that he can't make that table turn round and walk back agen."

Applebee thought he had the doctor safe this time, the table being much longer than that end of the apartment was wide.

This offer was accepted as coolly as the others, and the money deposited with Mr. Cameron, Applebee winking one eye very hard at the company, as if he thought he had "done" the doctor cleverly. The table was about twice as long as the apartment was broad, and how it was to revolve in that confined space seemed a puzzle. The doctor, however, was not at all disconcerted, but, having elevated his long arms until with his outstretched pediments he resembled a great letter "X," suddenly pounced upon the table—an extension-table, remember—and, shoving it together as if it had been a fan, coolly turned it about, then drew it out again, and marched it back to the open-eyed astonishment of Applebee, who merely remarked:

"Well, I'll be hanged!" and didn't say anything further. The last experiment had crushed the sporting bachelor as effectually as if a garden-roller had passed over him.

Enough having now been performed in the way of physical feats, the doctor, having pocketed the stakes, inaugurated the more serious business of the evening. Questions and answers, mingled with absurd requests, such as requiring all the clocks in the house to be sounded at once, and other vagaries, followed in rapid succession. There were many blunders, and some correct replies



which were more than "guesses," and it was observed that those who were most successful were Mr. Cameron and Dr. Garstaker. Mr. Calthorpe asked some questions in regard to "stocks," upon the strength of the answers to which he privately dispatched some instructions to his Wall street agent; by a singular chance, the information, although imparted, as was supposed, in utter ignorance of the market, proved correct, and the credulous Calthorpe made a profit of several thousands by the operation. He was not aware that the telegraph line was adjacent, and that parties were in the habit of tapping it in the furtherance of transactions of which the nature may be imagined. The replies given to Stacy's questions were not so satisfactory; the spirits very unexpectedly rapped out something about "a little milliner in Division street," throwing that young gentleman into confusion, which was increased by the old gentleman's asking, in his most aristocratic manner:

"My son, is this so?"

"They are unkind spirits at the best," whispered Paul Arden in the ears of Leah, "but they are as chary of their confidences as yourself."

The pretty Leah blushed, but made no answer.

It being understood that a distinguished leader of the new doctrine, represented as the responsible editor of the Spiritual Investigator, was present, a medium was placed in the cataleptic state, and the visitor (who happened also to be a manufacturer of matches on a large scale) was requested to manipulate her. A few passes produced a voluminous array of answers, imparting new ideas of the future state, where things appeared to be managed about the same as on earth, but Mr. Pheasant inquired if there was any news direct from the spirit land, and received for rejoinder: "No-o, nothing in particular, except that matches are made in heaven," that gentleman was so elated that he forthwith proceeded to organize a company.

The experiences of the evening were terminated by the only unaligned performer in the room—the table—which folded up of its own accord, executed a hornpipe, threw one or two somersets, and bowed itself politely into its appropriate corner. At least, such was the printed account of its performances in the next Spiritual Investigator, and that, of course, must have been perfectly reliable. This evening's phenomena elicited from Stacy the sole expressions of genuine admiration he had given vent to during the evening.

"A stunning table that!" he exclaimed; "beats the musical clock with the singing birds all hollow. Where did you get the article, Cameron? It must be so handy to keep in one's dining-room, eh, governor?"

"Stacy, no trifling!" replied Mr. Cal-

thorpe, gravely; "these are very serious matters."

"O, the old man's a regular out-and-out convert—swallows everything," said Stacy, with an apologetic look toward the company. "I really believe he'd give away his last dollar if the spirits commanded it."

"Would he?" thought Cameron; and again he and the doctor exchanged glances.

"Ladies, gentlemen also," said the doctor, after a whispered consultation with Cameron, and while the gentlemen were assisting the ladies to bonnet and robe themselves—isn't it astonishing how long it takes to tie a bonnet string, and how difficult it is to let go the bonnet—"one word before we dismiss. It has been suggested to me that a supernatural manifestation of a more interesting character than the one we have just been engaged in is to transpire tomorrow at the residence of one of the most celebrated mediums of the country. As many as can afford the time should attend a seance, the developments of which, I assure you, throw our humble interpretations into the shade."

"Is there to be any bettin' there?" asked Applebee.

"None, that I am aware," was the bland response.

"Because I am down on gamblin' spirits, anyhow," continued Applebee, thoughtfully.

"You can, however, pay Mr. Snook himself, one dollar at the door," added the doctor, drawing on his gloves.

"The more shame for the spirits for permittin' it," rejoined Applebee; "somehow, I can't help thinkin' it ain't exactly right for people that makes such spiritual pretensions to be allus takin' money for their services, and no good done either. It reminds me of the money changers in the temple, and don't gee with the notion of a spiritual origin at all. It's bout the on'y thing that makes folks so mighty hard to convince. However, I s'pose its all right, but this time I reckon I shall back out."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE PINE BARRENS.

The residence of this celebrated medium, whose name was Snook, with the familiar premonition of Jonathan, was situated in the midst of one of those dreary pine barrens which occur at intervals in the more thinly settled districts, and was a shabby little tumble-down hovel of only one-story, built up against a rock, embracing the reception room and the sleeping department—the kitchen being on a more roomy scale than either—in fact, the open air. The spot which the tamperer with forbidden mysteries had pitched upon

for his abode was eminently calculated to convey to the spectators, unaccustomed to such scenes, an indication of the world as it should look just prior to the final dissolution—the trees and herbage exhausted, the familiar sounds of animated nature silenced, and, brooding over all, an aspect of utter desolation, which immediately communicates a like impression to the most buoyant spirits. The solitary log house, about which, perhaps, a single wild, emaciate figure is seen flitting over a fire, completes the picture by suggesting the idea of the last man.

If Mr. Snook did not in many particulars resemble the last man, he had compromised by choosing the last place for any man to live in. This shanty, where during the week he made a show of performing wonderful cures with herbs and weeds that clustered thickly about, an offensive medicinal spring, occasionally officiating as guide through the subterranean labyrinths to such as might require his services, guarded the access to a grotto, placed in the centre of a sandy waste, encircled by stunted pines of dark green shade and scattered about with gray stones, a boulder rising directly over his tenement from the rear by which it was sheltered from the northeasterly gales. To this dear spot many a pilgrimage was undertaken, and Jonathan was apparently making converts and money quite rapidly. At any rate, his lonely cubic was continually receiving fresh accessions to its list of visitors, and there was one thing remarkable about it, that, except on occasions like the present, they usually came alone, or in parties of two, and many of them had a rough, untractable look, that would have seemed to indicate anything but a proneness to be deceived by such quackeries as those practiced here—for he professed not only to read the future also, but to be able to eradicate the most obstinate diseases by the mere laying on of hands. Even the fat little undersheriff of the county adjacent became spiritually inclined, and intimated a strong desire to pay Snook a visit. Singular, wasn't it?

About this plain or barren were dispersed on the following day a crowd of people not less than one hundred in number, and of all degrees of respectability. Carriages and vehicles of other descriptions were drawn up beneath the shadow of the trees, to which the horses were tied. Many of these present had come thither from a very long distance, and some three were who hailed even from the distant commercial emporiums. Hours having elapsed and no sign of human occupancy being apparent, some impatience was exhibited by the most curious, who set up a clamor, in the midst of which the door of the hut was unfastened and a strange-looking man stepped out among the bystanders. He was very tall, and meagre enough to be taken for one of those departed shades with which, or with

whom, he professed to be on terms of intimacy. Long-winded arguments with the ghosts of an appalling line of defunct celebrities, beginning with Abraham and the Witch of Endor and Ahasuerus, and ending with Thomas Paine and Cotton Mather, had worn upon his own spirits and made him thin. His face was long and cadaverous—in hue, a changeable green, more or less yellowish and blueish, according to the weather; a badge, it was said, of his intermediary calling, but pronounced by a heretical disciple of Esculapius a symptom of fever and ague, caught from the underlying marshes. Those confounded doctors!

As for the garb worn by Snook, it was a veritable curiosity, and would not have disgraced a second-hand clothing shop, of the odds and ends of which it appeared to be made. The cloth of which it was composed had originally been gray, but was now patched and darned into an indistinguishable mass of varied hues, held together by tapes and strings. His feet were protected by moccasins, and his head was wrapped around by a very unpropitious woolen comforter. His appearance was greeted by the mischievously disposed with cheers, which an unearthly look from the medium instantly checked, and there was no more disturbance.

"My friends," said Snook, "the spirits have already informed me of your presence, but knowing that I had had a fatiguing night, they would not disturb me. Will you walk in?"

After much crowding and squeezing at the door, where Snook himself unobtrusively took the dollars, as they flowed in upon him in a silvery stream, the room devoted to the exercises was filled and running over; a second and a third party awaiting their turns without. There were present, beside strangers, the whole of the Cameron party, including Doctor Magnus, Garstaker, the two Calthorpes, and Miss Babbat—a lady to whom allusion has already been made, and who, being strong-minded, defied the aspersions of society and wore "bloomers." Mrs. Cameron, being an invalid who never ventured from her apartment, was, of course, unable to attend. Agnes, for the same reason did not, being in attendance upon Mrs. Cameron. As for Mr. Applebee, he would not.

The exercises were prefaced by a sort of wizard-like peroration from the experimenter, representing a prayerful invocation to the spirits, who having inspired him to that effect, he called upon his friend, Mr. Pheasant to assist. Thus, Mr. Pheasant, somewhat distinguished for the light which he had contributed to shed upon the world in an unspiritual as well as spiritual capacity, promptly agreed to do, at the same time remarking that this prescience in connection with his name, on the part of one a total stranger to him, was one of the most striking

ing testimonials he had ever received with regard to the authenticity of spiritualism. "The spirits will on this occasion," he said, "unless I am much mistaken, exhibit to us some remarkable phenomena, illustrating the wedding of mind and matter."

Some one giving utterance here to a smothered laugh, Mr. Snook promptly rebuked the irreverence, innocently observing that "nothing could be unworthy serious consideration which could tend to illuminate the human mind," at which the laugh became general, as the joke had by that time got round. Taking advantage of this, Mr. Pleasant replied that his conviction of this important truth was so deeply grounded as to enable him, in addition to worldly presents, to publish a periodical sheet, "known, ladies and gentlemen, as the Spiritual Investigator—terms, two dollars per annum, in advance." Whereupon a brisk demand for the Investigator.

The light being now extinguished and the door having been made fast, a voice with a curious shake in it, gave the company salutation, as through a trumpet, the words, "How do you do, my friends?" contrasting remarkably with preconceived impressions of spirit vocalism, for this one had a bad cold, and said "heow" and "deew" in a strong nasal accent that provoked a close comparison with that of the medium. There was more than one present who thought the salutation undignified as proceeding from immortals, and who, in fact, imagined that in the other answers of the spirits, they could trace the ungrammatical habits and even the very dialectics of the neighborhood. Surely Julius Caesar, Cicero, Demosthenes, Shelley, Byron, Ben Franklin, and George Washington, with the rest of the illustrious fraternity, had at least some knowledge of grammar! It seemed equally unreasonable that George the Third, the distinguished Yankee hater, should say "heow," instead of how, and "raound," instead of round.

"The spirits," continued Snook, "are about to favor us with some demonstrations applicable to the times, but I am counseled to explain that the slightest exhibition of a tendency to irreverence will cause them to withdraw from us altogether."

This was followed by a dead silence of about five minutes, during which nothing audible but the breathings of the party. Then came a terrific bang upon the table, which resounded like a concussion upon the monster drum of the jubilee. It is useless to deny that everybody jumped, and Mr. Cameron felt Gershom hanging tremblingly upon his arm.

"So, so!" thought Cameron. "I can read you now, I think."

The first stroke upon the table, like the first grand crash of an orchestra (who has not felt the electric thrill that runs through a crowded auditory when, amid profound

stillness, the leader's baton waves his columns to the musical assault?), was the signal for a general roll of drums, large and small, beginning very low in the scale and swelling louder and higher until the building shook with the final roar, like that of thunder. It certainly seemed as though no mortal hands could have produced such a fugue. Then came the rataplan, regularly beaten; the roll-call or reveille; the sound of drum and fife, describing the march of troops, whose distinct tramping seemed to be heard; the rattle of a few sharp shots, denoting an attack on the outposts; the distant rumbling of artillery wagons, the confused thunderings of cannon and cracking of small-arms, the sounding of the bugle charge, the fierce dash of cavalry, even the remote shouting—all the circumstance and horrid din of war were admirably represented, so that the listeners could almost see the carnage.

"A desperate battle," said the voice of Snook amid the gloom, "is going on in some quarter of the world. About this time we may expect to hear important news."

"About this time look out for rain!" said Stacy, in the style of the almanacs, for he thought he could recognize the tones of the medium.

To his no little surprise, a smart shower suddenly descended upon the heads of all present, astonishing Mr. Cameron and Doctor Garstaker quite as much as the others, but this they kept to themselves.

"This must stagger incredulity itself," said the voice of Magnus.

No one made answer to this, and after some performances from divers of the spirit orchestra—there being, as before, a peculiarity about the sounds, and the notes given all at once, very full and sharp—other freaks were performed, such as a show of hands illuminated by phosphorus, which played fitfully before the vision of the wondering spectators—and, on one of them being grasped by a member of the party, it administered a cuff that vividly recalled the image of Hyer. Then there was a wild hunt in the air; a confused medley of heads, legs, and arms, and hands bearing instruments from which proceeded a turbulence of sound; the barking of dogs, the wailing of cats, cries, groans, and hisses, and laughter. Even those who had been foremost in ridicule of the theory felt no disposition to scoff at it now. There was something so truly supernatural in all that occurred, heightened by the effect of their own imaginations, that many could not repress a cold shudder.

Questions were put and answered in phosphorescent letters, some of these being written backward and at the same time held upside down toward the reader; and some of these answers were wonderfully correct, astonishing none more than the question-

ers, while others were so confused and contradictory as to lead to the belief that the spirits, or whatever they might be, were cognizant of nothing that was not passing in the mind of the questioner. In short, that animal magnetism or clairvoyance, in a novel form, was the mainspring and controlling influence of the mysterious influence under which they labored. Mere human jugglery was evidently not to be thought of in connection with them.

A flight of spirit drawings on very unspiritual bristol board, like nothing that could be imagined in the way of human production, succeeded by way of relief, which the spectators were told to retain for examination in the light. A sweet female face, surrounded by a luminous halo, beamed slowly upon the audience and as slowly retired. In the midst of this proceeding Jonathan Snook was conscious of a hand of ice—a spectral hand—that suddenly rested upon his forehead, passed across his face and down his nose, and slowly but irresistibly attracted him upward from his chair.

"Lord have mercy upon us miserable sinners!" gasped Snook, whose alarm instantly communicated itself to the assemblage, although they did not first understand what had taken place. "What do you seek?"

"O impious fools, that dare your Maker's wrath!" hissed a voice that pierced like a cold wind to the marrow of everybody present. "O greedy dogs, who can never have enough! O idiots, that will not understand! Have ye no fears for the wrath that is to come? You that blaspheme for gain, that kill for hire!"

"Pardon us! We are but humble inquirers in the field of reason," mumbled the medium.

"Thou shalt have reason enough," replied the voice; "the only reason that reacheth the hearts of such. O ye men of unrighteous ways, the Lord is angry because you have defiled his sanctuaries with the multitude of your sins! Tremble, for the fire of heaven shall fall upon the blasphemers!"

"Who-o-o are you?" gasped the doctor, holding fast to the table and as much frightened as the rest.

"I am the Archangel Gabriel. Down, devils, down!"

Mr. Snook, feeling himself grabbed by the hair, set up at this juncture a frightful howl, and those who loitered without were rather taken aback on seeing some forty persons rushing, stumbling, jumping over one another's heads, rolling over each other in the sand, shrieking, hailing, shouting, praying, and among the most terrified of them all Jonathan Snook, who emerged last of all, accompanied by a spectral figure as tall as himself, and, if anything, wilder in aspect. The energetic manner in which the Archangel Gabriel was belaboring Snook with a heavy oaken stick accounted for the outcries.

In spite of his long, tangled locks and disordered habit—in spite of the hollowed cheeks and eyes of fire—it was not hard for those that knew him to identify Gilbert Hueston. He was in one of his most phrenetic moods. Since his dismissal from prison he had not been seen at all, even by his son, until, gaining an entrance at the rear of the spiritual laboratory through some cleft in the great boulder communicating with the cave of icicles, he burst upon the amazed group of sightseers like an escaped exaltation.

When Stacy reached the open air he found that it had been raining! Strange as it may seem, more than one of those who attended this spiritual gathering went home that night in a condition bordering on insanity. Some recovered from the shock; others, among whom was Gershom Calthorpe, only half regained their senses, and continued ever afterward engrossed, both body and soul, by the dangerous delusion, while one or two became the occupants of a madhouse. The history of science is full of similar examples, and a record of its follies will one day furnish the material for a volume of equal interest to those in which are embalmed the witcheries of Salem.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## DOCTOR NIGHTSHADE.

The success which the old impostor of the Barrons had met with, both as regards pecuniary profit and psycho-logical influence suggested to Mr. Cameron, fortunately for his mind's repose, a train of thought, the principal feature in which was the reflection that he should be spared the trouble and the guilt of adopting violent measures, as he had almost resolved upon, against the Calthorpes in furtherance of his dark designs upon Gershom's property—an extremity that he was not long to escape, though certainly not from any regard he bore to Gershom. Mr. Calthorpe, from entertaining at first a positive sentiment of dislike to the Camerons, had become more strongly attached to them daily. Henceforward, in his newly hatched projects against his guests, Cameron found an efficient ally in the credulity of Gershom himself, but a still more efficient one in Magnus Garstacker.

Few persons could have been better calculated for getting on in the world, as society is at present organized, than Doctor Nightshade, lack of conscience being apparently as necessary nowadays to all who aspire to reach the golden round as are honesty, true piety, and virtue to those who aim at the more enduring pleasures of the future. Magnus combined in one person the professions of astrology and medicine, although of late years his practice in the latter pursuit had grown to be so intermittent and peculiar that chemistry would have been the more truthful designation. He had an equal aptitude for making money out of anything that he laid hold of, and his utter indifference as to the manner in which he enriched himself was so notorious that nobody thought of disputing it; and yet his position in society was not a mean one. Scandal had long since effected all that it could against him, and shrank from such profitless assaults upon his thick hide. The revenge which Doctor Magnus took against those who sought to injure him in this way, in the shape of cramps, convulsions, headaches, and heartburn, conveyed through his prescriptions, was full and complete, but he was no such fool as to kill his hen while it could lay him a golden egg, and so his malice had never gone farther than we have said. Even Cameron was sure to feel an extraordinary premonitory gout after a dispute with Magnus, whose medicines now he generally took good care not to swallow. Utterly regardless of personal comfort when the neglect could benefit his pocket, Magnus was equally tenacious of it when there was no profit in the case. Thus he would get out of bed and ride a dozen miles on the most inconvenient nights for a fee in proportion to his trouble, but would not have

disturbed a wrinkle in his well-warmed sheets for a moneyless patient, though death were in the balance. By marking out for himself such a line of conduct, and steadily pursuing it through life, the doctor had got to be quite wealthy.

Garstacker was really, however, a man of considerable talent and learning, and was on that account all the more dangerous. In his social relations he was lively, witty, liberal and generally liked. What transpired in the dusty and obscure recesses of his lonely residence—what passed within the shelter of his own callous heart, within which so many guilty secrets were always laboring, none but himself, however familiar, might know. In crime and mystery he had but one collaborer, and that was Cameron, who knew of him only so much as related to his own private matters, none of which, of course, he could have revealed without inflicting mortal injury upon himself. That pliable gentleman, Mr. Gershom Calthorpe, so full of confidence and self-conceit that he did not suppose others capable of feeling any but friendly emotions in his presence, little dreamed that, only a few days before, as he lay on his back, with rheumatic pains in his limbs, which prevented his stirring, a certain mixture had at one time stood by his elbow which, had he taken, his powers of mind would have been gone from him for ever. At that precious moment of his existence it had been only Agnes Cameron who stood between him and a fate worse than sudden extinction. On the day which immediately followed the scene at the Pine Barrons Mr. Cameron was closeted with Garstacker for several hours—a sufficient interval to arouse in the mind of Agnes the most lively apprehensions for the safety of her father's guests. The very quietude which reigned during the whole morning was a proof that some sinister scheme was in course of incubation. Whatever the subject of discussion its result must have been gratifying to both, for the countenance of each wore a smile of gratification as they parted. The mental anguish which this occurrence inflicted upon Agnes was indescribable. Since the discovery of the espionage which had been placed upon her lover she durst no longer make a confidant even of him, and the only being upon whom she might rely in this extremity was her mother, whose constant illness unfitted her for all duties, and was only increased by such unwelcome revelations. It would almost seem as if she, too, had been the victim of some drug which paralyzed her vital energies, and drew her daily nearer to the grave. For a being living a life so secluded she possessed a knowledge which might almost have been called intuitive with regard to persons and events removed from the scope of her daily observation. There was a mystery about Mrs. Cameron, enhanced by the circumstance

that she was rarely referred to by Mr. Cameron, and had not an intimate acquaintance in the village, which irresistibly piqued the public curiosity, but all to no purpose. She was as one long buried, over whose sepulchre a stone has been rolled. With her, in the seclusion of her apartment, night after night, did Agnes pray that something might occur to soften the obdurate heart of her father.

Some days went by, and Cameron's influence over the Calthorpes was constantly increasing. Gershom had never known such an entertaining person as his friend Cameron. So clever, so polished, so versatile—in fact, so up to everything. Nothing more was heard from father or son about returning, although, only a week before, Stacy had been heard distinctly to anathematize the place, and although letters were continually arriving from home, wondering what either could see there to interest him, and earnestly urging their return.

In the interim Cameron broached a proposition to purchase the disputed estates at a valuation based upon a reasonable system of compromise, and to this suggestion the elder Calthorpe was readily disposed to accede, but Stacy, it now appeared, had reasons for further delay. In the meantime Cameron and the doctor were proceeding to inaugurate their grand scheme of plunder, in which all was to be considered fair game that might come to their net.

"There's Agnes," said Cameron, in one of his confidential moods to his associate—"Aggie has a natural turn for somnambulism and clairvoyance, and sometimes, when under the influence, tells curious things. With a harmless prescription or two of your own concocting mind, I saw harmless—even she might be turned to account. Trust me, she'll make a capital card for us, while our standing in society will effectually shield our motives."

"But will she play the part you have assigned her?" asked the doctor, who knew her character so well that he put no faith in her co-operation.

"Will she?" echoed the mercenary father. "She shall! In my family, sir, my word is law."

"Her inspiration, you must reflect," pursued the other, "is no sham. I understand exactly what these sensitive, nervous temperaments are capable of. Sometimes in the course of my experience it has appeared to me as though these impressive creatures, shrinking within themselves like sensitive plants at slightest contact with a nature grosser than their own, yet, withal, so highly endowed, are not mere morials like ourselves, but beings of a loftier grade, placed like beacon stars for our guidance half way betwixt earth and heaven. I could almost think, do you know, that we are the fallen angels, and creatures like

these the sinless ones by whom our final redemption is to be accomplished."

"Ho, ho! how ridiculously you talk," rejoined Cameron, "with an abortive attempt at a laugh; for at such moments the doctor talked in a strain that he could not comprehend. At such times an indefinable expression sat upon his feature—he was not the same Dr. Magnus whose professional talk was of ligatures, poisons, and lotions, and it occurred to Cameron—If women like Agnes are angels deputed by Heaven, why should not this be an agent of darkness as well, placed in men's paths to lead their feet astray and win their souls to the devil! He was afraid of him."

"I was not jesting," said Magnus. "There may be something in the theory, which would help to account for all our troubles and sinister actions here below. But that is not what I set out to say. Even should Agnes consent, is there not some danger that she might betray our secrets?"

"Not the slightest, man. Sleeping or waking, her thoughts are ever for my welfare."

"You villain!" thought Magnus, as he scanned the features of his accomplice in guilt. But at the moment the pale and sorrowful countenance of a young, deserted wife arose before him. He closed his eyes and shrank back with a convulsive shudder.

"Why, what has come over you? One would suppose that you had been tampering with the spirits."

"Reflection, Cameron—reflection!" passionately exclaimed the doctor, smiting his breast.

"Hang reflection!" rejoined Cameron, who had never seen his associate exhibit such emotion before; "burn it! drown it in sparkling chablis! That's the wise man's plan for killing care and banishing the devils. If you are thinking of Agnes, you need not be troubled about her. She thinks too much of me to mar our sport. I see how it is," he added, seriously regarding the doctor; "you've been giving way to reverie—a very pernicious habit, but a glass or two of wine will set all right again. Come, pledge me, sir, in a goblet, and let's make it a bumper!"

"No," rejoined Magnus, huskily, as he turned to leave; "wine only increases with its sting the hell that rages here."

And he smote his breast twice or thrice rapidly, as if to repress a feeling of suffocation.

"Dyspepsia, I see; a bad complaint," said Cameron, with a knowing wink and a chuckle, as he sipped his wine. "Take anything for it?"

"Nothing—no; but I shall certainly swallow a brace of blue pills some of these fine mornings. O, Cameron!" groaned the doctor, dismally, "I am a lonesome, miserable wretch!"

"And so should I be if I yielded to re-

flection as you do. I tell you there's nothing like a bumper of wine to banish your ailments. Come, let me fill."

"One glass, then; but let it be none of your graping, aristocratic wines. Let it be brandy!"

"Voilà!" responded Cameron. "Help yourself."

Dr. Garstacker tossed down a fearful dose of what he sometimes called in joke the elixir vitae, and hastily bustling off, left his half-tipsy confederate to the darkening solicitude of his study.

Under the auspices of Cameron and the doctor, spiritual manifestations now became the order of the day. There were knockings and rappings in half the dwellings in town; even Mr. Applebee, who resided with two antique maiden sisters in a comfortable "frame" at the end of the principal thoroughfare, was haunted by them, and began to grow thin. A club, composed of persons who were believers in half the grosser follies and delusions of the day, was forthwith organized, and Gershom Calthorpe was humored in his pet follies ad nauseam, until his poor old head was in a condition which fitted him for the fellowship of the most transcendental upholders of the most visionary scheme that had ever yet been concocted. From being a disbeliever in the sacred truths of revelation, he, like most atheists, had taken to practicing the most idle and the least easily demonstrated as readily as the most plausible of all the sophisms by which he was surrounded. A golden tide now flowed in upon our speculators in the mysteries of immortality, and no testimony more convincing than this of the doctrine of man's free agency would have been required, as, otherwise, a bolt from heaven must have annihilated the authors of the impious and sacrilegious rites that were there perpetrated in the name of a new religion. The influence acquired by Cameron over the aged millionaire was complete; but a new stumbling block now manifested itself in Stacy.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE POINTED FINGER.

Although chosen by design in one of the most inaccessible portions of the district, few locations could equal in loveliness and fertility that which Gilbert Hueston had selected for his abode. The hand of God was on all the land about—as wild and innocent of art as in the days when the roving Indian was the undisputed master of every rood. Extensively well versed in the topography of the section, he had reared his humble dwelling where the schemes of railway

projectors and speculators in lands were not likely to trouble him for many a year to come. Every variety of scenery diversified his grounds; there gently rounded hills and sloping valleys, alternated with rolling lawns and glassy rivulets, great parks of giant elms, and tangled forests where herds of wild deer roved in perfect security and freedom.

His solitary cabin was a rude edifice, constructed partly of stone and partly of timber, a single story in height, the dilapidated roof of reeds and dried branches, clumsily thatched, being overgrown with wild creeping plants that threatened ere long to hide the habitation totally from view. A rude attempt at gardening was visible, and a half-rotted fish-net hung upon the garden fence. All was wild and suggestive of decay. Roughly and inartistically as it had been put together, it had been at all times for Hueston a pleasant retreat; and more especially so when, with youth and health to sustain him, he had first set up his household gods in that earthly Elysium. Of late, when not assisted by Ezra, his books and his thoughts had been his only familiars. He was conversant from his youth with the works of the leading philosophers, whose alluring doctrines he had gotten so thoroughly by heart that he seemed already to stand upon the threshold of the illimitable, being inspired with a spiritualistic philosophy which laughed to scorn the trickeries of professionals, and the mysteries of the future appeared to expand before his enthusiastic vision in all the brilliant hues of Paradise.

On the memorable day of his unexpected appearance at the Barrens Hueston had passed some hours in close seclusion within his own cabin, then for days unvisited. There, in the solitude of the little apartment devoted to his studies, he had been in the habit of consulting the world of spirits and indulging in those dangerous fits of reverie which had exercised so disastrous an effect upon his brain. But on this afternoon his usual good fortune seemed to have deserted him. With the aid of chemicals he had even drawn upon the wall a sort of horoscope, answering to those of which he had read in the olden alchemists, and, placing himself opposite the strange device, continued to gaze upon it steadfastly until the outer world and its temporal affairs had been altogether forgotten, repeating to himself a kind of formula, in which his supposed spiritual familiars were designated by names uncommon and fantastic, some of which were evidently the result of his spiritual readings, while others were the coinage of his own spectre-haunted fancy. A phosphorescent, slow by degrees, took the place of the uncertain light that had filled the apartment; the atmosphere was broken by shadowy forms and undefinable nebulous masses, twirling around him in a mys-

tic waltz to a soft, weird music that momentarily increased until his senses were filled with a dreamy ecstasy nearly akin to that produced by opium, to which he was strongly suspected to have resorted. The couch, with its bearskin covering, upon which he had thrown himself, seemed transformed into a cloud. Sweet countenances, beaming with light and loveliness, passed mournfully but rapidly before him, but paused not, pointing ever in the direction whence they came with a warning gesture, and vanishing with a look of sorrowful pity which he regarded as prophetic of coming troubles. Then the strains grew more discordant and unearthly, and a series of hieroglyphics began to dawn in characters of fire upon the wall.

"It is the hand of destiny," he murmured. "I am, then, abandoned by those I most relied upon! Yet will I not perish utterly without one effort to regain my wavering influence. The chart tells me with an unerring voice that my destiny, whether for good or evil, is on the eve of its fulfillment. Once more, then, the cavern!" At the door he met Ouiscaasset.

"The Good Spirit," said the faithful Indian, "is angry to-night. Go not to the cavern, my white brother. There is that in the months of his people which bodes him no good."

"Ha!" exclaimed Hueston, turning paler at this confirmation of his worst forebodings, "What do they say?"

"They murmur against the authority of the Sachem. They say that my white brother would use them and make no return."

"It is but a repetition of the old story," muttered Hueston between his clenched teeth. "I never trusted them fully, but to abandon me in this my hour of need! There is something beyond their own conception in this. They must have been tampered with. If I find it so, by heavens they shall all perish upon the same pyre that they have lighted for their leader! Follow me to the cavern!"

Finding persuasion useless, the Indian bent his head in token of acquiescence, and silently followed his master and friend.

Hueston found that George had not deceived him. His entrance was received with wild looks of ominous import. Not a hand was put forth to return his friendly greeting, and there was a total absence of the brotherly frankness which had characterized their conduct on former occasions. Hueston indulged in no circumlocution or concealments, but came directly to the point.

"Who here," he almost savagely demanded, "proclaims himself a prey to discontent? Which of you has dared to raise the standard of revolt? Which of you has taken upon himself the responsibility of calling the Brotherhood together—a duty

that belongs, as your leader, only to me? Or what am I accused? Was it not to my exertions, means, and influence that this order was indebted for existence? Nay, many a one among you did I drag from penury to fit him for so proud a fellowship. The coals of fire that you should have aided me in heaping upon the heads of my enemies—cowards, ingrates!—you have turned to heap on mine!"

The boldness of his speech, as well as the power which Hueston was supposed to exercise over the world of shadows, cowed the majority of his opponents; but there were some not so easily controlled, who were resolved to have their say.

"While all respect you as the head and chief," spoke up the sachem second in command, "and while we own the favors you have rendered, we submit that this state of things can endure no longer, and have resolved ourselves to break our bonds. Hitherto you have monopolized sole power. We have gradually become your slaves, with the simple word of a simple man for our law. It must cease from this day forth!"

"What are the remedies proposed, for, of course, though kept so long in secret, you have a plan?"

"We have concluded," responded the speaker, "to elect a president, chargeable at the option of his colleagues and subject to the advisement of a council especially appointed to revise his acts. The matter has been debated and the document is already prepared by which our future actions must be regulated."

"What then? Proceed!"

"This document, Gilbert Hueston, you must sign."

"How if I refuse?"

"You will be ejected, even as you ejected Martin Hungerford!"

"Hungerford!" exclaimed Hueston, breathless with indignation. "You will not surely degrade me to his level? Why, Hungerford was a traitor, and as such, for your own good and with your own consent, I expelled him."

"Then, where is Hungerford? Does your power extend to the lives as well as to the acts of your fellow-men? If this were submitted to, no man can tell whose turn might not come next. Bring here the new articles of faith. If Hueston sign these, he is still in fellowship."

"You kill with kindness," replied Hueston, bitterly. "Where is this precious parchment?"

"It was handed to him by the scribe."

"Is this the only copy?"

"It is. Madman, what would you do?" he added, suddenly springing toward Hueston.

"A testimony of respect for your new fraternity," replied Hueston, folding his arms and glaring defiance upon them. He

had torn the new constitution into fragments before the very eyes of its authors.

A movement of irresolution succeeded. Then the Brotherhood began to murmur and there was a general pressure toward Hueston, who, nevertheless, did not recede an inch.

"I am unarmed," he said, "and cannot resist you without proceeding to an extreme which, unless pushed to extremities, would be impious; but here, by the livid corpse of my martyred brother, I swear to perish rather than quit the sanctuary so long consecrated by his remains!"

"Out with the drivel and the body too!" shouted some of the more unscrupulous. "Let us have to more juggleries!"

They had advanced but a step when Ezra and the faithful George rushed breathlessly into the open space between his father and the malcontents. His unerring rifle was in his hands, pointed, as was that of the Indian, directly in the faces of the mutineers, who, not liking the aspect of things, at once desisted.

"You'll rebel, will you, ye filthy curs!" shouted Ezra, mad with passion. "Try it some of you! Let him step forward that likes to be thought courageous. What—not one of all your number? A pretty pack to place dependence on!"

"Why do you interfere? No harm was meant," said the first speaker, sullenly.

"No harm, did you say, Eustace Harvey? Do you call this act of driving a man from his own, no harm? What an admirable pettifogger the law lost in you when it threw you over the bar! Now Eustace Harvey, Adam Savage, and the rest—a word with you in turn. This spot, and all that it contains belong, you will not deny, to Gilbert Hueston, who stands before you. The very brotherhood from which you seek to eject him was of his and his brother's rearing. One thing, therefore, is plain—if that authority rests with any one, it is his privilege to dictate terms to you. In his name I therefore say, you may retire if you like, taking just what belongs to you—no more, no less; but make another movement, utter another threat, and, although we may share the common ruin, I denounce you to the authorities. As for Martin Hungerford, bring the man back yourselves, since you are so anxious to recover him."

"We had no hand in that," exclaimed several at once.

"No? but the law says otherwise. In its esteem you are all accomplices, and the penalty awarded to one will be awarded to all. What do you say now? Do you retract?"

"All we desire is the more equal distribution of authority," replied Harvey; "and, as to the rest, that too hard a hand may not rest upon those who may occasionally seek to interpret our laws to their own advantage—for God having given every man a

right to his share of the soil, it is no more than just that those who would monopolize it should be made to pay forfeit."

"Be it as you will. My darling object defeated, I have no other. The authority you dispute back to me I devolve to my son. As for me, I am old, and have nothing to do but to quickly pass from the scene of my much disappointment and sorrows."

"But will your son accept?"

"For all good purposes I am with you still," said Ezra. "You know me too well to believe that I could act otherwise. The wrongs inflicted upon our kith and kin shall be punished to the full measure in their time and order, nor with my consent shall foot of stranger press the fruitful soil nature and the laws have given us as a heritage. Now to less serious matters. The Indian tells us of a royal stag of ten he met just now in the forest, and where there are one there are more, or my woodcraft fails me. Who's for the chase?"

A unanimous snort called a thousand shrill responses from the nooks and recesses of the rock, at this proposition so much in accord with their feelings, and, hardly pausing to grasp the hand of their late chief, they passed without order from the cavern into the free, fresh air and joyous sunshine, leaving Hueston alone with congenial solitude and gloom. Only the erect and dusky figure of the devoted Indian—looking in his paint and trappings like some hideous idol transplanted from a temple of Hindostan—remained beside him. At length even he had vanished, and Hueston, having ordered that no one should approach, was presently left alone—alone with the corpse of Cyril.

How long he had pondered and prayed in solitude he knew not, when a swell of distant music, mingled with sounds which he knew were utterly unintelligible, caught his ear. He looked around, holding his breath, and listened intently. The solitude was appalling, and the single torch which dimly lighted the place threw a supernatural glare upon the corpse in the crypt, making it look more livid and ghostly than ever. His heart palpitated with a strange, nameless fear. No other sound but the wizar-like music and the incessant drip, drip, from the invisible roof of the vault. He had never known terror before; he owned it now—a superstitious, chilling kind of awe, under whose influence courage grew faint within. An irresistible impulse drew him toward the corpse.

"Spirit of my murdered brother," whispered Hueston, with a vague horror, "what can this sound portend?"

Slowly the corpse seemed to rise its right arm until the fingers pointed to the quarter of the cavern from which the sounds had proceeded.

Hueston snatched the torch from its niche, and, now pacing forward into the gloom, and now looking back to make cer-

tain that he was not followed, after proceeding some hundreds of yards over boulders and huge blocks of crystal, and past gaping fissures, into one of which he must have fallen had he not carried a torch, he came to a vaulted passage, which he pursued for what must have been a great distance, when the brand which he carried suddenly dropped from his grasp, and left him in utter darkness. When he again sought to advance, putting out his hand before him for guidance, a wall seemed to enclose him on every side—cold, and slippery, and oozing moisture, and slime. Some living object touched his hand and slipped away in the crevices of the rock. He shrank involuntarily and again advanced, determined to combat the malicious influence which had lately taken so much delight in tormenting him.

His position was now really perilous. The silence was painful, and the chance of groping his way back without accident was very slender.

As the prospect of perishing alone and in such a place was not to his liking, he put out his hands once more, and was relieved to find that at least one avenue of escape was open to him. An hour passed, and still he seemed confined to the contracted passage he had entered. It appeared to grow narrower every moment. Just then a light attracted his attention. With the same care he pushed onward as before, and presently came to a crevice in the rock, from which proceeded the ray, and also the singular sounds that had guided him thither.

Hueston had groped his way to the rear of the hovel where Snook was in the habit of holding his interviews with the spirits, and, if rumor spoke truly, with creatures of less ethereal mould and more worldly proclivities. This crevice in the soft, limestone rock he soon widened by the removal of a stone, and squeezing through with some difficulty, found himself unexpectedly among the paraphernalia of the medium. Several of his confederates, blowing French horns and rasping lean fiddles, or torturing a drum and an accordion by the light of a flaring dip, were as much astonished as if a real spectre had risen from under their feet, but, as Hueston did not exhibit any similar surprise—merely placidly his fingers upon his lips as he stepped by them—they very naturally supposed him to be in the secret; else how could he have been there?

The rest of the occurrences of that day have been duly set forth in a former chapter. One result of this last flight of Hueston's disordered fancy was the total breaking up of the original organization, but in its place arose a new fraternity, freed from all the religious asceticism and mysterious observance by which for so many years Hueston had maintained his ascendancy over them

and still upholding the right of the proselytes to the most unlimited freedom within the pleasant domain whereon they were bred and which they had been taught to believe that unscrupulous men were intent to resist. The support of the poor, the aidance of oppressed and the relief of the needy were cardinal points, of their creed, while the persecution of the oppressor or the stranger who came within their lines as intending to do them harm, even to the extent of obliging him to disgorge that of which it was known he had defrauded others, was enjoined as not only a right, but a duty.

Henceforth their haunts were the sylvan shades that bordered the lake and studded the mountain side. Their gatherings were held in secret spots unnoted by Hueston, who buried his brother's corpse in the innermost recesses of the cave. It was many days ere he visited it again. By his orders the Indian rolled the rock which once closed it into the pool beneath, and the grottoes whose secrets were thus for the first time unveiled soon became a favorite resort of the curiosity seeker.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AN UNWARRANTED PERVERSION OF THE GREAT HARMONIA.

A few days subsequent to the eclatissement consequent upon Hueston's sudden appearance among the mummers at the gathering on the Pine Barrens, and his no less unaccountable disappearance therefrom, three persons were seated in earnest consultation round a table in the library of Judge Cameron. One was the magistrate himself, another was the philosopher Magnus Garstacker, and the third assumed the fleshly proportions of the medium, Jonathan Snook. Had this interview taken place within the common knowledge, the public might have exhibited some curiosity to know what two of the most influential men in the township could have had to say to bring them into such intimate relation, with a character so notorious as Snook. At this interesting juncture late would so have it that Agnes Cameron—as yet unaware of the terrible sacrifice that was to be demanded of her for the purpose of sustaining the corrupt magistrate and his confederates in their nefarious designs—should be at that moment engaged with her tambour frame and her troubles behind that very screen within shelter of which she had listened to the original conversation between her father and Magnus Garstacker with regard to the Calthorpes; and which divided the larger apartment from a small bay window commanding a view of her father's gardens, and



the silvery lake with its fringe of blue mountains beyond.

At first her natural impulse was to retire; then, as her own name caught her unwilling ear, she sank back into her seat, more dead than alive from a dread of the revelations that she doubted not were coming forth. This action was her preservation, for Cameron, coming to the screen just as Agnes had fallen into the shadow of the drapery, and casting a hasty glance behind, seemed satisfied that there were no listeners about, and returned to the table.

"It is for his sake only," thought Agnes, "that I turn eavesdropper; and why should a girl's dread of the world's censure deter me from even worse extremes?"

The unmistakable tones of Jonathan, without the nasal drawl, were the first that she heard distinctly, and it was a source of mingled gratification and pain to Agnes that she was now beginning to ascertain who were her father's accomplices.

"It is a hazardous scheme," said the medium, apparently in reply to some proposal which had been laid before him by the others; and, there being now no occasion for disguise, the rustic manner he had previously assumed was dropped; "in entering upon so bold an undertaking it will not do to conceal from ourselves the peril that will environ us at every step. For although those who have investigated the subject at all know that our theory is based upon truth, yet mediums, as well as other folks, are sometimes obliged, in order to compass their views, to resort to trickery. If in the course of the attempt to mold them to our will, the spirits should grow fractious—"

At this the philosopher Magnus laughed outright, while Cameron flushed up like an insulted gamecock.

"Master Snook!" quoth the magistrate admonishingly.

"I am listening, sir."

"Do you see anything about me," asked the magistrate, "looking the medium steadily in the face, to induce a suspicion that I am more credulously inclined than most persons?"

"O, no, my dear sir, by no means," replied Jonathan, as obsequiously as before, and rubbing his hands while making the most of every syllable.

"Then, pray sir, favor me by abandoning this nonsense and coming at once to the point."

"I am doing so, gentlemen, as rapidly as possible; but I must be allowed my own mode of proceeding, or, really, there will be no getting on at all."

"You talk like an adept, sir, who believes in his art," said Magnus, "and whom exposure but strengthens in his convictions. How beautiful is faith!"

"I appreciate the irony, gentlemen," but you with pardon me," said Jonathan, with

a rising color in his face, "if on a theme in which I am so deeply interested," (here Mr. Cameron jingled the loose change in his pocket) "my tongue outruns my discretion and your patience. My friends, you are both of you prudent and far-seeing men. What if this little scheme of ours should secure the consummation of our purposes, but kill the innocent instrument?"

"Pshaw!" replied Cameron, taking a swallow of brandy to drown the unpalatable thought; "if you mean Aggie, she's no chicken—slender as she looks."

"Our friend, Snook, here, is growing conscientious," grinned Doctor Magnus with one of his satanic sneers.

"I am not, thanks to an early acquaintance with vice of all sorts, I never was! I merely wished to place before your eyes, if you had not weighed them already, the full consequences of this step, so that there be no backing out in the future."

"Who would think," said the Justice to his appealing confidante, "who would think, while undergoing all this, that he was listening to as accomplished a rascal as ever went unhung?"

"There's a vacancy, just now, in the parish, or will be shortly," said Magnus, "and I shall cheerfully recommend our friend, Jonathan for the post."

"I may," said Jonathan, "one day seek that elevation."

"Or some other—one you are sure of!" said Cameron, pointedly.

"My time is nearly up," remarked Magnus, glancing at his watch, "I have an important analysis to make before three. You have our proposition before you. Say the word—are you to be with us or against us, in this business?"

"Your scheme is an excellent one," rejoined Snook, "and shall have my ardent co-operation."

"In spite of the uncertainties of the future?" asked Magnus, with an attempt at sarcasm.

"In spite of the powers internal and supernal!" returned Jonathan, almost fiercely. "When the father of sins has an object to accomplish he seldom lacks instruments, and I'll find confederates enough, I'll warrant you."

"From what part of the realms of darkness will you fetch them?" asked Cameron, affecting raillery.

"They shall be of more corporeal mould," was the reply: "what say you to the late associates of the amiable cynic, Hueston?"

"Faugh! impacticable; a pack of mad-brained theorists," rejoined Cameron.

"You do them less than justice; they are almost worthy, in point of rascality, to sit on the same bench with ourselves. The mysterious league has disbanded, the old cushion-thumper, they say, has gone madder than ever, and shuts himself up in his

castle. In short, I have out-manceuvred him, and his forces are now virtually at my command. Without making confidants of them, we can use them in many ways for the forwarding of our purposes. There's nothing like fraternization, my boy! What say, friend Cameron, to a seat in Congress?"

"To Congress? Ha! ha! ha!"

"Don't laugh—you shall go there, if you like, sir."

"Shall I, really?"

"You shall! You might be president, if you prefer it, but follow my system. You pay your money and you take your choice!"

"How I admire your self-abnegation, exclaimed Cameron, "not to take it yourself!"

"Hueston still survives," pursued Jonathan, ruminating, "and he is —"

"Everybody's master, one would suppose, to hear people talk of him," growled the Doctor; "but let him be careful."

"Everything is to be feared from those Huestons," said Jonathan thoughtfully. Nothing would be easier than for them to spoil our pretty scheme if they got wind of it. We must get them quietly out of the way, and I think I have a plan that will answer the purpose. We have work before us, I can tell you, and enough of it. Fortunately, there are plenty of men of influential character but tender intellects, who can be made unconsciously to aid our views, and the number of those who possess great talents combined with an utter want of principle is quite in proportion. These we must pay. A number of well managed displays in the supernatural line will attract the thoughtless, and a few exaggerating letters with good indorsements will lend an air of credibility to the whole. This will set the ball in motion, and while it puts money in our purses, will blind the Calthorpes as to our ultimate object. Of course you must furnish me with plenty of funds to begin with, and I depend upon your promise that Miss Cameron shall be our High Priestess. Nothing could be

done without her, and even should she be inclined to play us false, we have still a surety for her ultimate faith in her romantic attachment for the younger Hueston." ("Are you there?" thought Agnes, as a new light suddenly flashed upon her, and a feeling of positive triumph took the place of her late terrors and misgivings; "I thank you for the hint, and may Providence enable me to improve it.") "Where the affair will stop," continued Snook, "there is no telling, but our success, I think, is tolerably assured."

The conversation which Agnes had fortunately overheard afforded her much food for serious reflection. Whatever might be the result of the game these men were playing, her own ruin seemed certain. There appeared, therefore, but one course left for her to pursue, and in silently making out her plans for the future, although she was fully conscious of the sacrifice that she was required to make, she did not waver. As it was not a part of her father's policy to acquaint her with the nature of his views she was spared the pain of listening to the confession of unworthy motives from the lips of a parent; the latter placing his project upon such a footing in their subsequent conversations upon the subject, as to make it appear that through her acquiescence in his measures, and through that alone, could his ruin at the hands of Gershom Calthorpe be averted. His manner was so plausible that had she not heard the dialogue just narrated, she must have been convinced in her own despite. His surprise and gratification were equal when in reply to his admonitions he heard her say, "It is my duty to obey you, sir. When the hour of trial comes Agnes Cameron shall not be found wanting."

The philosopher, on the contrary, shook his head when the result was made known to him, and expressed it as his belief that so much alacrity on the part of that young lady was very suspicious.

## CHAPTER XX.

## A PROPOSAL.

The thickening mysteries of which Agnes Cameron had gradually become the centre exercised, as might naturally be supposed, an enervating effect upon a brain already exhausted by previous trials, and the poor girl was finally prostrated by a fever, in the height of which her dreams were filled with visions, and forms from the unseen world appeared to come and go like shadows before her unsteady sight. But nature asserted her supremacy, and at the expiration of a week Agnes was considered sufficiently convalescent to leave the sick room and receive the congratulations of her acquaintances. A heightened color and a slight trembling of the hand were all that remained to tell of the danger she had escaped. This state of affairs was fated to a serious interruption. One morning there loomed upon the people of Excelsior a youth whose apparition, as he rode about the village, excited an unusual sensation among the gossips. He wore, this young man, a coat with enormous collar and huge funnel sleeves, to which the tapering skirts, by some called swallow-tails, were ludicrously disproportioned; a cravat with fringes like those on a lady's parasol, a pair of cross-barred leggings—they were too stunted and too short for pantaloons—and boots about as large as baby socks, while his 'Hyperion brow,' which still retained the fishlike expression that had characterized it in its infancy, was overshadowed by one of the most imposing specimens of the conventional style of hat. A telescope would also have revealed a slight mustache and a little duck of a mouth into which, with his eyes shut, he might have defied you to pop a sugar-plum. This youth's reception was flattering in the extreme, especially as he was reported to be amply endowed with wealth. It was, as might be conjectured, Stacy Calthorpe, who had confessedly visited Excelsior with the view of depriving that spot of its loveliest ornament in the person of Miss Agnes Cameron, whom he was to bear away to a distant city as his bride. Huge was the indignation excited thereupon, and many were the schemes that were put in agitation to prevent so unwelcome an issue. Mr. Cameron could not resist so inviting an offer, and the preparations for the wedding were hurried forward secretly, but with unprecedented dispatch. The judge's associates were judiciously kept as long as possible in the dark. Agnes herself knew nothing of the arrangement until it was gently broached to her by her duenna. Her heart almost ceased to beat, and her features were like those of a statue as she listened. By degrees a sickly smile broke over her faded countenance. "It matters little how

they propose to dispose of me," she answered; "my hand, I fear, is claimed by a bridegroom whose demands are yet more urgent, and who will not be denied."

Young Stacy Calthorpe, although at home in what he called "genteel society," was considerably embarrassed when he waited on Agnes in person to acquaint her with the full extent of the honors that were in store for her, but as she did not appear at all surprised or confused, and as, in fact, she did not at first reply to him at all, further than might be conveyed in slight inclinations of the head and in monosyllables to which no meaning could be imputed, he grew himself more confident, and drew, as he proceeded, a brilliant picture of the life she would lead in the great city of Gotham, to which he would at once convey her as Mrs. Calthorpe, including the opera and the fashionable follies of Fifth avenue, which he described like an auctioneer. But the lady, for some cause, did not appear at all overjoyed at this fanciful reproduction of the joys that awaited her. She did not attach any very lofty value to wealth, and it such had been the case, Stacy Calthorpe was not a Cæsar.

"Your circumstances, Mr. Stacy Calthorpe, it is needless to detail," said Agnes, quietly, in reply. "With your transcendent merits, also, I am well acquainted. It is not requisite that you should dwell upon them with me. But have you properly considered the step you would take?"

"Of course; I know folks will say I am throwing myself away, and all that, but do you s'pose I'd have made you the offer if I hadn't considered? As to your ill health, you know—why—you know, that's fashionable—all women of high connexion are out of sorts almost always, but somehow the doctors continue to keep 'em a-going."

"I hear, sir," said Agnes, smiling in spite of her painful position. "But are you aware of the qualifications that should be possessed by every true woman who aspires to the title of wife?"

"O, of course—piano, a little French, a little Italian, crochet work, polka, the German, Stewart's."

"A wife, Mr. Stacy Calthorpe," said Agnes, gravely, "should bring to her husband for her best dower capabilities and affections suited to the station in life to which he would call her. She should be sufficiently unencumbered with domestic ties to relinquish without a murmur the friends and associations of her youth for those of the new sphere upon which she is required to enter. Above all, she should possess an unclouded mind and a pliant will that can bend on all occasions to that of the man with whom she has interwoven her destiny. The glitter of gold is at the best a deceit, which dazzles and mortifies our neighbors while it does not materially contribute to our own happiness, but the smile

of affection is the heart's true sunshine—better than wealth, or fame, or power—and without which the costliest mansion is nothing more than a gilded sepulchre."

"Hang'd if she can't out-talk our whole coterie!" thought Stacy, in ecstasy. "O," he said, "we shall get along well enough; there is nothing easier. All that's necessary is to do what everybody else does under the circumstances—it's impossible to go wrong. We're all in the same boat—but, I beg pardon—you don't admire the water."

"There is another thing," she continued, as seriously as before; "a wife should love her husband with an undivided affection, and, Mr. Stacy Calthorpe, I do not love you!"

"Pooh! that's nothing!" he rejoined. "At home we don't consider that an obstacle. In fact, we have separate rooms, and it is etiquette to see each other as seldom as possible; so seldom that—well, you know, it's a mere social compact, and—a—you see, Miss Cameron, the fact is—I know what I mean, but I'm no talker, and that's the long and short of it."

"We will waive that point, then, and confine ourselves to matters of fact."

"Matters of fact; that's my idea precisely."

"Have you, then, Mr. Stacy Calthorpe, considered sufficiently what are the duties of a husband toward his wife?"

"Yes—plenty of money, I suppose—carriage, op'ra-box, shopping—trot the bills—no intermeddling with domestic arrangements—no grumbling—all that!"

"And is it in this way, sir, that your father has passed through life?" asked Agnes, indignantly.

"Precisely! He never intertered with the old woman. Begad, if he did he'd never ahead the last of it!"

To prolong such a conversation would have been useless; to appeal to his generosity, Agnes felt, would be equally so. She resolved to be candid with him, as the only alternative.

"I am still afraid that we do not understand each other, but if any deception has been used, you shall not, at any rate, have an excuse for blaming me. This proposed union, then, of which I never heard until this morning, is so opposed to my own wishes that I should look even upon death as a welcome deliverance from such a thralldom."

"Your father never told me so," answered Stacy; "I'll swear he told me only this morning that you were dying with love for me—he did, upon my word!"

"And you believed him?"

"Of course I did. It is not often that a young man of my position and prospects has to woo in vain. If there is any condemnation in the case I know which side it doesn't lie on."

"Enough of this, sir; you see I am ill; pray spare me."

"O, I don't want to bore anybody. I guess I can find some people that won't consider my conversation tedious; but, as for old Cameron—if I don't give him a sample of my opinion before I go back."

He brought up here very suddenly, for Agnes, uttering a low groan, and pressing her hand upon her heart, sank back upon the sofa. At the same moment nurse Dunderberg entered, pale and collected, but without a shadow of surprise on her face. She had noted the interruption, and knew too well what it portended. She was followed by Judge Cameron, to whom Stacy immediately imparted his griefs.

"Never mind," he said, as Agnes, leaning on the arm of Mrs. Dunderberg, slowly left the apartment; "you're a man of spirit and ambition, and you shall have her yet!"

In spite of Mr. Cameron's assurance, it was becoming alarmingly probable, however, that the threatened nuptials would never be consummated. A wiser power than man's had taken the matter into his keeping. From the moment of the conversation recorded in the pages preceding, the intended victim began to sink with a rapidity that foreboded her speedy dissolution. Seeing, at last, that there was no hope for him, Stacy, after an ineffectual endeavor to prevail upon his father to accompany him, packed up his valise in a "buff" and departed for the city, intending to carry back with him the deeds and papers which had so nearly fallen into Cameron's clutches. They were contained in a wallet which Stacy always wore about his person, and he had never permitted a doubt as to their perfect security to cross his mind. His dismay, when he found that this precious packet was missing can be but faintly imagined. In vain he scoured the neighborhood in the hope of recovering them, not daring in the meanwhile to acquaint his father with his loss; they were not to be found, and the operation of "putting screws" to Cameron was invariably postponed.

"Never mind," thought Stacy, "if we don't recover them there will be so much litigation saved, and who knows that the entire section is worth the lawyer's fees it would cost us to obtain?"

So, instead of returning and acquainting his father with the facts, he pursued his homeward journey, wisely concluding to intrust his confidences to a letter at the nearest post-town, by which proceeding he would save both his father's reproaches and the renewal of certain unpleasant scenes with Mr. Cameron.

Now, indeed that personage sought to soothe his stricken child with the news of Stacy's departure—making a virtue of the disclosure, as though the match had been broken off by himself, in compliance with her wishes; but it was too late! The



heart that was all love and tenderness—that had repaid his neglect and ill-treatment with unvarying affection, seemed crushed forever. She lingered slowly, like some drooping flower hovering between life and death through its brief Indian Summer, growing daily more attenuated, and yet not uttering complaint or murmur. Her thoughts wandered, it was evident, and in her abstraction the power of speech seemed suspended. Her mother was the only person about her whom she recognized. When addressed by her, Agnes would put her disordered hair back from her altered face, and, gazing upon her for a moment with every sign of affection, would suffer her head to subside upon the bosom which had sheltered her when a child—an attitude in which she would remain for hours. Once again was Ezra Hueston freely admitted—more in the hope that the sight of her childhood's acquaintance might prevent a total aberration of intellect rather than out of any disposition to favor him; yet a mother could not have exhibited more affection for her child than was exhibited by Mrs. Cameron for Ezra Hueston. No words were interchanged between the lovers; the frail victim only pressed his hand against her heart, and gazed into his eyes with a look so intense, and yet so powerful, that the tears would start despite his efforts to restrain them. As he bent over the delicate, wasted creature that clung so confidently to him, as though in his presence the one sole joy of her life had been consummated, there was no use for words. The eyes have a language of their own far more eloquent than the most honeyed phrases, and Mrs. Cameron would not for worlds have interrupted them. In Ezra Hueston's esteem, Agnes had won by her misfortunes a tenfold claim upon his regard, and if he had loved her before, he all but worshiped her now. The interview was a short one, measured by moment's alone, but, brief as it was, they had obtained a better insight into each other's hearts than years of intimacy had revealed to them. The precarious cobdion of his only child effected in Mr. Cameron's mind, for the time, a change of purpose with regard to Ezra which had hitherto never entered into his calculations, and young Hueston was daily granted an interview as the sole means of preserving his daughter's life. This did not at all involve a change in his views with regard to Hueston, his secret dread of whom was daily increasing.

It was Snook who had managed to acquaint himself with the secrets of the brotherhood, and to depose the elder Hueston. Opening to them by degrees, by appeals to a passion, which more or less actuates all men—the greed of gain—a prospect of boundless riches, he readily succeeded in drawing within his influence the ruder and more numerous portion of the visionary

crew, who preferred to embrace a new leader like Cameron, whose weight in the outer world would enable them to practice without fear of detection or punishment such illicit acts as might lead to the general aggrandizement of the members—a minor division, owing to consciences more tender, preferring to associate still with the son of their former chief.

The consciousness that his star was in the descendant made Hueston more gloomy and morose than ever, and he fretted as much under the ascendancy of his son as beneath the insidious manœuvres of his enemies. His old excitement was dying out, and he was becoming cross and querulous. He even once accused his son of being secretly leagued with his enemies, inasmuch as the influence of the Camerons over him was apparently greater than his own.

Thus situated, Ezra's position was truly embarrassing, for as yet the culpability of Cameron was more a matter of theory than proof, at least in as far as related to his father's most serious wrong.

As for Hueston he had apparently lost all faith in his kind. Vainly did he seek to question his fate through the shadowy familiars from whom he had once been wont to derive consolation under his trials. With the ingenuity of approaching madness, he attributed their desertion of him to his momentary weakness in his last interview with one whom he had marked as the destroyer of his race, and he resolved henceforth to steel his heart against all such unworthy emotions. At times he would stroll off to a great distance, under what he termed the spiritual influence (and a vexatious and mischievous spirit it must have been which could have led him into such a labyrinth of doubts and perplexities), and after days would return, ragged and covered with wounds from the briars through which he had torn his way, and bruised by the rocks over which he had fallen—the ever faithful Indian finding it difficult to keep up with him in his wanderings. Had it not been for the Indian, in fact, Gilbert would have starved, for his skill as a marksman had altogether left him, and his eyesight was daily becoming more impaired. It was on one of these occasions that Hueston, arising in the night and stepping softly over the figure of the slumbering Indian, was miles beyond recall before either George or Ezra knew of his departure. Apprehensive for his father's safety, the latter hastily started in pursuit, taking that trail through the forest with which he was best acquainted, while George proceeded to explore the most intricate places.

All that day Agnes seemed strangely disturbed, constantly putting back her hair to listen for those footsteps that had become to her as familiar as the throbbing of her own heart. As hours on hours glided by and came no Ezra, she grew more strangely

agitated, and for once even the soothing and caresses of her mother failed to restore her to her usual quietude. That night the old infirmity came back with tenfold violence. Overcome by anxiety and long watching the nurse, Dunderberg, had fallen asleep in her chair; Mrs. Cameron had already preceded her in the adjoining chamber, and when she awoke in the morning to look after her charge, Agnes was not to be seen.

All the surrounding dwellers, and more besides, were immediately out in search of the missing girl. Some assumed to be wise, and set the occurrence down as one of the consequences of tampering with forbidden subjects, but none withheld their sympathy from the reputed victim of these sacrilegious proceedings. The search that day was a vain one; and the next, and yet a third were passed without any clue being obtained to her whereabouts, until the conviction at last began to obtain ground that she had thrown herself into the lake in one of those fits of mental aberration to which her father now acknowledged she had been subject.

On the disappearance of Agnes the town-ship was inundated with rumors, and, although the story of Stacy's disappointment was notorious, it was everywhere confidently asserted that the refusal had come from the father against the young lady's wishes, and that the lovers had compromised the matter by an elopement. Of course, nine-tenths of the young spinsters "always thought she was an artful, designing creature," while the young gallants could not see what she could admire in such a "specimen" as Stacy Calthorpe.

Presently came letters from home, with anxious inquiries from Stacy, and as days flew by and no tidings were received of him, the family became seriously alarmed. Heavy rewards were offered and parties sent out to search the county thoroughly. Mr. Cameron was not sorry to be thus unexpectedly relieved of the most formidable impediment in the way of his plans against Gershom, but as his duty as a magistrate might have cast suspicion upon his conduct had he remained quiescent, he began to thresh about him as energetically as the most active—until a quiet admonition from Doctor Nightshade caused him to change his tactics. Whatever the reason might have been, Judge Cameron suddenly took to a series of operations which only embarrassed the officers and others engaged in the search. In the meantime, Ezra Hueston and a small but energetic party, including Paul Arden, were diligently engaged in the search for Agnes, when the discovery of Stacy's clothes on the margin of the lake, where his horse was also found wandering, seemed to account satisfactorily for his absence, and, as far as he was concerned, all uncertainty subsided.

The whereabouts of the remaining actor in the mystery became now the absorbing point of interest, and the name of Hueston was as usual becoming mingled with the popular surmises, when Agnes returned as mysteriously as she had departed, and the chief concern now centred in the fate of Stacy Calthorpe.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### PRINCIPLE VERSUS PRACTICE.

Under ordinary circumstances the excitement attendant upon Stacy's disappearance would have abated upon the discovery of the garments belonging to the missing man and the restoration of Agnes Cameron, but the discovery of blood spots upon her attire—simply accounted for by the wounds she had received from the briars during her fresh wanderings—and some incoherent expressions which fell from her lips with regard to Stacy, rekindled the suspicions of those who overheard her, and led to a renewal of the search; Gershom asserting that his son had taken with him some three thousand dollars in cash, besides papers of great importance, and that he had been waylaid and murdered for these by some one well acquainted with the circumstances. The fact of the clothes being found, and not the money, seemed to the old man proof conclusive.

Although his host would have been rejoiced to hear that no extreme measures had been resorted to in regard to Stacy Calthorpe, yet the possibility of the papers being destroyed by which alone Gershom could deprive him of the property of which he had so long been undisputed master relieved him not a little. For, whoever it might be that retained them, the risk that he would run of being accused as the murderer would effectually repress any attempt to dispose of them. The magistrate's doubts and surmises were partially allayed one morning by Jonathan Snook, who had just returned from a trip to the distant settlements, and who confidentially disclosed the fact that he was the possessor of the missing documents.

"Now," said Jonathan, "I hold the cards. What will you give me for a quit-tance?"

"Um—that's according to circumstances," replied Mr. Cameron. "What's your figure?"

"One-half the value of these papers—nothing less."

"You had better say all, at once! Take them, in the devil's name, if you covet them. It's a dirty business, and it's the part of a

prudent man to eschew pitch, you know, lest he may be derided."

"What should I do with them?" asked Jonathan.

"Ay, that's it—what should you?"

"On the other hand, their value to you is evident. Once in secure possession of those papers, no swearing would be hard enough to shake you out of the property."

"I have sufficient to purchase them at the claimant's valuation should it come to the adverse decision, I think," replied Cameron, coolly; "but I may have other views which I do not disclose to every one that seeks my confidence. No—I'll not bother with them, nor with you, either."

"Mr. Cameron!" exclaimed Snook, in surprise, "you must surely have forgotten a conversation that transpired between us in this very apartment a few days since."

"Conversation? What conversation can you allude to? I confess I don't exactly—"

"Why," said Jonathan, indignantly, "you ain't going to deny that, only last Saturday week, you made the most liberal offers if I would only obtain for you these very papers from old Gershom? This is not the fair thing, my dear sir," and Jonathan looked the picture of injured innocence.

"Offers? Why, Mr. Snook, have you altogether taken leave of your senses?"

"I guess not," replied Snook, doggedly, and putting the papers in his pocket again. "I know a thing or two, and before this matter's settled we'll see who stands highest in this community."

"Mr. Snook, I must request you to remain," said Mr. Cameron, authoritatively, as the former rose to depart.

"Indeed!" sneered the medium. "I'm sorry to be compelled to decline your invitation."

"I don't invite," retorted Cameron; "I insist! You forget I am a magistrate."

"A precious magistrate! If every one had his own, Lord knows who wouldn't be picking oakum this moment."

"You grow insulting, Mr. Snook."

"It's always the way," rejoined Snook, "with those that hold the winning cards. I have only to hand these papers over to Gershom Calthorpe to insure a handsome reward."

"And to insure your being laid by the heels as a common assassin!"

"Assassin?" rejoined Snook, turning pale. "Why, what do you mean?"

"O, it's my turn now, is it? Answer me one question, sir, and instantly, Where did you get those papers?"

"O, you needn't look so domineering at me," answered Snook, evidently much alarmed by Cameron's manner; "I'm not to be scared by a frown or a few sharp words."

"Will you tell me where you obtained those papers?" asked the magistrate, reach-

ing his hand toward the bell rope, "or shall I summon aid?"

"Well, then—hang it!—I found them."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" roared Cameron, throwing himself back and yielding to an explosive roar of laughter. "That's about the most ingenious excuse—why, Snook, bless me! now I look again, you're at least five-and-twenty years younger than when I last saw you!"

"I don't see anything so amusing in it. I did find them, and that's the truth on't."

"H'm! Did you find Mr. Stacy Calthorpe at the same time, then?"

"Find Stacy Calthorpe? What can you be driving at?"

"O, nothing—a matter of no importance, Young Calthorpe is supposed to have been murdered, that's all, and as you have his budget, why—"

"Murdered!" exclaimed Snook, drawing forth the wallet and casting it to the farthest corner of the room. "I am as innocent of that as the child unborn. Everybody knows I have been absent."

"Yes; you went away on the same day that Stacy Calthorpe took his departure, and, unfortunately, just two hours after him. You followed the selfsame road, too, and ill-natured people might say you did it purposely, in order that he might get a fair start of you."

"All this I solemnly swear I knew nothing of till this moment. I did not know that he was leaving the Summit, and the discovery of that wallet, which he must have dropped on his way, was the first intimation I had that Stacy had been near me."

"This may be the case, but in a court of justice, you will permit me to tell you, such evidence would not be worth a rush."

"Well—you're too sharp for me this time; keep the papers for nothing. But, rely upon it, I shall be even with you one of these days, or my name is not Snook."

"Well said! and as you know very well, and I know very well, that such is not your name, the condition fails, of course. Mr. Jonathan Snook, or whatever you call yourself, none better knows than you that I have only to breathe your true name to the next in authority, and half a dozen jails in as many different States would immediately solicit the honor of your company."

"You will make no disclosures, though, whatever you may say to frighten me," said Snook, regaining his composure. "As for the papers, I have told you the true story as regard them, and my conscience is easy. I am a rogue, I confess, but so are thousands whose robes of office afford them a ready cloak for their villainies. A murderer I am not. The very sight of blood gives me the ague."

"You abandon these documents to me, then?"

"Yes, I must, I suppose, for I see you covet them. As for any disclosures you

may make, I have no fear. The revelations which I might make by way of retaliation would more than balance the account."

"Stay and try some wine," said Cameron, with affected nonchalance, as he took up the wallet. "Our friendship is of too old a date to be severed in this abrupt manner."

And, placing the packet of papers in the centre of the grate, he held it there with the poker while it rapidly wasted to ashes.

"There—that disposes of one bone of contention, at all events! And now, Jonathan—honestly, man—what did you do with the cool three thousand, eh?"

"Cool cucumbers!" ejaculated Snook; "you don't say he had that much about him, do you?"

"Indeed, I do!"

"O, fool! fool! fool!" exclaimed Snook, with a look of great disappointment.

"Who—yourself, or Stacy?"

"And I might have had it—that is, we might have had it just as well as not!"

"Even at the risk of getting the ague?" inquired Cameron, maliciously.

"Three thousand is a large stake to play for, and would justify some sacrifices," replied Snook; "but I'm glad I did not meet him. You have the only spoil I took. Send me, or bring me to-morrow a check for a hundred or so. It is not much, and will serve as a new soldering to the 'old friendship' you know. So, good-day to you."

"This is a triumph!" murmured Cameron, in a transport, as he beheld the wallet and its contents gradually resolving themselves into nothing before his eyes. "Old Gershom may now go forth, and welcome. Yet, stay—that would be hardly hospitable. He bleeds freely yet, thanks to his own superstitious credulity, and it would scarcely be right to deprive the old man of his humor. Then, so long as we are the gainers, why, let him spend; he's pretty sure to be first to tire of the sport, and, whether young or old, the man that wishes to get experience must pay for it. My dear friend!" he suddenly exclaimed, as Gershom popped in unannounced, "I was thinking of you this moment. How's your rheumatiz?"

"O, better, a great deal better, thanks to your unswerving hospitality," replied Gershom, who looked very feeble. "I never knew what it was to have a brother till I knew you, and now I am sure I shall prize you more dearly than ever."

As he spoke, he tossed upon the table before Cameron a letter, just received from the city and sealed with black.

"Another death in your family, my dear Gershom! These are sad bereavements."

"Yes—sad, very sad. Only a few days ago a son, and now a wife. Hereafter my old home is distasteful to me. I am too old, I fear, for fashionable company, and having only a daughter left me, why, she shall come up here. You may do as you will

with the property, and we'll abide together, please God, for the remainder of my earthly journey."

"My poor, sorrow-stricken friend!" murmured Cameron, covering his face with his handkerchief.

"What overpowering emotion!" ejaculated Gershom, in admiration. "My own flesh and blood never exhibited half so much for me. What's all this you've been burning?" he inquired, absently. "Papers? Always deep in the mysteries of the law, eh?"

"Yes—deep, deep!" rejoined Cameron, suddenly seizing the poker and jamming the remains of the packet into the live coals.

"If I were to allow my business documents to accumulate on my hands, my affairs would be thrown into sad confusion."

"Any news of the pocketbook—I should say, of Stacy?" asked Gershom, provoked by this into a new train of thought.

"None—none whatever. Notwithstanding I have had parties out in every direction, and have offered extraordinary inducements, as yet, I regret to say, no traces have been discovered."

"Tis a pity," said Gershom, ruminating; "a very great loss to me, such a sum of good money. But Stacy was always a careless dog, sir."

"Yes; you must miss him exceedingly."

"A great loss—a very heavy loss," muttered Gershom; "three thousand dollars! So much for ostentation. You don't find me going about with my pockets crammed with show money, making myself a decoy duck for thieves and cutthroats. No, indeed! A man that's so easily fleeced of his riches deserves to be fleeced of 'em."

"He does, indeed, my dear Gershom."

"Why, you or I would do the same, in a different way, if it weren't for the laws. Don't start—you know we would. Ah! to think how many respectable tricks we shrewd financiers are obliged to play! Were only your ordinary gamblers to do the same, how society would pucker up, and denounce the villains, to be sure?"

"Well it's a hard world at best, and money was made to get, or you and I, friend Gershom, might not be here sipping our wine at our ease as we do. Your daughter will visit our humble establishment, then?"

"Directly she can get ready," replied Gershom. "She knows you through my letters, and loves you like a second father already."

"H'm! Is she pretty?"

"Yes, and witty, too. A match for the sharpest of our city ladies. I can assure you. Some of them can find out the depth of a suitor's pocket before they have danced with him. If you were only a young fellow now, and unmarried!"

"I wish I was," sighed Cameron; "and for that matter I am young enough yet, but the joys of matrimony come but once in a

lifetime. By the way, Calthorpe, there's that third instalment on the Grand Junction will be paid in to-morrow. I shall hand mine in this morning to avoid confusion. As for yourself, it a few days, or even weeks, would be the slightest accommodation, why—my purse is your own; use it freely."

"I thank you," answered Gershom; "but no one can say that Gershom Calthorpe ever leaved upon his friendships when money was at issue. Here, I have my check ready—wrote it before I left my room. My memory is always equal to my engagements. One thousand five hundred, I think were the figures. Oblige me by handing this in with yours."

And he gave him his check.

"Willingly," said Cameron. "although the distance is short, and I should like your company."

"I know; but my rheumatism. O, ugh! Somehow, although it don't get worse, it don't appear to get much better, in spite of Doctor Garstacker's abilities. I shall try the chairvoyants or the water-cure next time, certainly."

It would have been singular if Gershom had recovered, considering the fact that Doctor Nightshade had been for the past five or six weeks diligently engaged in saturating the old fellow with lotions and potions, the object of which was to keep him so much reduced as to render him incapable of getting about, and to incapacitate his mind from the power of reflecting. Under this treatment the favored guest was rapidly attaining dotage."

"The doctor is a remarkable man," said Cameron; "but he has his shortcomings, and, after all, what are two or three weeks in effecting the cure of a lingering disease? Should not his present plan succeed, however, he has other resources, for he does not confine himself to any particular system."

"A most wonderful man, I should say. And now I'll go back to my Swedenborg," said Gershom, getting out of his chair rather feebly. "You don't read enough, Arthur; upon my word you don't. What a fortunate thing it is," he thought, as he hobbled out of the study—"what a fortunate thing it is to have a friend to manage one's affairs for him! Nothing to do but read and reflect—reflect and read; no more worryment, no more responsibilities. At this rate my youthful days will come back to me."

To go back a little way in our story:

Farmer Applebee's notions regarding spiritualism were none of the brightest, but this much he said, that he was neither prepared to accept nor reject the theory—regarding it as a sort of tampering with the infernal, with which the less man had to do the better. He was trudging it manfully homeward through the morass, at a late hour of the night, about the time of the supernatural visitations, when a spectral figure in white seemed to rise directly be-

fore him out of the ground. Mr. Applebee needed no more, but, putting his hat over his ears, started off at a tangent on a brisk gallop for the nearest habitation without looking behind. It so happened that a considerable party were engaged in a quilting bee at the hour specified, and the company was at the height of its mirth when Johnny Applebee, wild with affright, his eyes staring out of his head like those of a shrimp, dashed into the apartment.

"The gh-o-o-a-boo! a-hoo!" sputtered Mr. Applebee, as he tumbled headlong into the middle of the quilting-frame, carrying it to the floor, and scattering the inmates as if he had been a thunderbolt. A pale, spectral figure in white at once filled up the doorway, but the festive crowd did not wait for a further inspection, but precipitately fled.

A number of them presently returned, accompanied by a Catholic priest, who proceeded by bell, book, and candle to exorcise the ghost.

"In nomine domine, pater, filius et spiritus sanctus!" began Father Leary, in classical Latin. "I charge you, O spirit, if ye be a spirit, to come forth of your consanement, and abandon this house awthegither!"

He was answered by a vigorous pounding upon the door of the closet.

"He's a pugnacious spirit," said the father, retiring a little; "Darby, give him the bell again, and take up a collection; he wants a mass said for a sowl. Take yersel out o' this at waunst," said the padre; "Deus vult—git! Give me some whisky, Darby; me throat's dary as an empty herrin' box."

The pounding was doubled, accompanied by kicks.

"What's yer thrubble ye sowl?" asked the father. Darby, give us another sup.

"Lemme aout!" roared the ghost, in a high fit of passion, making more noise than before.

"That's no spirit, bedad," said Father Leary; "thum's good brogans, wid nails in em. Open the doore, Darby darlin', only just a wee trifle, while I howld a discoorse."

There was a crash within the closet as the priest said this, and, as the boy unclosed the door, which had been unlocked from without, a tall figure, smeared with some white material, darted out with great violence, took Father Leary off his legs, and rushed from the house, leaving a cloud of smoke as it passed.

"Saints defend us!" exclaimed the priest, "what a smell of sulphur!" It was not sulphur, in fact, but flour, a pail of which Mr. Johnny Applebee had upset over himself in making his exit.

Meanwhile the original ghost had glided noiselessly on until, somewhat after midnight, it had gained a rude stone building situated in a cleft of the hills, within a short

distance of the lakes. It was contrived like a fortress, this building, but without any windows save a small, square aperture or two, inaccessible except on one side which adjoined the slope of the hill. A lurid flame, accompanied by a dense smoke, was issuing fiercely from the chimney, giving vent at the same time to a pungent, sickening smell, and patches of greasy soot fell upon the white garments of the apparition. A reddish, flickering light flashed also through the apertures in the wall.

"Some devil's work is brewing to-night," muttered the eavesdropper, recognizing the place for the private laboratory of Doctor Nightshade; and a white form crept stealthily to the wall, and, placing a fallen branch against one of the apertures, looked within. The sight which met the eye was one of horror, which might well have unnerved a heart less accustomed to deeds of ruth and terror.

Let us for a moment turn back to Mr. Stacy Calthorpe. It will be remembered that, indignant at the rejection of his suit, he had turned his face once more in the direction of the city, proceeding on horseback and alone to the nearest railway station, with his saddle-bags well secured, determined to confide in none of the people in the neighborhood, whom he was beginning to regard with suspicion. Unfortunately, the youth mistook his way, and, as though led by his evil genius, stumbled unexpectedly upon the laboratory of Magnus Garstacker, who was at that moment engaged in splitting some wood before his own door.

"My dear young friend," suddenly exclaimed the doctor, "this is really an unexpected pleasure!"

"An accident," replied Stacy. "I started for the station, but lost my road."

"That's bad," said Magnus, "and you have so far to go. But you can rest here until the morning, as it is now getting late, and in the meantime share my supper. Then I will be your guide."

"Thanks," replied Stacy, removing his saddle-bags and entering. "What a very wild spot you have chosen!"

"Gloomy but grand," said Magnus, "and suited to the character of my studies, for you know I am a chemist. Besides, I always admired the sublime in nature."

"A capital place to cut a throat in," muttered Stacy, eyeing the doctor askance.

The room which they entered was square and uncarpeted, warmed by a large chimney-place, in which a huge fire was blazing. In the centre was a plain pine table, and on the adjacent shelves were plants and crucibles. By the fire stood an alembic. A rude repast was soon smoking upon the board, and the doctor, producing bottles and glasses, invited Stacy to make himself comfortable for the night; but had the latter witnessed the excited glare with which the

eyes of Doctor Nightshade rested upon his costly watch, his diamond breastpin and his jewels, and especially upon the plethoric pocketbook, the ends of which could be seen peering from his breast-pocket, he might not have felt so thoroughly at ease. Before an hour had passed Doctor Garstacker had possessed himself of all the little man's secrets, not even omitting the contents of his valise, the possible value of which he plainly foresaw. Stacy was merry and confiding, the wine was good, and the doctor, while he plied him liberally, was a jovial companion.

"I have a fancy for a punch," said the doctor, who was getting more taciturn as the night advanced. "Let us celebrate the occasion by abumper."

And Stacy did notice that his hand shook a little as he made the decoction, but attributed it to the frequency of his potations. As he finished the brew and poured the warm water in, a raven croaked hoarsely by the window and a passing breeze struck the solemn monitor in the belfry. The doctor jumped up with blanching cheeks.

"Rest here a while," he said, "till I return. The wind is freshening, and if it stirs the old bell, as it sometimes does, you will find it hard to sleep."

He went out, closing the door as he went.

Stacy took a deep draught of the mixture, but as he did so a fierce pain shot through his quivering heart and attacked his brain. Another and yet another. A dim revelation of the truth flashed through his bewildered mind. Could this be poison? He sprang to the door only to find it locked on the outer side. The fear had now become a certainty, and Stacy made the air resound with his shrieks. He wrestled with the latch, he pounded and threw himself with all his might against the door, calling upon Doctor Magnus for aid and mercy. Presently the cries became fainter, the blows weaker, a dull fall of some heavy body succeeded, then all was silence.

This was what the eavesdropper saw by the firelight in the laboratory of Doctor Nightshade—a square, half-furnished room, a great pine table, and a man in check sleeves, with the lineaments of Doctor Garstacker, cutting up a human body thereon. And, ever as he slashed and saved, he took from the trunk a fragment and cast it into the fire. When the task was finished the operator carefully washed the floor and table, and, gathering up the clothes and other property, made a bundle of them, peered cautiously out, and hastily strode to the lake.

The eavesdropper followed.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## STRANGE RUMORS.

Such was the condition of affairs at the Summit when the public ear began to be agitated by the rumor of certain strange and unaccountable proceedings of which that place was said to have become the theatre.

Assailed at first by the skeptics as a pre-concerted arrangement, concocted for the sole purpose of extorting money from the credulous, the wonder, nevertheless, continued to gain ground until its fame was coextensive with the civilized world. It was reported, in fact, that a young woman whose ordinary acquirements did not surpass the generality of her sex had fallen into a trance, during which she exhibited the marvelous faculty of reading what was passing in the minds of total strangers, with whom she had had no previous verbal or written communication, and also of describing events occurring at the moment in any part of the world to which those with whom she conversed might direct her attention. The gift of prophecy she seemed to possess in a remarkable degree, many of her utterances having come true within the knowledge of her questioners. Described as being naturally of a modest and retiring nature, and as having enjoyed little or no opportunity of accumulating information upon those subjects over which the prominent minds of the day were disputing, she would, nevertheless, freely quote and critically analyze the arguments of the disputants, discoursing as warmly, though not as learnedly, as the most enthusiastic debaters upon the subjects connected with the duties of life and the prevalent abuses of society. Many of those abuses she traced to their proper source—the promptings of the grosser nature, unmodified by subsequent better teachings; but by far the greater proportion she attributed to the machinations of intellects, which, incited by the predominant spirit of greed, and making a cloak of pursuits by custom rendered reputable, were devoted to the dissemination of ideas and the sowing of ill, the ultimate results and aim of which was the aggrandizement of the projectors at the expense of their dupes. Spurning, in the excess of our worldly zeal, the teachings of the purer, truer faith as embodied in Christianity, we have made to ourselves an idol of gold, which we reverence with more than the earnestness of the ancient devotee, who could go no farther than the sacrifice of life in the performance of his pagan rites, while to the god of our idolatry we offer the immortal soul.

At first Mr. Cameron professed to be highly indignant at the manner in which the privacy of his family had been invaded; but accepting the principle that, the public

curiosity once aroused, the only prudent course is to allow it to exhaust itself, which it will do the sooner the less it is interfered with, he submitted to the overrunning of his house by curiosity-seekers, intent on taking an observation of the sleeping phenomenon—the more philosophically as, adopting a hint of Doctor Garstacker's, he had succeeded in imposing a tariff of one dollar per head for thus permitting his house to be converted into a menagerie. The free-list, of course, asserted its claims, and the editor of the local paper was at once suborned as a matter of policy. Hundreds who, inspired by listless curiosity, had visited the Cameron domicile, bent upon criticising the humbug, were absolutely confounded, and went away thorough converts to the spiritualistic theory; but we do not hear that any of them experienced religion as a consequence of their conversion, or that the incorrigible race of sinners who made Wall street their thoroughfare to the gates of immortality were rendered more charitable thereby. The immediate consequence of the excitement was a rush of sensation-mongers from all parts of the country, and, the long-contemplated Grand Junction Railway having been completed at a cost of about a thousand dollars an inch to the stockholders, the confederates organized a company, had a town laid out on the borders of the lake, erected a kiosk over the pool at the Sachem's Footstool, which they christened "The Springs," erected a shambling hotel, and threw open the caverns as an additional attraction to the public. Thenceforward the tide of travel was to flow steadily thitherward.

Finding that business increased upon his hands, and that the line of deception upon which he had fairly embarked paid better than even the law, Mr. Cameron now entered fully into the projects of the crack-brained enthusiasts by whom he was surrounded. There was no miracle which these new lights, by a few simple passes of the hands and a little bungling jugglery of an inferior order, did not profess ability to accomplish; and although their delusions betrayed in the clearest manner a human invention, and a very weak human invention at that, the dupes were numerous. Even the tricks of the phantasmagoria were played off without detection, for when human beings have once set their hearts upon being humbugged they will cheerfully subject themselves to the most ridiculous fantasies. When simple Mr. Applebee, on applying his hands to the poles of a battery in Doctor Garstacker's office, found it impossible to withdraw them until after some flourishing over his head of the doctor's cane, he yielded to an implicit conviction in spirits; and when some apples which Magnus had given him began to wrestle with each other in his great-coat pocket as, at the doctor's suggestion, he stood with his back to the fire, and

finally jumped out on the floor, where they took to dancing, he was ready to go his whole pile on it. You might have talked to him afterward as much as you pleased about stuffing apples with quicksilver, but he wouldn't have believed you, not he! As it had been by this time discovered that he was an irrepressible subject, he was much in demand by the mediums, who played him with all the clever tricks in "The Magician's Own Book" without even once awaking his suspicions. When, at length, Mr. Snook, as one of the trio, asserted his ability to effect wonderful cures by the mere laying on of hands, he was resorted to by all the country round, and Doctor Garstacker declared that, as a curative agent, there was nothing equal to it in all the pharmacopoeia. When, in addition, the neighbors of former Applebee, who was a man of influence, on questioning him, were assured of his entire belief, and that the doctor had told him that there was "nothing like it in the whole cornucopia of medicine," they became converts in turn, and even fancied themselves ailing in order to submit themselves to his manipulations. Mr. Applebee took to strange ways—neglected his farm, the shutters fell from their hinges, the gates swung from their fastenings, the fences fell down, the grain rotted in the furrows, weeds predominated in the garden, and everything, as the saying is, went to wreck.

It was in vain that Mrs. Cameron besought her husband, with a countenance indicative of the mental struggle that was taking place within, to shut out from their household the spying curiosity of the world, if not for their own, for their dear daughter's sake. Money was pouring in upon them in a torrent; for to the original delusion the doctor had added his spiritual practice as a medico, and the man, whatever might have been the case with the parent, was immovable.

The trance which had fallen upon Agnes was not continuous, but commenced generally a little after noon, and lasted until the next sunrise. Outstretched upon her bed rigid and immovable as a corpse, her hands clasped upon her breast so firmly that the circulation was impeded in the veins, and the tips of the fingers about the nails were almost black from coagulation, she would lie with her eyes gazing earnestly before her, at things invisible to the bystanders, of whom, farther than to reply to their questions, she took no notice. While the spells lasted she seemed to be sustained by an unnatural excitement, during which prophecies, exhortations and warnings would fall from her lips, without the slightest apparent effort, in language as graceful and as flowing as that of the most polished of orators. During her waking hours she retained no recollection of what had transpired during her trances,

but remained in a weak and exhausted condition, taking but little nourishment and but rarely speaking, until the return of mental darkness once more sealed her eyelids. So complete was the monopoly of the trade thus initiated with clairvoyance for its basis, that several practitioners of the occult sciences who had made reputations upon the strength of being descended from some "seventh son of a seventh son," went off in high dudgeon to alter their systems, and to practice spiritualism extraordinary upon their own accounts.

The supernatural attributes of the place received additional emphasis from a little occurrence which came off about this time without previous rehearsal. As Miss Letitia Lavender, a sentimental lady of fashion just arrived at the Springs, was poring over a thrilling romance within the embowered kiosk, her eyes, momentarily uplifted, alighted upon a shadowy figure clad in aboriginal robes of the storied past, standing within the opening to the cave, and apparently gazing intently upon her. Dropping her book, she clung to a slender pillar for support. The shade descended, and as it rapidly approached, a ghostly chill came over her and she fainted just as the spirit, wildly waving its hands, glided past her, sank into the waters of the pool, and disappeared—leaving a fresh sensation for the local newspaper. Although it was only the degenerate Indian, Quiscasset, masquerading among his old haunts in his tattered finery, and who, being drunk and not seeing the occupant of the kiosk, had stooped at the spring for a draught of the cooling water and tumbled in, the Haunted Spring received a new interest from the story, and was carefully avoided thereafter by solitary sojourners—especially after dark.

Of course Doctor Garstacker took advantage of these occurrences, and it is but due to that talented and ingenious authority to say that his series of lectures upon the "Spiritual Essences in Connection with Matter," delivered before the Excelsior Debating Society, and introduced by a prayer from Rev. Jonas Hardwinkle, who had become a full convert, attracted the most enthusiastic encomiums from spell-bound audiences. Nor was the lecturer compelled to run about town with a bundle of tickets before he could get together a paying house. The doctor was the professional attendant at the bedside of the clairvoyant, and many a sucking philosopher went away from the Summit with a head so bewildered by the practitioner's high-sounding phrases that it never recovered from the confusion.

Very soon clairvoyants abounded in other quarters; there was nothing that Deity itself might compass which these exponents of a new philosophy did not impudently profess to have at their command. It is lamentable to add that they found multi-



tudes of converts to the new religion of which they were the apostles, and if in the course of their communications with the invisible world they developed the fact that the heroes of the past had been greatly over-rated—that Bacon was a mere drifter, and Aristotle and Ovid fools and dullards, the number of believers was not lessened on that account. Only once, at a private seance, it happened that Mr. Pheasant reading an original ode communicated by the spirit of Southey, a critical listener expressed surprise at the weakness of the lines.

"Just so," replied Pheasant, blushing, "you see, in emigrating to that delightful sphere, every subject renews the pristine bloom of early youth."

"How very young he must have been then!" said the commentator, innocently.

It happened one evening that, while Doctor Magnus was explaining the wonders of psychology, in his usual lucid manner, to an open-mouthed group that had gathered about the couch of his sleeping medium, old Gershom came bustling into the room in a state of excitement very much opposed to his customary quietude. Both Cameron and the doctor felt an unaccountable quaking as the widower bustled up to them, holding out a small strip of paper, which proved to be a draft in favor of Stacy Calthrope, signed by Gershom, which had been presented at New York since the disappearance, and as there were good reasons for supposing that Stacy had not parted with it voluntarily, it became evident that the discovery of the person who had offered it would lead to a solution of the mystery.

The ways of Providence are surely wonderful," said Gershom, as if he had just awakened to the conviction. "To think that, after all the trouble and expense we've been at in this affair, the only clue we have obtained should proceed from a shred of paper turned up by accident among the business documents of a broker in a far distant city."

Doctor Garstaker had not waited to hear the sequel, but, glancing at his watch with a visible agitation in his manner, muttered something about a patient, and hurried off. Now, Mr. Calthrope never entered the apartment in which Agnes was undergoing these strange experiences but that she manifested some additional excitement, and in this instance the circumstance did not escape the sharp eye of Gershom.

"See," he said, "the very sight of the paper plunges her into the sympathetic state. My word for it, she can tell us all about the transaction!"

During this speech Agnes had been growing momentarily more uneasy, shifting restlessly from one position to another, and placing her hand before her eyes as if to shut out some unpleasant sight.

"Will none stay his hand?" she muttered. "Ah! it is too late! Vain, vain will be all your searching now!"

"What do you see?" asked Calthrope, breathlessly; while Mr. Cameron, it may be believed, was not the least interested of the listeners.

"I see," whispered Agnes, whose eyes appeared to be fixed with an awful expression upon some object beyond the circle that crowded about her—"I see a vaulted room, a flickering fire, a mangled body—it is Stacy Calthrope's! And he who bends above it wields a knife which drips with clots of blood. And ever as he listens, with the guilty look of the assassin, he cuts a fragment from the ghastly corpse and flings it in the flames. How the flames leap and hiss, as though they loved the dainty shreds of flesh that replaced their coarser fare. Again—I see a lake, down by whose shore one casts a heap of garments tossed and torn—"

"We shall have it out of her yet," choked Gershom, looking, with his ashy face and quaking knees, even more like an assassin than the dreadful object portrayed. "Make a clean breast of it, my dear. The man was—"

"Hard, O, hard of heart and stern of purpose!" murmured the sleeper, as if unheeding his question. "So young, so unprepared to send him hence! You need not frown on me," she added, writhing as if to escape from some one that sought to detain her. "Your hands are cold as ice, but were they iron, one touch of these burning tissues would make them melt."

"If we could only get at the name," stammered Gershom, trembling in every limb.

"Why, this is he!" exclaimed Agnes, shrinking from Gershom with a piercing look of terror. "The same—the very same!"

"Is he the boy's father?" said Gershom, misunderstanding her. "Her mind wanders indeed, but there's some truth to be winnowed from all this, and if money can do anything—that is, in reason—"

"All will be developed in good time," interrupted Cameron, "but at present the influences are unfavorable. It is better she should rest for the night; but to-morrow—"

"To-morrow we shall count the game," chuckled Gershom, in whom desire to recover the money was as much an impelling motive as the discovery of his son's fate. "In the meanwhile, does your suspicion point to no one who may have done the deed?"

"O, no—do yours?" whispered Cameron, with one of his peculiar looks.

"In confidence, of course?"

"In confidence."

"What do you think, then, of you young Hueston?"

"Why suspect him?" asked Cameron, secretly delighted.

"For the best of reasons. In the first place he was a suitor for your daughter, and so was Stacy, whom he supposed to have cut him out."

"Very true."

"And, in the second, he is evidently poor—a sufficient motive in itself for such a proceeding. He must be the man!"

"I agree with you," said Cameron, "but for the present it will not be necessary to acquaint others with our suspicions, lest the ends of justice may be foiled by the very means we would adopt to forward them. Let us increase our vigilance while we keep our own secrets, and, in the meantime, I'll go and have a talk with Garstaker."

"Do so," replied Gershom; "I have the strongest reliance in that man's wisdom; with three heads like ours nothing can remain a mystery long."

Pursuant to his promise, Cameron forthwith rushed off to Garstaker's, but on a very different errand from that he had intimated to Gershom. The doctor had expected the visit, having gone directly to his own rooms after his abrupt departure from Cameron's, and was walking backward and forward in his study when the magistrate burst in upon him.

"So you have surmised everything," said Garstaker, between his clenched teeth; "I saw it by your eye the moment the old fool blundered in upon us."

"You should maintain a better command of your countenance," retorted Cameron. "Had you been perfectly cool and self-possessed I should have suspected nothing. And now, tell me, how did it happen? You must have gone to work shrewdly to throw even myself off the scent."

"It was an accident—entirely an accident," replied the doctor, "nothing at all premeditated it!"

The magistrate could not restrain a significant smile.

"Although accident might account for the discovery of a pocket-book, it does not account for the disappearance of its owner; whence one would infer that he had been improperly disposed of."

"What can have put such an absurd idea into your head?" retorted the doctor, with a cold shudder.

"Snook."

"Snook? ha! ha! ha!" roared the doctor, "is it possible you thought me so green? Come, you are not going to compliment me this evening, at any rate."

"No nonsense, if you please," said Mr. Cameron, somewhat nettled at the doctor's manner. "This is anything but a joking matter. Do you tell me seriously that Jonathan Snook was not concerned with you in the business?"

"Neither he nor any second party whatever," answered Garstaker. "The whole thing grew as I said, from chance. On his way homeward this little man was so unfortunate as to lose his way. Luckily, he stumbled upon my laboratory, and the thought of his pocket-book made the devil come over me. Instead of obeying the better impulse, I played the part of larcinist, and put him on a road from which he will never return. Hush! was that a footstep?"

"What if it were? You are not a coward, I hope," said Cameron, sternly.

"Coward!" retorted the doctor, with a glance of lightning.

"Hush! Aggie knows everything—you may ask her, if you like," was the quiet rejoinder.

"That girl of yours is dangerous," said Garstaker, in deep thought. "Take care that one of these odd mornings she does not come out with secrets that neither of us would care to have published."

"I have thought of a plan to prevent that," answered this model father. "Although she is almost as good as a gold-mine to us, yet it would be an act of cruelty worthy only of the most mercenary of wretches, if we allowed this public exhibition of her misfortune to go any farther. Besides, I have still some conscience, and the peril in which we place others is surely worth taking into consideration."

"Your parental uneasiness in behalf of your daughter does you honor, sir," sneered Doctor Garstaker, "but it would have been less open to suspicion had it been exerted a little earlier in the day. Tell me your plan."

"I propose hereafter, to seclude her altogether from society," was the answer. "And as you, doctor, have a widespread reputation for the treatment of those whose intellects are unsettled—"

"I comprehend fully," said the doctor, winking. "Leave Aggie to me and I'll see what can be done for her, although I greatly fear she's incurable."

"And the three thousand dollars, eh—how about that?"

"Now, really, this is not the fair thing," growled Garstaker. "I've laid all the trouble and risk so far, not to speak of future contingencies, and I certainly should have all the profit. But still, as we're partners, I'll not be hard. Take one-third, and the matter's settled."

"Make it in the form of a payment for some service rendered," replied Cameron, "and I'm satisfied."

"No you don't!" said Magnus, quickly. "You come in as particeps criminis, or, by Jove, you don't come at all!"

"Reflect. You are in my power."

"No more than you are in mine. We've perpetrated too many rascalities together, and have shielded each other too often to

betray ourselves now. I play a desperate game, I am fully aware, but I can meet its hazards. It needs be in a desperate spirit."

"So can I—so there, at least, we agree. But you should have confided in me, for, do you know, in my zeal for the apprehension of the culprits, without dreaming of your being interested, I was very near exposing you."

"It is not too late to throw them off the scent altogether, so there's no great harm inflicted. Here's the cash; and as for Miss-tress Agnes, the sooner I have her under my exclusive control the more speedy will be her chance of recovery."

"I shall depend on you doing your best," said Cameron, pocketing his share; "of course, I shan't pay you anything. The reputation that one such case will bring you is, alone, worth a fortune."

"I'm not ambitious," replied Garstacker, closing the door upon his visitor. "The game is becoming rather too interesting," he mused, as he paced his sanctum floor with anything but the air of a man at ease. "Cameron appears to know everything; Snook is mixed up with the matter also, and there's that poor witless thing with her confounded tongue. I am beginning to appreciate the value of caution. Only one more card is left me to play, and then—Arthur Cameron, your most obedient!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A BURIAL, A WEDDING, AND AN EXCITEMENT.

The arrangements for the transfer of the helpless girl whose prospects had formed the subject of the extremely disinterested dialogue just quoted to the hospitable establishment of Doctor Magnus Garstacker, were soon complete, and by the end of the week, Agnes—at first hardly conscious of the change—was quietly domesticated under the roof of the man whom of all others she held in detestation and dread—whose reformatory doctrine, ideas, and works, all performed for the good of the human race, without hope of pay or profit, had, through a judicious course of puffery in certain equally disinterested prints, by this time gained him an extended reputation. It was a bad day, that, for the cause of reform in general, and medical reform in particular, when Magnus Garstacker, with technical dignities borrowed from heaven knows where, and with about as much regard for the honor of the cloth he was disgracing as the highwayman may be supposed to cherish toward the cassock, first tacked to his name the magical letters, "M. D."—the im-

positions and quackeries of a few such pretenses as he, once detected, invariably recoiled, not upon the actual cheat, but upon the profession of which he desired to pass for an expert.

Thus far, except in the judgment of a few discriminating persons, Magnus had contrived to sustain a lofty character for both professional abilities and private virtues. And when the afflicted daughter of the village magnate was taken under his charge, the world—that is, the infinitesimal portion of it which vegetated among the rocks and ravines of Excelsior—in its first fit of enthusiasm elevated the quack into a miracle of friendship—the very pattern of sympathizing humanity and self-denial—a second *Damon*. They did not dream of the grim skeleton in the closet!

Agnes, however, was not many days in his keeping before unfavorable symptoms began to display themselves. Those who could have comforted her were shut from her presence. Her unhappy mother having fallen into a fresh quarrel with Pythias, in consequence of her opposition to her daughter's removal, had taken to her bed, and was even then lingering between life and death, a victim to the rapacity of an unfeeling husband, who had taken her only for the gold she had brought him, and that husband already making ready for another alliance, the splendor and advantages of which, he was resolved, should make up for the shortness of the first.

While things were thus trembling in the balance, the winter had come and gone like an ugly dream—at least to some parties we know of—and the first warm days of spring, when the snow had finally been dissipated by its genial breath, were made still more rosy and balmy by the arrival of Helen Calthorpe, bent upon ascertaining the motive that could have influenced her father to forego his counting-room and his business interests in behalf of the new society for which he had conceived an intuition so singular.

Helen's coming gave renewed life and warmth to those ambitious fancies which had for so long a time been germinating within that brain, so fertile in expedients, to whose workings the Calthorpe family were being indebted for its ruin. Helen was accompanied by a tall, elegantly attired personage of much mustache and side whiskers, clad in an overcoat the waist buttons of which were between his shoulders, and a jaunty traveling cap—said personage being, as he ostentatiously proclaimed himself to several with whom he had scraped acquaintance by means of his cigar case, the ally of the magnificent Helen. Two days, however, were sufficient to dampen the spirits of this fragile specimen of polished humanity. At the end of that time, having foolishly ventured out for a "day's shooting," young Doremus De Ramm—

such his aristocratic cognomen—came back to the Summit with a pair of very muddy goloshes and lips as blue as an indigo bag. The ceremonies of calling in the doctor and swallowing a few gills of quinine being gone through with Spartan fortitude, Doremus philosophically declared himself satisfied with the country, and precipitately returned to the metropolis by rail. Had he been aware of the grossly irreverent manner in which Mistress Helen had spoken of him as "only her walking stick," it is possible he might have borne his separation from his adored with even more stoicism than he constrained himself to exhibit.

Helen Calthorpe was a girl whose charms there was no denying. She was none of your gentle, quiet, sigh-away damsels was Helen; she had been cut out apparently for a heroine, and had she lived in less prosaic times, would undoubtedly have been one. Tall and robust, and yet unexceptionably molded, a sculptor could have desired no better model. She was beautiful, too, but her loveliness was of that description that most men wonder at more than they esteem. As a frame for the exhibition of a costly shawl or a superb mantilla, she possessed high claims upon the dealers in those articles, more than one of whom would have given his thousands to have seen her promenading Broadway, as aid once an unfortunate lady of treacherous memory, with "From Bulpain's," or "Bought at Brodie's," pinned to the hem of her costly robes. Everywhere she went the same sensation attended her advent, and when, by chance, in a crowded and brilliant drawing-room, amid the swell of music and the twinkling of cross-banded trowsers, this gorgeous beauty—a glowing peony among those lesser flowers—came and sat down on the sofa beside you, the air became heavy with perfume, and a mountain of silk and muslin seemed to be sinking into subsidence by your side.

To tell the truth, Gershom appeared to be somewhat afraid of his tall, forward daughter. It was in no gentle terms that, on the day of her arrival, she took him to task for his long desertion of his family and friends, and she was but half appeased when he assured her that he had been detained only by the difficulty of finding witnesses to support him in his claim, and by several weighty enterprises out of which he was reaping—thanks to his dear friend Cameron—enormous profits. And, in fact, in return for some thousands in hard cash which had passed from the keeping of Gershom into that of Cameron, his estimated dividends from the various projects in which they were jointly interested amounted to a very high figure; his assessments certainly did.

A stormy night was that which succeeded the arrival of Helen Calthorpe at the Summit. The waters of the lake were lashed into fury, and fell with the noise of thunder

upon their rocky borders; rivulets were magnified into torrents, trees were uprooted and borne like leathers aloft. In his solitary cabin Gilbert Hueston lay outstretched upon his pallet of straw. It was evident that his race was nearly run. Bent on one knee above him, Ezra supported the drooping head of his father while he applied a stimulant to his almost tasteless lips. Strange fancies flitted through the brain of the declining visionary; weird shapes and graceful figures flitted through the air and hovered about his couch, to which he, ever and anon, beckoned and whispered. A stronger gust shook the rotten door from its hinges, and a pale, sad figure, clad in a plain white robe—on her brow a wreath of withered flowers—a faded shawl of some brilliant color drooping from her shoulders—stood, silent and unexpected, before the father and his son.

"For God's sake! Mrs. Cameron," exclaimed Ezra, starting forward; "what unusual occurrence could have induced you—has Agnes—" he paused abruptly, affrighted at the looks of his father, who had also sprung upon his feet, and with his thin, bony hands outstretched, was appealing to the supposed phantom "Mary—my wife!" he exclaimed, as he surveyed her. "It is she indeed, and all was a hideous dream!" The visitor dropped at his feet and buried her face in her hands.

"Gilbert, I am she! Forgive, forgive!" The recluse took the cowering figure to his arms; he smoothed the dishevelled locks and kissed the cold lips of the humbled, abject woman.

"Look but in my eyes," he murmured, with the old tone of love, "say that you regret the past, that your heart is still mine, and all is forgotten, forgiven. Blessed in each other's company we will yet tempt the future together with trusting hearts."

"It may not be," she answered; "death's hand is on me even while I speak. I knew that my hour had come, but I could not die without hearing at the last the words of forgiveness from him I have wronged and offended."

She fell as she spoke, but the strong arms of Ezra supported her.

"Mother!" he said; "for twenty years I have not uttered the word. Look up and live!"

"Bless both—bless both—son and husband, dear to me still! And you—Gilbert—"

"I—I forgive—I have long forgiven!"

"Leave the rest with God; promise this, and I die without murmur."

"I will—I do!"

"And Agnes," said Ezra, with a strange trembling at his heart.

"Rest assured she is not my child, though of Cameron's lineage. Heaven knows with what interest I have watched you both while not daring yet to make my-



self known. They will hardly miss me, Gilbert; another comes who will press my vacant throne. Caressed once more by arms of those I love, the long years roll away, all pain surceases, and I die content!"

She passed from earth at that moment, amid a sudden hush in the elements, which seemed to pause that a soul might be waited to heaven. Then the clouds broke away, and for a moment one clear, bright star shot forth a palid gleam directly over Gilbert's roof, then vanished.

"God's will be done!" said Hueston. "I am content she died not in his arms!"

And now the curtain is up for another scene in the unfolding drama.

Mr. Cameron is no sooner dead than Arthur is in active pursuit of her successor. This time his choice falls upon Helen Calthorpe, and as—but this is entre nous—he is shortly to be in nomination for Congress, and is wealthy besides, he does not appear in that lady's eyes a very undesirable match. He was all the more anxious, on his part, for the event to take place, as Gershon had recently manifested signs of fatigue and dissatisfaction, which the unexpected proposal soon afterward made by that skillful operator immediately dissipated. Far from being affronted by the proposition, the deluded Gershon embraced it with the greatest eagerness, merely observing that her own consent would be indispensable, as he never strove to dominate over his children in such affairs, which implied that Helen was pretty sure to do as she pleased, whatever might be his wishes. In the meantime, as Cameron and his new deity appeared to be on the best of terms with each other, it was probable that her own consent had been gained not less easily.

Helen made the most of her triumph. Balls and other entertainments were nightly devised by one or other of the wealthy citizens for her especial pleasure, over which we may be sure she queened it right royally. The wedding was as brilliant an affair as either of the parties could have desired, many distinguished guests from the city attending to give eclat. The nuptial rites were performed in the self-same church in which Agnes had met with her midnight adventure, but even that had been supplied with a brown stone front, adorned with monstrous grimacing faces, placed there as it to scare away the parishioners.

The ceremony was projected in a style fully equal to that which would have characterized it in a more fashionable locality. Would it might be said that this glowing prelude, in which Arthur Cameron and his stylish bride figured as the principals, was only the herald of unclouded enjoyments and better resolutions in the future; but marriages so ostentatiously celebrated are

rarely happy ones. The first cross occurred at the very altar where the ceremony was in process of consummation. The pastor had gotten along capitally with prayer and peroration, and had just arrived at that stage of the proceedings where the clergyman, for form's sake, calls upon the assembled witnesses to ratify or overthrow the banns, when, to the astonishment of all present, the group which had gathered about the altar was thrust aside, and Agnes Cameron—her countenance pale and haggard, her hair dishevelled, and her garments in wild disorder—confronted the bridal party. Intent upon preventing a marriage which struck her as untimely, and even sacrilegious, she heeded not the indignant glances that assailed her, but proceeded boldly on her purpose. As she stood there by the dusky chancel, her soft hair falling in a golden cloud about her shoulders, and the reflections through the stained glass of the oriel window enveloping her person in a kind of glory, she resembled the illuminated figure of a saint, come down from the ornamented casement to take part in the ceremony.

"If these unrighteous ceremonies are still unconsecrated by priestly act," she exclaimed with hands raised in supplication to the clergyman, "let them not go on! O, shame, sir!"—turning to Cameron—"could you not wait at least until her corpse was cold, or till her breath had ceased to linger about the home she had so lately quitted for the coffin?"

Every gaze was riveted upon the magistrate, who certainly seemed a little paler than usual, but otherwise was all coolness and self-possession. In a few moments Agnes had been carried, weeping and protesting earnestly, into the vestry room, from which she was quietly transferred by Garstaker to the apartment from which she had escaped by connivance of her nurse, who had informed her of the impending desecration. The sensation occasioned by her intrusion was not so easily to be overcome until the state of affairs had been delicately explained by the doctor.

"My love, fear nothing," said Mr. Cameron, endeavoring to calm the agitated bride. "The cause of this interruption has been properly cared for; our friend, Doctor Garstaker, has explained everything. Mr. Hardwinkle, if you please, we are waiting."

"I am not certain that it is not at war with my duties," replied Jonas, hesitating a little. "So serious an interruption—"

"Certainly," replied Cameron, fiercely, "when such interference really takes the shape of authority or reason, no one can question the course to be pursued. Upon my word, ladies and gentlemen, if every idle or unknown tongue were privileged to break off a wedding at its most critical stage, we should have a pretty confusion!"

"I abide the decision of the company," said Jonas, appealing composedly to the bystanders, who were whispering and consulting with each other in a very significant manner, while the bride seemed so overcome by contending emotions that it was necessary to bring her a chair and a glass of wine.

"This is an awkward affair," at length said one of the groomsmen, who was an intimate of the bridegroom's family and had been consulting earnestly with his fellow assistants. The interruption amounts to nothing, but until time has been given to investigate, we do not exactly see how—"

"That is, in fact, the plain state of the case," chimed in another, with the idea of relieving the embarrassment of his colleague.

"It seems you are all divided as to whether these nuptials should be proceeded with—is it so?" asked the bride, slowly recovering.

"That is exactly our dilemma."

"And how as to my own inclinations?"

"They are everything in this matter. Your decision, where no charge of any kind is alleged, is the law," said Jonas, blandly.

"Then I will decide of myself, and let the world put what construction it will on the action!" starting up and looking about her with haughty assurance, as she advanced once more toward Cameron. "Sir, in no idle spirit of trifling, no girlish want of knowledge as to the importance of the step I was taking, I contracted to you my hand. If it is your wish that the contract should be fulfilled, in the face of all doubts and suspicions I am yours!"

Cameron took the hand extended to him,

and, warmly pressing it to his lips, advanced again to the altar, where the same questions, having been once more put, and this time without interference, the ceremony was concluded, the benediction hurried through, and amid triumphal music the party retired in imposing procession to the parlors of the leading hotel, where a banquet was served which the local newspaper pronounced a superlative affair, and a brilliant ball, to which all the guests were invited, wound up the auspicious day.

Then the usual calm succeeded, and then the elections—at which, it is painful to add that, notwithstanding a public ovation preliminary, and a presentation of silver plate, and paid for out of his own pocket, Mr. Cameron was signally defeated. But what mattered that, so that one darling object was answered.

People accounted the shrewdest in worldly affairs often overreach themselves in their marriages, if on no other occasions, and this, before the honeymoon was over, Arthur Cameron found to his cost. The bride was of the high-spirited, strong-minded sort, and soon established her claims to domestic superiority, while in the follies and delusions and absurdities with which he had entangled himself, she went beyond all in extravagance. Before they had been wedded a month Helen was promoted to the presidency of the society he had founded, and Mr. Cameron was heard to declare that he wished Congress or the earth would open for his reception—he didn't care which.

And thus the deceased Mrs. Cameron was avenged.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## PROGRESS.

Sacred at in the earlier stages of its existence by the many who never supposed that such mad follies could extend beyond the contracted circle in which they originated; laughed at others to whom the hallucinations and eccentricities of their kind are only so much food for their diversion, and most unequivocally condemned by the greater portion of the community, the society of Freethinkers of which Excelsior was the home and centre as well as the irradiating source, after struggling for a few months against the public derision, was found all at once to have become a formidable institution. Undoubtedly the first germ of this latter-day innovation was fostered by love of gain and the passion for notoriety. At first the leaders in the movement were obscure and ignorant persons, without any settled principle, and only a very confused idea of the distinction existing between right and wrong, or truth and error. By degrees shrewder and more calculating people began to take a part in its affairs. Females in whom the domestic affections were either very weak or altogether wanting, as if desirous of showing the world how completely woman can unsex herself, rushed desperately into this doubtful arena, where they challenged the natural discriminations of the sexes, and made themselves so conspicuous for their brazenness as to throw into the shade the maddest pranks of their weaker sisters. Here, ambition, avarice, superstition, infidelity, even lust, met as on common ground, and aided by the most outrageous deceptions to spread the insidious influences which were already sapping the vitals of society.

The controllers of this novel application of the Eleusinian mysteries were not bad judges of human nature, and well knew upon what string they might longest ring the changes, and Mr. Cameron had not been dilatory in determining the use that might be made of them. In all their proceedings they pretended to identify themselves with the various doctrines of reform, as giving a semblance of reason and earnestness to their proceedings; and having by degrees established the theory that the world is on the wrong track, the bait was swallowed by thousands whose theories, could they prevail, would speedily reduce the human race to that abnormal condition which prevailed before the flood.

It was at the residence of Doctor Magnus Garstacker that the headquarters of the new philosophy were finally established, a step which, owing to that person's reputation as a man of science, imparted a decided impetus to the organization. Meetings were held there at stated intervals to which en-

trance was obtained by any one whose motives were not suspected upon payment of a certain fee—an additional contribution entitling him or her to the privilege of membership. The magistrate himself was acting manager, the doctor secretary and treasurer of the concern: Mrs. Arthur Cameron, nee Calthorpe, presiding in a manner truly imperial over its deliberations. Man—monopolizing, tyrannical, mercenary man—was the subject which, apart from metaphysical considerations, occupied a share of the society's attention, and the blunder which nature had committed in creating a distinction between the sexes was made the most of by the various advocates. In the world we were journeying to there were no salient differences (here numbers joined issue, insisting that we take with us all our desires and preferences, and even the tangible articles which render this life acceptable to the majority; witness the spirit photographs which give everything of a subject, even to the customary ornaments and personal adornments), except that woman attained her proper dignity, and was no longer a suffering, ill-used angel, confined against her will in a sphere for which nature had never designed her and subject to treatment in comparison with which the horrors of the slave pen were recreations—the difference between skim milk and strong bohea. Man! what was he? A pair of tongs—an animated pair of dividers—a forked radish. He had had his spell at governing the world, and what a mess he had made of it. It was time he took his turn at churn and cradle, and gave woman an opportunity of setting things to rights again. Women must have a chance at the bar—who could outdo them in argument? and as for assurance, that they might readily acquire by practice! They must vote, too, and hold office—it was one of those natural rights of which man had deprived them. Those articles which have from the earliest ages fallen to man as his peculiar property, the "breaks," were henceforward to be worn by all in common, in short, everything which might tend to discourage the difference which nature, by some accident, had interposed between the sexes was in future to regulate the proceedings of the society, which was to be guided by spontaneous inspirations rather than forms. The establishment of perfect freedom in all things, and the abrogation of the ridiculous institution of marriage in favor of the new idea, which its propounders put forward under the enticing name of Passional Attraction, was commended to the serious notice of the fraternity. When to this passage of absurdities the atheistical abominations of Paine and the delusions of modern spiritualism were added to swell the conglomerate, the character of these meetings may be faintly imagined.

Doubtless, society as constituted is open to many serious objections; abuses have from age to age been engrafted upon it, rules and ordinances originally applied to beneficent objects have, by the machinations of the designing and ambitious, become perverted to totally different uses from those for which they were intended, and the law, have gradually grown into an enormous system of machinery for the advantage of the rich and powerful, and the oppression of the poor and friendless. When all this is granted the remedy is not so plain. The world is a vast complication of disorders, but the way to mend a broken vase is not to throw it out of the window, and when the world is to be regenerated, it will not be through the agency of such wretched tinkers as Magnus Garstacker and his notoriety-seeking followers and dupes. He who wishes to reform society let him perform one thing—let him discover the philosopher's stone; the rest is easy.

On a certain evening quite an animated session of the initiated was held at Doctor Nightshades, which was distinguished by more than the usual allowance of follies and deceptions. The attendance embraced representatives from all parts of the Union, including inspirational professors of various shades, mesmerists and those who professed the cure of diseases by spiritual agency and the laying-on of hands, radical reformers and enthusiasts of all persuasions, and the advocates of women's rights pure and simple—lady reverends and medicos intermingling. There was a strange mingling here of brazenness and modesty, intelligence and ignorance, candor and duplicity, the good and the bad, which gave a spice to the proceedings, and among the mere curiosity-seekers were members from the hotels—just now overflowing with their tide of visitors to the Springs.

Fortunately, there is a vast deal of virtue in this world that we hear little about, because goodness is of itself unobtrusive and modest, and seeks its chief reward in the applause of a gratified conscience. Were it not for this, we should be not only in a deplorable condition as to the present, but should be destitute of all guarantee for improvement in the future.

The author of all mischief, if he listened at all to the speeches and sentiments which were ventilated in the course of their proceedings by those who worshiped at the shrine of this new Delphos, must have fallen into a paroxysm of delight at each fresh ebullition.

The two large upper parlors of Doctor Garstacker's mansion were thrown open, brilliantly lighted and gayly decorated for the occasion. After the discussion with which these rational conversaziones were usually introduced had been duly dispatched, a repast comprising every delicacy that can tickle the palate or warm the blood was

dispensed by waiters from a banquet in an alcove; a beautiful girl who appeared, like several others, to be there from pure enjoyment of the novelty, sat down to the piano, and a promenade was instituted, Doctor Magnus leading off with the fair president, who really looked charming. Dancing followed, in which the quantity of wine that had been consumed was attested by the flushing cheeks, unnaturally brilliant eyes and frenzied motions of the dancers. It was well for his peace of mind that Arthur Cameron was not there that night, or he might have been anything but delighted with the supernatural exhalation of his wife and the undisguised humility with which she treated his friend, the doctor. But the magistrate, having excused himself on the plea of important legal business, was just then attending a mystic circle of a different sort in another direction, the members of which were anything but spiritual, albeit they were practitioners at the bar.

At this gathering the licentious performances of the three days' feasts which in ancient Greece were celebrated in honor of Bacchus were warily emulated. Something more than the conventional freedom of waltz and polka characterized the dancing, although it did not quite degenerate into the cancan; and, after the fatigues of the earlier figures, they assembled into groups and couples, many being total strangers to each other, either seating themselves upon sofas or retiring into neglected corners, or loitering in the moonlight on the balcony (there was a "hop" in progress at the nearest hotel, the lights of which were reflecting in the silvery waters of the lake and the music from which came wafted hitherward upon the breeze) or sauntered to and fro with arms affectionately encircling each other's waists—the sexes commingling in blissful affinity. There was singing, meanwhile, and a little whist or euchre, and a series of tableaux vivants diversified the monotony awhile, in which the wildest liberty was permitted to dress and attitude—and these were not model artists, either, but respectable citizens, the majority of whom saw no harm in what they were doing.

Before midnight the affair had assumed all the attributes of the Saturnalia, somewhat modified by modern observance. Dapper little men sang funny little songs, sentimental ladies and gentlemen sang sentimental airs, and there was so evident an inclination to throw overboard all restraint as to render it difficult to guess where all this might end. A tremendous crash of China ware at the farther end of the rooms all at once brought the company to their feet.

"H'sh!" said one of the officers, who had made himself conspicuous as an aid to the doctor; "lights down, if you please—we are about to witness something remarkable."

At first, the doctor himself, who had been engaged in an animated corner conversation with Helen—that lady being at the time seated upon his lap, assisting him in the demolition of a dish of almonds and raisins—was ignorant of what was meant by the order to lower the lights, and, supposing that there was fun ahead, quietly assented to the darkening process, when stalwart arms stole round luxurious forms and the hot breath of passion and "green seal" was felt on burning cheeks and shrinking shoulders, while an ear not over acute might in more than one quarter have faintly detected the sound of a kiss or a slap. But when, from amid the wreck of plates and confectionery which littered the floor, he saw Agnes Cameron advance, lighted by a lamp which she carried, and looking in her entranced condition and in the white robe in which she had risen, like a statue awakened to life, so pale she was, he suddenly started up, nearly overthrowing his partner, and was about to put an abrupt termination to the scene. The ladies, however, crowded about him in such a manner and were so earnest in their entreaties that he desisted. Had there been sufficient light remaining, they would have seen that his countenance was as pale and bloodless as that of the sleep-walker, and his agitation, now fortunately unnoticed, might have betrayed a secret which he was not at all ambitious of having exposed.

But the mischief, whatever it might be that threatened, was past averting, and already quite a crowd had gathered about the somnambulist, awaiting with breathless expectation the denouement of this strange interlude. The sleepwalker continued to advance, apparently not noticing the presence of others, her eyes fixed upon some object visible to herself alone in the darkness beyond. An air of painful earnestness pervaded her pale, worn countenance, whose beauty was rather enhanced than diminished by the sufferings she had undergone.

After a searching glance in the faces of the bystanders, of whose presence she seemed gradually to become aware, she shook her head slowly, as if in disappointment at not recognizing some one of whom she had been in search.

All at once she caught the earnest gaze of the lady president, who was observing her with an intense curiosity, the first occasion since her marriage and the second since her arrival at the Summit that she had enjoyed an interview with her step-daughter; and a feeling of self-reproach at her own want of concern for the welfare of the spellbound girl was already tinging her cheek, unaccustomed to such exhibitions with a blush or shame. The agitation of Agnes, on perceiving who it was that had confronted her, was excessive. She would have fallen, but that some of the spectators, moved by compassion, bore her, trembling and affrighted,

to a chair. Helen, singularly interested, remained by her side, while Doctor Garstacker, shivering as if with the ague and unable to interfere, shrank behind the rest and would at once have obeyed the impulse which warned him to fly the apartment, had not an irresistible curiosity to hear what she would say induced him to remain.

"She is not gone?" was the first utterance of the sleeper, whose faculties appeared, nevertheless, to be in some sense more vivid than when awake. "O, 'twas a horrid dream, and yet I thought I saw her as plainly as I see those who press me round."

"Saw whom, my poor child?" asked Helen, bending gently over her.

"Whom should I mean?" replied the somnambulist, peevishly. "Are there so many strangers here that you can be in doubt? or are such marriages so common as to cause no wonder?"

"Why, I am Helen Cameron, to be sure, and I certainly did wed your father, my unhappy child, but why or how I erred in doing that, I cannot understand."

"I think you are sincere," said Agnes, scanning her; "there can be no deceit in that kind face. Let me feel your hand, mother—must I call you so?" she continued, drawing Helen closer to her, and closely perusing her features. "How is this? You do not tremble."

"No. Why should I, child?"

"You do not know, then—" and, suddenly checking herself and looking stealthily around, she added, in a lower tone, "Have you not suspected, lady? There are poisoners around us! O, was it right to step into a bed vacated thus?"

"Now, indeed, do I tremble!" said Helen, whose curiosity to hear more was rapidly getting the better of her prudence. "Speak more plainly, child. You deal in mysteries."

"O, if I dared!" whispered the sleeper, pressing closer to Helen, and looking with evident alarm toward the quarter of the room where stood Garstacker. "But for that dark, stern man I would tell truths would freeze the blood, but he is by—"

"He shall not harm you, Agnes; indeed he shall not. I will be your safeguard; tell me all without reserve."

At this moment Magnus rudely broke through the circle, and would have seized the sleeper, and hurried her away by main force if several out-stretched arms had not restrained him.

"This is cruel," protested Magnus; "cruel both to the girl and to myself as her guardian. A very little more of this kind of torture will kill her outright."

"If it were sure to be the death of us both I would hear her out," replied Helen, almost savagely. "I have already heard such whispers, and accident has evidently given me the means of learning the truth. This girl is not so mad as we have supposed."

ed Speak on child; there are friends here who will protect you."

"Forgive me for having wronged you," whispered Agnes, pressing her hands to her bosom; "I thought you one of them, and was afraid to speak my thoughts. Keep that murderer from me" (with a convulsive shudder, and pointing to the doctor as she spoke).

"O! not so bad as that," said Helen, with a half smile that was plainly assumed.

"Your father had a son that thought so, too," said Agnes.

"My brother—do you know anything? O heaven, why do I tremble thus?" said Helen, who seemed ready to swoon.

"What of Stacy?"

"Ask him!" was the sharp reply, and her transparent finger was pointed like that of a spectre at the shrinking form of Magnus.

"Ask him; for he, of all who knew your brother, living or dead, can tell you!"

Doctor Nightshade saw that without an effort to regain his predominance all was lost, and again interfered.

"I positively will not allow any more of this," he exclaimed, approaching Agnes; "the unintelligible ravings of a wandering intellect have caused enough mischief in the world without our adding to it."

"Why, you yourself have been foremost in asserting her infallibility," said Helen, who, however, recollected that in all the pretended revelations of the somnambulist hitherto, the oracle had been generally kept invisible, the doctor acting always a go-between when she was consulted. "Perhaps you can explain this inconsistency. Either the entire system you have advocated is an imposture, or her words bear a more serious meaning than you seem willing to attach to them."

"Not necessarily," replied the wily practitioner, "not necessarily. When approached in the proper manner, and through a duly-qualified medium, the answers of my fair charge have invariably been found to be correct, but this course of procedure is so totally at variance with our usual habit—h'm! There are mysteries in this life," added the doctor, changing his strain, which was becoming too dictatorial, "which none of us may penetrate, though some of us may occasionally obtain a glimpse beyond the threshold. I trust, my friends, that the well-established character of years will not be taken from me on so frivolous a pretext. Remember the Witten Delusion, and how many innocent lives were sacrificed to it."

"I remember," rejoined Helen, "that it was only terminated when the real promoters were made to pay the penalty of their criminal falsehood. But I am not so easily hoodwinked as you suppose. This whole affair shall be probed most thoroughly, and the less you may do in opposition the less cause the community will have to suspect

you. Look after your charge; she has fainted. To-morrow she shall be examined in due form, and if, as I am now inclined to think, her constitution has been tampered with, in order to bring her to that condition best suited to your mercenary purposes, rest assured that you and all concerned shall be kept to a strict accountability. In the meantime she may as well be placed under my charge. I will answer for her good treatment, rest assured!"

"No doubt—no doubt," said Magnus; "but when my charge is withdrawn from the protection in which she has been placed by her father, who doubtless knew very well what he was about when he confided her to me, it must be by force, or at the instance of the proper authorities. I may remark, however, in order to save you trouble, that no magistrate would think for a moment of taking her deposition."

And while Helen, merely observing, "we shall see about that, sir," pulled her shawl about her, and withdrew, Doctor Garstacker carried Agnes bodily out of the apartment.

Many followed Helen's example, but there were enough remaining to keep up the excitement. The doctor, having returned without a trace of excitement in his manner or appearance, and even an unusually fascinating smile upon his countenance, the charms of music were again called into requisition. No longer restrained by the presence of the more refined, the revelers gave themselves up to the abandonment of the hour. Their actions grew less and less constrained—lips were pressed to lips in an enthusiasm amounting to frenzy; sentences of endearment were breathed into willing ears that an hour before would have been shocked at such a freedom; the dance grew wilder and less decorous; some of the party were slightly happy, while others were hopelessly intoxicated. A free-and-easy chorus was attempted by some of the more convivial, but was silenced by several smart raps of a club on the door below, when, suddenly, the lights were extinguished, and the profoundest silence reigned.

It was but an admonition—for the invincible practice of Silas Mumpford, the village watch and cobler for the district, was to run away from the peace-breakers the moment he had announced his presence, and shortly afterward the assemblage dispersed.

The next morning Helen, procuring a warrant, and repairing to Garstacker's for the purpose of taking Agnes under her own protection, found that the latter had been either spirited away by her unnatural guardians, or had strayed off once more in one of those wandering fits to which she was addicted. As for the doctor, he had fled before daylight, for he was too old a bird to be caught napping. His last trump had been played, and he had lost the game!

The news of the doctor's disappearance, joined with what had taken place on the night of the meeting here described, spread far and wide, and the authorities were once more aroused to exertion to dissipate the mystery that still enveloped the death of Stacy Calthorpe. Old Gershom being little more than a mumbling idiot, Helen took the matter into her own hands, and speedily obtained from the Governor the offer of a large reward for the apprehension of her brother's murderer, adding thereto an extra inducement of her own.

As may be conceived, his wife's forwardness in this business gave Cameron not a little cause for concern, but, as to save himself from suspicion he was obliged to make some show of diligence, he received universal credit for his zeal in the public behalf.

All his zeal, however, could not avert certain suspicions which his judicial associates had begun to entertain concerning various strange proceedings in which Cameron was alleged to be implicated. On the day subsequent to Garstacker's disappearance these surmises were justified by the receipt of a letter in a disguised hand (possibly that of Snook), in which grave charges were alleged against the leading dignitary of the place—among others, that he had subjected his late wife to a process of slow poisoning in order to secure a firmer hold upon Calthorpe's fortune, of a considerable part of which, it was asserted, Cameron had already defrauded him.

A warrant was issued for Cameron's arrest, and also for that of Snook, who was said to be remotely concerned with him. Seeing the imminent danger in which he would be placed, Cameron, immediately on learning of these proceedings, summoned a meeting of his confederates, with a view to holding a consultation. They had taken the alarm, and only Jonathan Snook presented himself. There, during that eventful night, the prospects of the Piscataqua Banking and Trust Association, the Grand Junction Mutual Assurance, and other flourishing institutions were earnestly deliberated over, and were only terminated when the door was invaded by the officers deputed to make the arrest. Mr. Cameron had withdrawn to an inner apartment, where, as the officers entered, he was found in convulsions outstretched upon a couch, with only Jonathan Snook for an attendant. He had taken poison. His accomplice, pointing him out to the myrmidons of the law, was about to depart, when he was rudely collared and flung back. The indignation of Mr. Snook at this treatment was something to witness.

"I warn you, officer," said Mr. Snook, with raised forefinger, "that your are transcending in this the limits of your duty. As a peaceable and unoffending citizen, I warn you!"

"Do you?" replied the functionary, who proved to be no other than Darby Doolittle, the under sheriff of Wilbriar County. "We'll soon see what that amounts to, Mr. Artemus Frenche, or Snook, as I think you call yourself nowadays! Looking indignant won't help you. The confidence game's about played out this time, and the reward is mine at last!"

"You know me, then?" quoth the outlaw, with less assurance than before.

"Quite intimate, if I may say so. We've been on the lay for you some time, and are really too fond of your society to give you up so soon. Tom, the bracelets!"

"Why, you won't handcuff me!" exclaimed Snook, again becoming indignant.

"I will handcuff you!" responded Digby, with a grim determination of manner that struck despair to the soul of Frenche, who had just been meditating a fresh plan of escape. "Here, Tom, we've no time to lose. He may be a murderer as well as a forger, who knows. Best take it quietly, my friend. You might hurt yourself otherwise. You, Jones and Tucker, stay with the other until he gets over his nervousness. If he's been taking strychnine I shouldn't wonder if he never got over it. Now, get along there, will you? After you is politeness."

And in this ignominious manner Mr. Snook terminated his career as a spiritualist.

A few days afterward the novel inhabitant of the medium was subjected to a thorough overhauling, when, to the amazement of his late friends and patrons, but not at all to that of the officers, a great assortment of implements such as are used by counterfeiters were discovered behind the fireplace, together with a large quantity of bogus money, for which brother Snook had evidently officiated as the circulating medium. This accounted for the alarming addiction of many persons in seemingly respectable standing to the new theories of which Snook had been the exponent, and for their frequent solitary visits to the Prophet of the Heath; while many, remembering the number of undesirable pecuniary favors which they had received from time to time at the hands of Cameron and his partner in iniquity, Dr. Garstacker, were now at no loss to account for the intimacy which had subsisted between this trio.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## PHILOSOPHY AT FAULT.

There are some things in our social economy which seem to have been designedly placed beyond the reach of the mere human comprehension. That erudite and accomplished philosopher, antiquary, and reformer, Zimmerman Grubsneak, A. M., had passed fifty years of his life in a fruitless endeavor to explain the vexed problem—"Why does a dog always turn around twice before he lies down?" and had approached no nearer the solution than "why it must be because—" when a dangerous fit of illness dispatched him to his bed, never to rise again of his own volition. Unhappy world! that was fated to endure the irreparable loss of a Grubsneak before such labors as his had been brought to a satisfactory termination! The problem over which the little philosopher so vainly pondered and perplexed himself has remained, in one shape or another, a bone of contention to successive generations of Grubs, in whose hands the original subject is daily becoming more deeply involved in mystery.

Of the mystery chiefly treated of in this narrative a similar fatality may be recorded, but there was one obscurity which, more fortunate in the upshot, appeared at last on the eve of a clearing up. This was the mystery involved in the life and circumstance of the Cameron family; or, more properly, of Arthur Cameron, its head. People had for a long time wondered how it might be that this man, who had come among them in a state of comparative poverty—his chief property consisting of wild lands in an unfrequented region, which were long in becoming available for profitable purposes—had amassed so fine a fortune. His official salary was quite inadequate to display, and his legal practice, being confined to suit for trespass instituted by vindictive bumpkins, upon whose premises the cows and pigs of other bumpkins had committed ravages, or questions of boundary, could not alone have enriched him. Yet was Arthur Cameron confessedly the wealthiest man in the county.

How, in the meanwhile, he had long continued to baffle the suspicions of Hueston may be accounted for by the fact of a change of name, and by the complete seclusion in which the invalid Mrs. Cameron was compelled to pass her days, as well as by the unsociable habits of Hueston, whose haunts were the woods and caves, and who was never mentioned except as the seer, or the prophet, while he strictly enjoined the youth, Ezra, to forbear from even the mention of his name.

Now, however, that Doctor Nightshade had absconded to parts unknown, sinister stories began rapidly to circulate among the

people. They remembered—now that all prospect of "cakes and ale" in that quarter was at an end—how close had been the intimacy between Cameron and Garstacker, and the frequent visits interchanged of late between these two and a certain suspicious character who had sought to conceal his misdeeds and escape detection by sheltering himself under the assumed name of Jonathan Snook, but who now stood confessed as Artemus Frenche, the counterfeiter and forger; and who, by the exhibition of a few clownish tricks in a horsepond, had contrived to give color to the report that he had departed for another sphere.

Cameron as we have seen, was arrested, but speedily bailed, and from that inauspicious moment every hour brought with it fresh developments to implicate the guilty magistrate and his accomplices in a series of notorious acts of which the catalogue embraced nearly all the conspicuous offenses known to the law, even arson and murder being included in the list.

A few days subsequently, the individual known as Doctor Nightshade was unearthed and brought back to the scene of his philanthropic labors, where, Artemus Frenche having turned State's evidence, he was unceremoniously thrust into prison.

Next in order came the examination of the laboratory, and a scrutiny of the premises lately occupied as a dwelling by this distinguished medical reformer. The investigations at the former place resulted in the discovery of a number of charred and blackened human bones, of which the searching party could make nothing, except that they were not materially different from similar fragments to be found on the premises of persons devoted to similar branches of science. A series of concealed pipes and wires were found to permeate the walls of the building, which amply demonstrated the method by which he mystified so many dupes. A costly watch and a valuable breastpin were, however, discovered, which were identified as having belonged to Stacy Calthorpe.

It was just at this crisis that Helen determined not to rest until the fate of her brother should have been resolved to her satisfaction, obtained the presence of the Huestons as witnesses for the prosecution.

The case was embarrassed by the countercharges made by the desperate Garstacker, who implicated both in Stacy's murder—an allegation to which the rejection of the younger Hueston by Agnes in favor of the wealthy suitor gave a strong coloring. As for the property, it was, he said, easy enough for an enemy to place the articles found there in such a position as to throw the burden of suspicion on his, Nightshade's, shoulders.

It is not impossible that Garstacker might have got clear with all this, but just as it was supposed that the prosecution was



about to rest, the attorney, after some whispering with an officer—a detective—said:

"May it please the court, I have one more witness to call, who shall be the last, when I shall conceive, that whatever the result, I have done my duty in the case."

He beckoned, a side-door opened, and a lady, closely veiled, was handed in by Ezra Hueston. No sooner had she raised her veil on being seated, exposing a lovely countenance, flushed with health and beaming with intelligence, than everybody present recognized Miss Agnes Cameron, and a hearty cheer went up, which no endeavor was made to check. Withdrawn by Ezra Hueston by means of a ladder placed against her window, her nurse conniving, on the night of the exposure at the Doctor's residence, she had surrendered herself entirely to his care, and in the pleasant domain in which the young patron and his immediate associates now confined themselves, she recovered her health so rapidly that, in the great improvement which had taken place she was hardly recognizable for the same fragile being whom the arts and medication of her unnatural guardians had so nearly deprived of reason, if not of life. The story she had to tell was so direct and straightforward that Garstacker was convicted and remanded to pay the forfeit of his crime.

Amid all this, the frail victim had not a reproach—not on account of complaints for that unnatural parent who, for his temporal aggrandizement, had poisoned for years the happiness of a delicate being whose youth and innocence should have been her strongest safeguard. She would not even allow Ezra to administer a word of rebuke, but solemnly adjured him, by his love of her and his hopes of future immortality, to do all that might yet lie in his power to shield the guilty wretch that had so degraded her and to restore him to a sense of those higher duties which he had through life so seriously neglected. Ezra remembered the oath he had made in his father's cabin and gave the required assurance, and gained by that the only reward he had coveted—a wife.

When the news of his partner's discomfiture was communicated to Cameron, as he lay in his bedclothes at home, suffering from the effects of the draught he had swallowed, an invalid both in body and mind, his nerves fell to quivering and the bitterness of death came over him. For some moments it was thought the crisis had arrived in earnest. But the love of life was tenacious still in Cameron.

On that same night, impelled by a dread of Hueston's developments, and being left for some hours to the enjoyment of a solitude he had not known since the day of his downfall, while his guardians were enjoying a game of cards and making merry in the library beneath, Cameron stealthily arose from his couch and, slipping on his clothes, stole quietly down the stairs and made his way to the stables unperceived. That night was and is memorable for one of the severest tempests which had of late years visited those regions, but it stayed not Arthur Cameron when more than existence was at issue. Hardly knowing, himself, what it was he proposed doing, save that his life was at hazard and that flight alone could save him, he mounted a horse, and putting spurs to his sides, was not long in losing sight of the lights of the village. The thunder bellowed, broad sheets of blinding glare threw a false daylight over the landscape as he dashed madly away from dangers to which the perils of the storm were as children's pastime. Every little gully and trickling rivulet had become a swift stream, and the gale, as it raged uncontrolled among the trees of the forest, seemed to have been attuned to a fiendish chorus, the burthen of which was made up of his manifold sins. Yet headlong and without hesitation, through obstacles that at any other time would have seemed unmountable, Cameron rode: now floundering in mud holes or hurrying through mountain streams; now clambering the crumbling bank, or tearing through briars, or groping through forests—a tempest within him that mocked the frail fury without, he pressed onward until his beast stumbling, the rider was hurled against a stone with so much force as to render him insensible.

Then again the ever present consciousness of guilt dissolved the stupor. He had suffered a fracture of the arm, and his steed was, heaven knows where, delighted, no doubt, to be rid of so reckless a rider—yet it wanted but an effort of the will, and he should soon be placed beyond reach of harm. The old hovel on the pine barrier, although in ruins, would still afford him shelter, and the cave at its rear offered the ready means of escape when too hard pressed, while berries and fruit were abundant within a short distance. There he might remain hidden, and prolong his wretched existence until the excitement respecting his flight had subsided. Then for the west! where, under a new name, and with the exercise of his customary tact, all things were possible to a genius like his.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

MARTIN HUNGERFORD.

The rise of Magnus Garstacker had not been entirely unsuccessful. While it divided from himself, even for an instant, the attention of a portion of the public divided as to his guilt and embarrassed by his considerations, it fixed a taint of suspicion upon the elder Hueston, whose movements and whose habits were alike suspicious and who had been heard to exclaim in revengeful terms against both Cameron and his associate, Calthorpe, and to denounce in the most energetic manner the scheme of colonization in which they were engaged—nay, to threaten that none of their proselytes should cross the boundaries of the enchanted soil alive. Evidence, from Frenche, as state's evidence, confirmed the impression against Gilbert, until the populace, in their excitement were ready to dispose of him after a fashion peculiar to themselves.

Cameron had absconded, and, a reprieve having been obtained from the Governor, Magnus Garstacker for the time being was safe, but the populace, infuriated by this tampering and seemingly athirst for blood, revived the old but by no means forgotten story of Martin Hungerford's unaccountable disappearance and conjectured death, and soon a hardened, reckless crowd was gathered about the small and insecure building in which Hueston, on the first intimation of a suspicion, had been incarcerated.

In vain Ezra—who had run to the jail at the first alarm—endeavored with hand and voice to stay this raging torrent of indignation against his ill-starred parent. He obtained, it is true, a guard from the sheriff, which he strengthened by some additions from among the number of those who still remained faithful to their cause. But the "sacred cause of justice" required a victim, and Hueston, being poor and friendless, was selected as fittest for the sacrifice.

From a window of the prison Ezra gazed with a contemptuous countenance upon the half demented crowd that swayed and surged like an angry sea beneath him. From the midst of this seething cauldron huge shouts went up. The ostensible cause of the gathering was the hatred of bloodshed, and yet the most depraved of assassins could scarce have exhibited so strong a desire for blood as that exhibited by this frantic multitude of self constituted "regulators."

At length all these shouts, this confusion, blended into one deafening outcry. There were heard half a dozen blows, as of heavy implements upon some wooden barrier. There was a reeling to and fro—a brandishing of weapons—shots. Then a crash, as the prison door finally yielded—a yell, to which the Plutonian depths could hardly have furnished a parallel.

And in the midst of this popular demonstration, bareheaded yet erect and dauntless, hurling back looks of hatred and contempt with glances of defiance—a hopeless, helpless wretch, and yet happier in his own rectitude of conscience than any among the army of his enemies, Gilbert Hueston was led out from the prison.

At a short distance from the scene of this tumult was a locality famous for some occurrence in former times. It was a small plain, broken only in its general evenness by one slight eminence on the top of which flourished a single gnarled and blasted tree. Thither they dragged their unresisting prisoner—now their prey. A rope was swiftly adjusted, the arms of the prisoner were securely pinioned; and it was necessary to be expeditious, for the roll of a drum was heard in the distance, where Ezra Hueston, with a platoon of troops, was hastening to the rescue.

During these proceedings, a sailor who had mingled with the crowd exhibited much interest in the outrage—shoving, pushing, and elbowing his way to the front, and making liberal use of his fists where other arguments proved unavailing. He was a broad-chested, manly fellow, this young sailor, and there was something in his features and general appearance that spoke of capacities above the ordinary mark of a sailor's intelligence. He had, apparently, just come from a cruise, and—like Jack on all public occasions—appeared resolved to obtain a position in the front row of spectators. As he advanced, the constant repetition of a name with which his ears should have been familiar, made him inquire the objects of the concourse. He reached the foot of the gallows tree just in time to see Gilbert Hueston dangling in the air. A dozen rushed forward simultaneously to stay him; but would he be stayed at such a time? Not he! Knocking down with his sled-re-hammer fist all who ventured to resist him, and gathering aid behind him as he went, he set up a cheering shout, darted through guards and all—his sheath knife waved on high and descended upon the rope with a force that brought the intended victim to the ground.

"Why, you pack of human wolves!" indignantly exclaimed the intruder, as the mob pressed round him; and for some minute it looked as though he might be made to take Hueston's place, "would you hang a man for murder without a morsel of evidence? If you must have blood,



take mine, for, as I'm alive and hearty, I am the only one that had a hand in making away with Martin Hungertord!"

There was another shout, but this time a shout of a different nature. "'Tis Martin himself!" exclaimed one. "Why, Martin, man, you turned up at a lucky moment!" said another, and dozens were ready to disclaim their participancy in the transaction. Just then the drum was again audible, more distinctly, and a troop of horse came riding into, or rather over, the crowd—as usual in such cases, too late to be of any use except to disperse the concourse. The body of Hueston, dead or alive, had been spirited away, and soon the only object that remained in sight was the gallows-tree, shaking its warning branches in the freshening wind.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CONCLUSION.

On that night a strange and solemn scene took place at the lonely cabin of that moody character—that combination of opposite qualities and contradictory opinions, who had been known during the greater part of his early career as Gilbert Hueston, the misanthrope.

His life was nearly wasted; for Alstyn's interference, though meant for the best, had only the effect of prolonging for a few brief hours the life that was become so unendurable to its owner. That night, as we have said, was marked by a fearful tempest, in which farms and cattle were swept away in the general ruin, and trees that had braved the storms of a century were swept away like rotten reeds. Around the old cabin, for so many years the dwelling place of the enthusiast, the winds were howling like a legion of furies. But Gilbert heard not the din; for a few moments a bright vision floated before his changing sight—strains of soft, unearthly music were mingled with the din of the elements. As his end drew near the broken man recognized the few who stood about him. He breathed rather than spoke a few short sentences, desiring that he might be buried in the cave where the remains of his martyred brother Cyril were then decaying, and, with his head supported in the arms of his son, gently expired. Only a few of his old associates were witnesses of the concluding scenes. Among them Alstyn was the most sensibly affected. "It was my folly," he said, "that brought my old benefactor to this condition; henceforth the land has no dwelling-place for me."

When all was over, and the last throes had subsided, there was a calm, as it seemed both within and without the building, interrupted only by the sobs of Agnes and those of the warm-hearted sailor. As

for Ezra, he had no disposition for tears. A short prayer was uttered by a disciple, and the body was taken up, the faithful Indian, George, in his savage trappings, following among the mourners. Then was witnessed a remarkable ceremony.

All that time Cameron had remained hidden among the intricacies of the cave, a prey to the most exquisite tortures of mind and body. His brain grew dizzy from the violence of his pangs, and he was abandoning himself to the idea of death, when all at once there stole softly upon his ear the sound of voices joining in some solemn hymn—the self-same strain which he had hearkened to when a child—long forgotten, and now, under what circumstances recalled! As the strains rose in volume, sweet recollections of an innocent boyhood stole gradually over his wandering senses; on his infant lips, taught by a sainted mother, the words of that very hymn had been familiar; he had listened to them at her knees, a delicate, golden-haired stripling, with little thought of the applicability they would one day bear to his circumstances. These words, now reverberating through the vault in perfect harmony from so many voices, called up a vivid contrast with such innocent remembrances, a revolting picture of his wretched life, scarcely palliated by a single generous action, and he shrank guiltily within himself as he listened.

A singular curiosity possesses him. Agitated by a new and unaccountable emotion, he forgets his pains and gropes his way in the direction of the sounds, until, guided by a ruddy glare of light, he finds himself looking down upon a small, sad group who are consigning to the depths of a subterranean stream, just visible through an orifice in the rock, and of which the roar at intervals fills the cavern, the last remains of Gilbert Hueston; for here the enthusiast had interred his brother, and here he had solemnly adjured his son to bury him.

Short and simple was the ceremony. Not even the usual change had been made in the garments, but after a last look at the familiar features, the body was consigned to the torrent amid a silence interrupted only by the sound of hurrying waters—hurrying whither no soul might tell. A short, dull plash, a few heavy sobs, and all was over!

The group slowly turned away without a word spoken. Ezra was the last in the place, having requested as a favor to be left there alone for a few moments, that he might indulge his grief unrestrained. "Poor victim to a harsh world's inhumanity and injustice!" he thought aloud, as he gazed upon the darkling flood beneath "this is the end of all your glowing dreams—your disinterested plans for the regeneration of erring mortality!" He knelt upon one knee by the side of the orifice and gazed intently into the depths of the torrent; black as a stream of ink it was gliding past,

and beneath that sable pall the last but one of his race was already decaying. A prayer divided his lips, and at that moment he felt conscious that he was not the only worshiper at that singular shrine.

"I surely dream!" exclaimed Ezra, starting up fiercely as his gaze alighted upon the bleeding figure of Cameron, who had crept from his concealment, and was now kneeling by his side.

"Do not hurt me, Ezra. I come not this time for ill," he muttered, in broken and humiliated tones. "A hunted wanderer, flying from the inevitable consequences of a lie of guilt, I sought this retreat, little expecting to be brought face to face with my victims. The scene I have this night witnessed has made me a new man. Let me still live to make you reparation."

"Can this be the proud, relentless Arthur Cameron who pleads for life so abjectly?" replied Ezra. "What claim had he to pity? Throughout their lives who now repose in yonder stream, the victims of your avarice and lust, you have been the unrelenting persecutor of our race. Why should I not retaliate in kind?" And, with the impulse of the moment, he grasped Cameron by the throat and dragged him by main force to the brink of the stream.

Then, the remembrance of his vow to Agnes recalled a better feeling, and he stayed his hand.

"I deserve the worst you can inflict, yet, in mercy, spare me!" cried the now abject Cameron. "O Ezra, I am not afraid of the mere pain of dying; it is the uncertain future from which I shrink with horror!"

"You are in my power now," rejoined Ezra; "here, without a witness, I might torture you, villain, to my heart's content. But that would be to emulate your vices, and, therefore, in mercy to myself, I leave you. Live and repent, if there's repentance in you, and for that chance alone I will send you aid. As for me, only an ocean can divide the bereaved from their sorrow. In this world we shall never meet again."

He flung the base wretch from him as he spoke, and snatching the last torch from its niche, disappeared from the cavern, the miserable trickster calling after him in vain to stay.

The next morning, the authorities, following Ezra's direction, explored the cavern; but Arthur Cameron was beyond the reach of mortal aid. His corpulent body was found lying cold and stark on the spot where Ezra had left him. His scheming and turbulent brain was at rest forever.

THE END.