Four Canadian Highwaymen

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THE FOUR CANADIAN HIGHWAYMEN

OR,

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

BY EDMUND COLLINS

PREFACE.

The following story is founded on fact, everybody about this part of Canada who is not deaf having heard of the gang at Markham Swamp.

I have no doubt that some of my friends who are in the habit of considering themselves “literary,” will speak with despair and disparagement of myself when they read the title of this book. They will call it “blood and thunder,” and will see that I am on my way to the dogs.

Well, these people are my friends after all, and I shall not open a quarrel with them. For they themselves have tempted the public with stupid books and essays; and they failed in finding buyers. Therefore they have demonstrated for me that a stupid book doesn’t pay; and I will not, even for my best friend, write anything but what the people will buy from me. I am not a Fellow of the R.S.C., and if I produced anything dreary I could not look for the solace of having that discerning association clap their hands while I read my manuscript.

As to my subject being blood and thunder, as some of the *litterateurs* will describe it, I have only to say that the author of *Hard Cash* wrote more than a dozen short stories laid upon lines similar to mine. A young man fighting for a place in literature, and for bread and butter at the same time, need not blush at being censured for adopting a literary field in which Charles Reade spent so many years of his life.

By-and-by, when I drive a gilded chariot, and can afford to wait for books with quieter titles and more dramatic worth to bring me their slow earnings, I shall be presumptuous enough to set such a star before my ambition as the masters of English fiction followed.

E. C.

TORONTO, 1st August, 1886.

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THE FOUR CANADIAN HIGHWAYMEN;

OR,

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRETTY ASTER AND MR. HAM.

It was the autumn of the year, and the dress of the Canadian woods at that season, forty years ago, differed little from the gaudy garbs of now. Near a small village not far from the town of Little York, I choose as the place for the opening of this true story.

The maple, of all the trees in the forest, was the only one so far frost-smitten and sun-struck. The harvests had been gathered, and the only tenants of the fields were flocks of pigeons that came to feed among the stubble; for many a ripe ear fell from the heads in the tying of the sheaves; many a shower of the golden grain had fallen as the load, drawn by slow oxen, lurched and swayed along the uneven ground.

Nestling in a grove of primeval pines that sentinelled the placid, shining waters of the Don stood a low, wide-eaved cottage. It was completely clad in ivy; and upon the eastern side there was a dull copper tinge through the matted masses of the Virginia creeper.

Many of the earlier flowers had faded; but the pinks and the poppies were still rich in blood; and the sunflower sturdily held up its yellow face like ‘a wizened sorcerer of old,’ as a fair and gifted friend of my acquaintance puts it. The cottage and the grounds about it were the property of an English gentleman of taste and means. The nearest dwelling had an air of luxury, and round about it stretched wide areas of land from which the harvest of wheat and oats had been taken. Here and there in the distance a group of boys might be seen with their fishing rods in their hands; for at that day the Don stream was not foul by the drainage of fields, and shrunken from the downpour of the sun, and from the loss of its sheltering forest. Trout and often salmon-trout went into its quiet retreats in the face of the spring freshets; and many a congregation of foam bubbles did it hold upon its breast to screen the greedy, vigilant speckled trout.

In a little summer house through whose latticed sides the gadding vines were so interlocked and twined, as to remind you of the legend of Salmacis and Hermes’ son, sat a girl. Her wide-brimmed hat rested upon the seat beside her, and round about it was a double girdle of ivy, as if twining there. Looking through the door of the dainty place you could not see the girl’s face; for she had turned her head, and her chin was resting upon her slim, white hands, as she read from a book that lay upon her lap.

Her hair you could see, for it hung over her shoulders and down her white dress, like ‘a gold flag over a sail.’ For myself I usually prefer dark hair for women; but ah! who could have gainsaid the glory of those luxurious coils that hung over that sweet neck and draping the curving shoulders! Through the open doorway the sun streamed upon it; and the soft tangles gleamed like ruddy gold. Hence you will see that the colour was not that insipid ‘blonde’ with which shallow girls may adorn their heads for the sum of ten cents.

But although her face could not be seen, anyone looking at the balance of the head, the statuesque neck, would have surmised that it was beautiful.

A tall, lithe, well-built young man, who had a few moments before entered the cottage, walked into the garden from the back door. His eye was one that the

casual observer would describe as ‘full of mischief;’ but behind the sunny brightness was a pensive cast. He walked softly towards the arbour, and stood for several seconds looking at its beautiful occupant. Then, in moving his foot, the dry branch of a rose-bush snapped, and the girl turned her head.

‘Ah, it is you, Roland—pardon me, Mr. Gray.’

‘Yes; I have come here to eat your apples and your peaches; and to despoil the grove of their woodcock.’

‘Papa said you were coming some time soon; but I did not know when.’

‘Why, I met him this morning at the Don Mills, and told him he would have me during the afternoon and evening. I sent that message distinctly to you, Miss Aster.’

A faint shadow passed over her face; and it was plain that she was a little confused, as she stammered:

‘Papa must have misunderstood you.’

‘Perhaps, Miss Aster; but—well, I hope he did.’ At this moment another person entered the garden. He did not come with the graceful motion, and the easy tread of Roland Gray; but moved wily a pompous stride, swinging his arms almost at right angles with his body. His air you could only describe by the word ‘howling’; and he was just the man to immediately catch the attention of a vulgar girl. His hair was as dark as a crow’s; and it was as coarse as the bristles of a hog. He was short and rather stout of build; was somewhat ‘horsey’ in makeup; and had a face rather handsome. But that he was low-bred, there could not be the shadow of a doubt.

‘I thought you had eluded me, Aster,’ he said in the most familiar way; ‘thought you had stolen away up the river with that book.’

‘Oh, indeed. I have been reading here during the greater part of the afternoon. Mr. Gray, let me introduce to you Mr. Ham; Mr. Ham, Mr. Gray.’ Roland bowed with much politeness; but Ham’s stiff, pompous bend was an assertion of superiority.

‘I have probably broken in upon your *tete-a-tete* with this young man, Aster; so

I'll take a turn out and have a jaw with your guv'nor.' In a moment he was gone.

'This is your next door neighbour, I presume, Miss Aster?'

'Yes; he and papa are great friends. He consults papa upon nearly everything that he does upon his farm; and papa in turn consults him concerning our affairs.'

'I suspected as much. I presume that you and he are very intimate friends. I observe that he calls you "Aster."'

'I did not ask him to do so; and since he chooses to adopt this familiar fashion I cannot well rebuke him, papa and he are such friends.'

'Then do you permit *me* to call you Aster?'

'O indeed, I wish that you would do it; and all the time.' As she said this her eyes brightened.

'Thanks, Aster. I now feel that I am on equal footing with the rest. You are sure that you will not mind me Astering you before *him*? Doing it frequently?'

'Not a bit. I shall be pleased; I shall be *very much* pleased, because he seemed to take a pleasure in being familiar before you. And we are not such great friends after all.'

'You most not talk nonsense, Aster. It would never do to allow yonder well-tilled acres, that sumptuous dwelling, all those flocks of sheep, and herds of sleek cattle to pass into the hands of any other girl. Imagine pulling down the boundary line and joining the two farms into one! Imagine how your "guv'nor"—as this well-bred Mr. Ham styles him—would open his eyes if any other person should nave the temerity to ask for Miss Aster.'

'Then would you be really glad to see these two farms joined in one? To see me marry Mr. Ham?' Her tremulous eyes questioned his face eagerly. When she began her queries there was in them a flash of mocking mirth; but that had disappeared, and there was now only to be observed a grave, questioning expression there.

My reader is probably desirous of hearing something about Aster's face, notwithstanding the assumption that it was beautiful. As a rule we expect to find

chestnut eyes with ruddy-golden hair; but this was not the fact in Aster's case. Her eyes were the colour which men like Theophile Gauthier attribute to Venus: they were not blue, neither were they brown; but they presented in the most fascinating *ensemble* a grey which at night was a fathomless dusk, and by day that green which you perceive where the sea is a hundred fathoms deep. With the light upon her eye there was a glint of emerald, that witching glare which made Becky Sharpe irresistible. Now imagine an eyebrow, dark as the raven's quill, overarching such an eye, and contrasting itself with the burning gold of the hair, and a skin of Parian white and purity. Then contemplate a softness beside which the velvet upon the petal of a pansy would seem rigid; and this eye large and timorous, and fringed with long, dark lashes!

I do not like the work of cataloguing 'divine wares,' especially when my most elaborate estimate must present a picture crude and mathematical compared with the ideal.

This girl's nose was Roman in type; and was precisely like that which the engraver gives to Annette Marton. The nostrils were finely chiselled, betokening sensitiveness: and I may add that I have never known anybody with a thick nostril to be sensitive.

For a moment Roland's eyes were fixed wistfully upon the girl's, and he did not answer her question. But escape from the enquiring, unflinching stare was out of the question; so he said, mustering all the courage that he could:

'Well, to tell you the truth, Aster, I think you are twenty times too good for this fellow Ham; and therefore I should not like to see you marry him; to see the two farms become one.'

'Oh, I did not think that you considered me in any sense a superior girl; and I must feel highly flattered that you put a higher price upon that superiority than upon the splendid property adjoining my father's.' There was now the merest glint of mischief in her glance; and she was evidently desirous that Mr. Gray should be more explicit in his objection to the match. 'Does Mr. Gray realize what a great compliment he has paid me, a poor rustic, an untutored country girl, with a little knowledge about the bees and clover, and some cunning as to the tricks of breachy cattle? Now wherefore should I *not* marry Mr. Ham? Do I know more about the English authors, or about the French ones than he does? Am I more gifted in mathematical insight; or do I know more about the history

of kings and ancient wars? I can paint the merest bit; and my music is attuned for little else than the heavy heels of rustic swains and clumsy lasses. Now, Mr. Ham is more skilled in painting than I, and more learned in all things acquired from books: pray where, then, is the force of your objection to this joining of hands and farms upon intellectual grounds?'

'I think you miss my meaning, Aster. You cannot sum up the superiority of character by counting the items as you "take stock" in a tradesman's store. The highest and most captivating points in human character, especially in a woman's, often have such an evasive subtlety of outline that you can no more define them than you could the message which some blossom, blooming in a wild, far place, has for the human heart as you stoop over it to drink its perfume, and gloat upon its beauty. But you ask me to be definite: will you take offence, if, upon some points which present themselves to me, I become *quite* definite?'

'Not by any means, Mr. Gray. I am very anxious to hear everything that you have to say.'

'Well, Aster, I do not admire your friend, Mr. Ham. I think he is a coarse snob; and under an exterior of brusque frankness I believe he is deceitful and—cowardly. I should consider your union with such a person a monstrous sacrifice.'

'Would you have me wait until some man who reaches your ideal came and asked father for my hand? Or would you have me advertise in William Lyon Mackenzie's newspaper. Or, still another and final alternative, would you have me bloom in this sweet place all my days in celibacy?'

'I simply would not have you marry that person, Ham.'

'No other definite wish with respect to me?' Her head was bowed now, and her mischievous, upward glance was very fascinating.

'I have; but I should prefer for the present to keep it to myself.'

CHAPTER II.

A GATHERING STORM.

‘Oh! We had better go to dinner, then, had we not: I presume it is about ready.’

‘Stay, will you not wear this at dinner?’ stooping for a pansy that flourished among the late autumn blossoms.

‘Keep if for remembrance when I am away.’

‘Oh, but flowers fade; and I could only remember you for a couple of days.’

‘Why not press it between the leaves of a book?’

‘Oh, I will do that; and I will remember your lecture every time that I open the volume.’

‘Thank you; but if you can’t think a little bit about myself, I don’t want you to bother about my lecture. You can feast yourself in contemplation of your loud and gorgeous friend, Mr. Ham.’

They had entered the house: and at the same moment Asters father and Mr. Ham came in. It was quite plain that these two men were confidential friends; for as they entered the room the host had his arm within that of his guest, and both were so engrossed in their subject—talking in a low tone—that they seemed for a time unconscious of the presence of Aster and Roland. When the host did raise his head he simply gave a cold bow to Roland; and then bestowed a sharp glance upon his daughter. Nor was the rudeness of the host to end here. Turning his back upon Roland he said:

‘Mr. Ham and I have been discussing the Marsh, and he thinks that I had better go on with the drainage.’

‘It will bring in two years all the money expended in reclaiming it,’ put in Mr. Ham. ‘Don’t you think so, Aster?’

‘I don’t know, Mr. Ham; I really know very little about such matters.’ At this juncture Roland’s temper was asserting itself under the slight by the rude parent; so he stepped in among the trio, and looking the girl in the face, said:

‘You are quite right, Aster, not to bother your head about bogs and swamps. Let

the men attend to all that.' The father was simply amazed; and drawing himself up to his full height he frowned upon the young man. He said nothing, however, and to break the embarrassing silence Aster chimed in:

'I suppose that the city girls of your acquaintance never meddle in such matters; but the truth is, papa always consults me about these things.'

'In the city,' retorted her father, stiffly, 'young women have other concerns; but a girl who is to become a farmer's wife should make the management of stock and the tillage of the soil serious subjects of study.'

'Most certainly,' replied Roland; 'if a girl *is* to become the wife of a husbandman the farm should be her great concern. But I was not aware that Aster had seriously contemplated taking such a step.'

'I presume, sir,' replied the father, his voice quivering with displeasure,' that there are many of my daughter's affairs which she does not feel bound to disclose to strangers.'

'I had thought that I might congratulate myself as one upon the list of your daughter's friends. Was I not right, Aster?

'I always felt great pleasure, Mr. Gray, in regarding you as my friend, as one of my most sincere friends. Her colour had risen as she ended this sentence; and there was a slight tone of defiance in her voice.

'A fact of which I was not aware,' her father replied, with still rising choler.

'But you should not be too hard upon Aster,' put in Mr. Ham. 'Girls thoughtlessly form friendships. You'll forgive her, I know, for this indiscretion.' Aster turned upon him a look of infinite scorn.

'There is one indiscretion at least, Mr. Ham, for which my father will never have to pardon me.'

'And what is that, pray, Aster?'

'For counting you upon my list of friends, sir.'

'Leave the room instantly, Aster,' her father almost shouted, while his face was

purple with rage.

When the girl withdrew Roland turned, and bowing to the host, said:

‘Your conduct and your tone, sir, towards myself are so extraordinary, so inexplicable, and so unmerited, that there is nothing for me but to withdraw. As for this person, Mr. Ham, whom you admit to terms of such intimacy, nothing, I assure you, but the sacred shield of your household could have saved him from the punishment which his insolence deserves. However, he will not always be able to shelter himself by these walls, and by the presence of the inmates. I bid you good morning.’ So saying he walked out of the room and into the garden where sat Aster, flushed, nervous and miserable.

‘I came to say good-bye, Aster; after all that has happened it is impossible for me to remain.’

‘I am sure,’ the girl said, ‘that Mr. Ham must have prejudiced my father against you or he never would have adopted such language and such a manner towards his guest. I feel quite certain that it was not the swamp they were discussing while alone together this afternoon, but your character. From what I surmise of Mr. Ham I believe him capable of traducing you; of actually inventing charges against your reputation.’

‘Could he be so infamous? This is surely not possible.’

‘But it is possible; and this is the man with whom my poor father, who really has my interests at heart, would have me link my life. For the past four years his wishes in this respect have been horribly plain to me. Oh, it is very dreadful, Mr. Gray; and it will be still worse for me now that you, my friend, must henceforth be estranged from our house.’

‘But you will not marry that man, Aster, dear?’ He was looking wistfully into her beautiful eyes.

‘Oh, no; I shall never do it of my own free will.’

‘Farewell, Aster. Though estranged from your father and your house, fate may some time be kind enough to let me see you. Farewell.’ And taking her hand into his he raised it reverently, tenderly, to his lips, and imprinted upon it a warm kiss. Then he arose, bowed and went away. For many a bitter day afterwards he

remembered the mute misery in her look as he left the garden.

That evening Roland sought out an old Eton schoolfellow, whom he found smoking on the lawn of his uncle's house.'

'Why, you seem rather excited, old fellow; what is wrong? I thought that the fair Aster had a monopoly of your company for this evening.'

'Yes; it had been so arranged. But I found that cad, Ham, there, and he saw fit to insult me. You can now guess, I suppose, the nature of my mission.'

'Hem; things are really serious then. Do you want me to help you through with the affair?'

'If you will, old fellow. My wish is that you wait upon this person in the morning, that he may name a friend with whom you can arrange the meeting. Let it not be later than the following morning. He has, of course, his choice of sword or pistol.'

'I doubt if the man will fight.'

'Then nothing will remain for me but the loathsome job of giving him a horsewhipping. And I presume that you will not be silent as to his cowardice.'

Early on the following morning Frank Harland, for such was the name of Roland's friend, rode away towards Oatland's, the residence of the coarse-haired Mr. Ham. He alighted at the gate, and throwing his bridle rein over a post entered the grounds. Mr. Ham was at the moment crossing the field towards his residence; but when he perceived the early visitor he changed his course and proceeded to meet the comer.

'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Harland? Did not know it was you. It is a long time since we have seen each other. Was over looking at some of my fellows who are clearing the bush of a piece of intervale. Rascals will not work if one's eye is not constantly upon them.'

In a similar strain did he chatter on; but his ease of manner Harland could see was only counterfeited. The early visit and the grave face of the visitor had alarmed him; but he had not the courage to put any of the questions that had turned his face into a note of interrogation. At last they were at the door of the

dwelling; and Harland paused upon the steps.

‘I come to you this morning, Mr. Ham, upon an important and delicate mission; and should be glad if you would accompany me to your office or library.’

A flush of scarlet came into Ham’s face, and it was vivid through the roots of his coarse black beard.

‘Certainly; I shall attend to you with pleasure. I hope, at least, that the matter is capable of an amicable and satisfactory settlement. I have always sought to do what is right, and—

‘I have no doubt Mr. Ham, that it can be arranged with entire satisfaction.’ With these words the visitor seated himself in the chair to which Mr. Ham, with a hand that trembled, pointed.

‘I am, sir, the bearer of a message from my old school friend, Roland Gray. What the purport of such a message is you will no doubt very readily guess, when you come to remember the language which you recently employed respecting him, and the threat which your words evoked. I am therefore ready to arrange the terms for a meeting with any friend you may be good enough to designate.’

‘I really fail to comprehend what you mean, Mr. Harland.’

‘Oh that is impossible, Mr. Ham. There is a code of honour among gentlemen under such circumstances, of which you must certainly be aware.’

The fellow’s courage had quite failed him, if the pallor in his swarthy cheek did not utter a huge lie.

‘You surely do not mean that you come to propose terms for a duel?’

‘I have come just for that purpose; and shall immediately wait upon any friend you will name to me.’

‘But there must really be some mistake. I am not aware of having used any language that could evoke the resentment of your friend.’ Harland simply shrugged his shoulders.

‘I am not here to discuss that point.’ And he rose with scorn upon his face. ‘I

take the word of my friend upon the matter; and he is a gentleman and a man of honour.' At this reply Mr. Ham adopted a new line of policy, and with it a completely altered manner and tone.

'Well, Mr. Harland, suppose that it be as you say with respect to the provocation; there is another feature of the matter which I bring forward with reluctance, considering your relations of friendship with Mr. Gray.' Here he paused.

'Pray, proceed sir.'

'I may say, Mr. Harland, that the repute of Mr. Gray is not the highest; and considering my own character and standing I do not see how it is possible for me to engage in a combat of honour with him. My position as I have said is unquestioned; but I know nothing of your friend save that report speaks of him as an adventurer without character. He has had a good education, and all that, and associates with people of my own standing; but these facts count for little.'

'Pardon me, sir,' Harland replied with a haughty smile. 'I intend that your position in this matter shall be made very plain. I intend to show that one matter alone stands in the way of your acceptance of this challenge.'

'And what, pray, may that matter be?' The fellow was once more ashy pale, and he trembled.

'Your cowardice, sir.'

'What! Do you dare in my own house to use such words?'

'I use them, of course, most deliberately. And now, sir, that you have raised the question of the worthiness of my friend to meet you in a combat of honour, you must first permit me to state that in denying that fitness, every statement that you have made is a falsehood. First, as to his blood: he is a gentleman. And I know that in proving he is your equal in this respect, you will pardon me for asking certain questions of you, as you will my making certain statements of fact respecting him. Pray, sir, who was your father?'

'A gentleman. He was the owner of this property; and held the position of magistrate in this county, as I do.' Mr. Harland bowed.

'And who, then, sir, was *his* father?'

Mr. Ham winced; turned red; and then stood up, glaring at his interrogator the picture of wild but impotent rage.

‘I will not press the question, Mr. Ham; I will answer it. He was what we describe as a “common person.” That is, he *was not a gentleman*.’ Mr. Ham’s face was dark with rage; but it soon began to assume its ashen colour.

‘Now, sir, Mr. Gray’s father is a younger son of a fifth earl in the British peerage. He is therefore by blood fit to meet in the field of honour the grandson of a—_Nobody_. Then, sir, as to the undefined charges against his character, they are gratuitous falsehoods. If, with these facts before you, a refusal of satisfaction is still made, I have only this to say: the unpleasant task of horsewhipping you remains to my friend; while the duty of proclaiming your cowardice remains to me. What is your answer?’

‘Though your language has been such as I never believed that anybody would dare use in my house, I am constrained to accept your statements respecting your friend’s fitness to meet me in the field of honour.’ Then, as a spasm of terror almost convulsed him, he suddenly asked:

‘What weapons does he propose? I cannot fence.’

‘This is a matter that your friend and I shall arrange. The choice of weapons, however, I may add, rests with your side.’

‘Then please wait till I write a note to—Jabez Drummond,’ and the fellow, taking a pen, seated himself at his desk. But his fears had so unnerved him that he made several attempts before he could get the pen into the ink bottle; and wasted several sheets of paper before his hand was steady enough to produce legible writing. When he had ended he turned to the visitor:

‘Will you not take a glass of spirits before you go? Will you not come and breakfast with me?’ His cringing manner was most despicable; and Harland answered in a tone of quiet scorn:

‘No, thank you.’

Then placing the letter into Harland’s hands, he said:

‘Can this not be made a formal encounter? I have read that this thing is often

done.’

‘What do you mean, Mr. Ham?’

‘That we do not, for example, use bullets. Let it be blank charges.’

‘Of course you are at liberty to do what you please in this respect,’ Harland answered, with irony. ‘But we shall use bullets.’

‘My God, Mr. Harland, you seem to delight in taking the part of a monster.’

‘Good morning, Mr. Ham.’

‘But when, where-about what time, I mean, is this to take place?’

‘That I shall arrange with your friend. But I may say that there can be no valid reason to prevent it taking place to-morrow at the rise of sun. Good morning, Mr. Ham,’ and without further words he left the house, mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

On the following morning, Gray, accompanied by his second, rode away towards the place of meeting. The sun had not risen, but the eastern arc of the horizon was suffused with deep crimson which terminated in a rosy pink. A small hollow running at right angles to the Don, and known at that time as Sleepy Gulch, was the place chosen for the encounter. As the two men reached the mouth of this gulch they perceived the opposite party upon the brow of the hill. A second or two later another horseman appeared. This was the medical gentleman.

The combatants met, and Roland bowed haughtily to Mr. Ham. To Drummond he said simply:

‘Good morning, sir.’ Harland took his friend aside for a moment. There was a

look of mingled disgust and merriment in his face.

‘Merciful heaven,’ he said, ‘look at the size of our friend Ham.’

‘I have noticed it,’ replied our hero, with a contemptuous curl of his lip.

‘I firmly believe he has half the bedclothes of his establishment wrapped about him,’ Roland interrupted.

‘Proceed with business, Mr. Harland.’ That gentleman, walking up to Mr. Drummond, said:

‘I wish a word with you-Is your master indisposed?’

‘He declares that he took a violent cold, and has been suffering of shivers all night.’

‘I am very sorry; at the same time I must point out to you the propriety of at once requesting him to unwrap, that we may proceed. You are aware, I presume, of the quantity and denomination of the apparel for such an occasion.’ Drummond joined the bulky Mr. Ham; and it was noticed as he conversed that that gentleman turned from his morning pallor to a positive yellow. He at first seemed to refuse; but at last, with a cry much like the low whine of a terrified animal, he began to take off his wraps. In doing this he turned his back upon the other party.

‘You will pardon me, gentlemen,’ Harland said, as he stepped to the front; ‘but I believe I have the right under such extraordinary circumstances to obtrude myself here.’

‘What do you mean, sir? How dare you come here?’ cried Mr. Ham in his fear and rage.

‘To see that you are disrobed properly, Mr. Ham. If you will permit it the medical gentleman here will decide whether upon such a windless, sunny morning, you require all this raiment. At least you will not require all this leather,’ he exclaimed, as he drew out a huge piece which had been fitted so as to cover the entire front of the hero’s body down to the hips. ‘You don’t consider wraps of this sort necessary for a man with a cold, do you, doctor?’ Harland asked, turning to the medical gentleman.

‘No; I have not during my practice seen such remedies for colds,’ the doctor replied, with a humorous twinkle in his eye. The high-bred Mr. Ham was a most pitiable object to look upon as his friend proceeded to divest him of a horse blanket.

‘As a real guarantee against added chill, Mr. Ham should have provided himself with a buffalo robe, Mr. Drummond.’ Harland observed —“skinny aide out and woolly side in,” you know. We could not have objected so much to that.’

‘What!’ gasped out the brave Mr. Ham, while a gleam of hope shot through his eyes like a sunbeam, ‘Mr. Drummond could ride away and get me one in fifteen minutes.’

‘Mr. Drummond,’ replied Harland, ‘this would be absurd. The thing will be all over in three minutes.’

‘But it would keep me warm going home.’

‘For only three minutes longer, however,’ Harland again replied, addressing the second. ‘Besides,’ he added, ‘it might be’—and here stopped short with the manifest intention of torturing the cowardly wretch. It was noticed by Roland that Ham was constantly casting his eyes up the hollow, as if expecting somebody. At last a thought flashed upon him.

‘Mr. Harland, I believe that craven has notified the officers of justice, and that he expects them to come and break up the affair. Let us therefore proceed. He may keep on the remainder of his wraps. No delay; measure off the ground.’ The two seconds then measured off fifteen paces, and stopped.

‘Not such a short distance as that!’ shrieked Mr. Ham.

‘Why, I thought your friend never fired except with a shot-gun at crows?’ Harland observed. ‘But it appears that he is a crack shot. And so generous, too; since the greater distance is intended no doubt for the safety of Mr. Gray.’ This was said in a tone just loud enough to be heard by all the rest.

‘Ask Mr. Ham what distance he would propose—I have no objection to the inquiry.’

‘What distance would you propose, Mr. Ham!’ inquired the second.

‘My pistol will carry at least a hundred yards; I drove a ball through an inch board with her yesterday. Why not make it, say eighty paces?’

‘Because, Mr. Drummond,’ Harland replied, ‘over fifteen paces is “poltroon distance,” and, besides, our pistols do not carry effectively more than twenty paces. We will not, however, under any circumstances, fight on “poltroon distance.”’

‘I agree,’ replied Mr. Drummond.

‘Now then, gentlemen, take your places.’

The doctor whispered to Roland: ‘Is it fair, quite, to fight him when he says that you are a crack shot, and that he has never fired?’

‘He lies, doctor; it is the other way. I learn that from childhood he has been firing at all sorts of things with pistols; and *I have never fired a pistol shot in my life.*’

‘Your places, gentlemen,’ cried Drummond. Roland was already at his post; but his opponent was not yet upon his ground.

‘Why this unseemly haste?’ he gasped. ‘I am so unsteadied by my illness, that I am really not in a position yet to take my ground.’ Harland spoke a word or two to Drummond, and then said in a voice distinct and audible to all:

‘If after I call three Mr. Ham is not upon his ground the affair shall be declared off. My other alternative will then be in order. One, two–-‘

‘Hold, hold, I’m coming,’ groaned the coward, as he took his place.

‘Now, gentlemen, your backs to each other,’ said Harland. ‘I shall count one, two, three, and at the end of the last count each man shall wheel and fire.’

‘If I fall I shall have you proceeded against, Drummond-you are in a conspiracy to murder a sick man.’

‘I did not know that Mr. Ham was an Irishman,’ chimed in Harland.

‘One!’

‘Oh!’ groaned the respectable Mr. Ham.

‘Two—three!’ Simultaneously with the word ‘three’ there was a pistol shot. The gentlemanly Mr. Ham had fired before his opponent turned. Before he could see the result of his shot, Gray who had turned promptly at the word, fired; and with a frightful yell Mr. Ham fell to the earth, and lay there. The doctor ran up, and putting the fingers of his left hand upon the fellow’s wrist, with the other made search for the wound.

‘Here it is; you have shot him in the left side.’

‘Do you think it is fatal?’ Roland asked composedly.

‘I cannot say; but I really have little hope otherwise.’ It was hard to weigh the value of this statement. It was decidedly an equivocal one.

‘I would most certainly advise you to get out of the way, Mr. Gray. He seems to have no pulse. By the way, are you hit?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good God, where?’ He pointed to his breast; and to the horror of Harland blood was oozing through his waistcoat.

‘Let me attend to you,’ the doctor, who had the heartiest sympathy for our hero, cried, springing up.

‘No; you must attend to him. Besides, as I expected, here come the officers, good-bye.’ In a moment he was upon his horse, and galloping across the stubble-stretches, and clearing the snake fences that divided field from field, like a bird. The magistrate and two constables, for such were the officials that comprised the interrupting party, no sooner saw Roland in flight, than they turned in pursuit at a rate of speed equal to his own, and called upon him to surrender. He made no reply.

‘Then, men, fire upon him,’ the magistrate shouted. One of the constables raised his carbine and fired.

CHAPTER IV.

TO THE EDGE OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

‘Swish-h-h’ went the clumsy slug past Roland’s ear. He grasped his revolver; and the resolution of the moment was to stand at bay and fight the churls. But the reflection not occupying the hundredth part of a second showed him that such a course was not to be thought of. His antagonist had fallen; but this was only *a crime of honour*. To shoot the Queen’s officers would be a vulgar felony. So he kept upon his course, confident in the mettle of his noble horse, who with nostrils distended, and neck thrust out, would now lay back one ear and now another, as if to listen to the progress of the pursuers.

At last our hero reached the road, which lay along a level country skirted on one side by pine groves, and upon the other by the recently-harvested fields. Turning in his saddle he perceived that while he had distanced two of his pursuers, the third, the fellow with the blunder-buss, was gaining slightly upon him. He noticed also that the officer was engaged as the horse galloped along in putting another charge into his weapon. About fifteen minutes more of fierce riding followed; and although Roland’s horse showed no signs of exhaustion, the pursuing beast, which was taller in limb and more lithe, was remorselessly, though slowly, lessening the distance. The road now began to sink into a valley, and thick forest grew upon either side. Roland’s pursuer was not more than fifteen paces behind, when the fugitive heard a scuffing sound. He but too well divined what it was; and the next moment his horse fell to the road, struck by the slugs from the pursuer’s carbine.

‘It is as well,’ muttered our hero, as he sprang away from the gasping beast. The next moment he had disappeared in the dense, dark wood. Ah! how sheltering, how kindly, seemed that sombre sanctuary, with its dark grey tufts beneath his feet, and the thick, dusk-green branches of the fir and pine! The gloomy background seemed to invite him further into the heart of its shade and *silence*. No bird whistled through the glaucous green of this silent, majestic wood; nor was there any treacherous bramble to crackle beneath his feet. For upon this chill, grey carpet no flood of sunshine ever came to coax tiny sprays out of the ground; and the layers of fine needles, or tufts of dank, sunless moss were soft and noiseless as down under his tread. The stately trees grew far enough apart to

allow him to move with considerable speed, and after he had satisfied himself that he was beyond the sight of his pursuers, he changed his course and proceeded in a direction almost opposite to that by which he had come.

He believed that such a move could not fail to delude the sleuth hounds, who would suppose that he continued his flight directly away from the scene of his offence. In a little while he sobered his pace down to a walk; and shortly afterwards he sat down in the sombre solitude to ponder his situation.

Full well he knew that before the set of sun nearly every inhabitant of the county of York would hear of the deed; and that a hue-and-cry would be speedily raised by the officers of the law.

It is true that duelling was at this period as much in vogue in genteel circles as it was in England; yet the victor in an affair beyond the water, had no difficulty in slipping away from the scene of his offence, and in passing across the Channel. Here he remained for a decent season; and when he returned, the law in deference to its toleration of the code of honour, shut its eyes. Friends of the vanquished never, or hardly ever, instituted proceedings.

But in the colonies it was different. Godliness had taken a deeper hold in the soil; the Puritans of New England, who, in their zeal, had burned old women because they were guilty of sorcery, had much to say in correcting morals, and removing evil. The duel they considered one of the most odious sins of society; and no doubt it seemed all the more odious to them because it was the sin of an exclusive class who put an estimate upon honour that passed the understanding of men who believed it to be their duty to offer the left cheek after the right had been smitten.

It is only just, however, to say that this was a precept more honoured in the breach than the observance. The long-lipped, witch-burner would draw blood with his knuckles; but he drew the line at the sword. The state of public feeling upon duelling Roland very well knew; and as he thought of Aster, with her sunny hair and glorious, yearning eyes, and the exile that lay before him, a numb feeling of despair began to gather about his heart. He was able to persuade himself that she would look upon the unfortunate affair as necessary for the assertion of his honour; but how could he hope for any further happiness, a criminal in the law’s eye, and an exile from the country of Aster?

Why, however, he asked himself, was Aster the central figure in the picture of desolation that he was painting? He had never given her more than a passing thought before; had never thought of her save as a frank, generous, sunny-hearted girl. Now he began to recall words that she had spoken of which he had never before taken heed. The rippling laugh, half like the notes of a silver bell, and half like the trilling of a bob-o-link's song, came back like music now into his desolate soul, making him all the more disconsolate that he was never again to hear it. But had she not looked wistfully into his eyes when he took her hand in the garden to say good-bye? Was such a thought not comforting now? Ah no. Too truly has our poet sung it:

"Comfort! comfort scorned of devils, this is truth the poet sings; —That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

Would he, Roland began to ask himself, have been hurried into the hasty words, the passionate feeling, which were really the origin of all this woe, but for his regard for her? No; he saw it all plainly now. He had courted this quarrel; he obtained what he sought, and now did he hold in his hands the bitter fruit.

'But he might have had his will; she is a lone girl; and her unnatural father was no less eager that the marriage should be than the baseborn himself. Let it be!' Then a startled gleam came into his face.

'Ah, the sleuth-hounds are everywhere around,' he cried, as faint and confused shouts came from the road and the country side. 'But I am safe here, at least for a time;' and he looked gratefully at the grand sheltering solitude about him. No footprint desecrated this sanctuary of nature.

He had taken nothing to eat since the evening before; and pangs of hunger began to gnaw him. He walked a short way toward a large, grey rock near which he heard a gurgling sound; and as he advanced he saw that a little stream of water gushed from beneath the base. He drank copiously of the pure, cold spring, and bathed his temples; but in carrying the water to his forehead he noticed that one of his hands was crusted with blood. Then for the first time had the thought of his wound recurred to him.

Stripping himself of his coat, waistcoat and shirt, he perceived that he had lost an immense quantity of blood. Tearing a piece off his linen shirt he proceeded to moisten the coagulated blood to ascertain the nature of his hurt. He soon found

that the ball had hit him obliquely upon the breast, glanced, and gone round, making a serious flesh wound. Probing with his finger he located the ball which had lodged in the muscles under his left arm. Taking his knife he inserted the hook with which it was luckily supplied, and, after much pain, and rending of the flesh and muscles, extracted the bullet. The bleeding soon became less copious; and from this he took much heart, for he was assured that no artery was severed. Having washed the wound he proceeded to make some lint, which he applied as skilfully as a surgeon could have done, after which he went to a fir tree and therefrom obtained a quantity of balsam.

His long experience as a hunter had taught him how to manage wounds; and he now prepared a number of narrow strips of linen. Upon each of these he spread a quantity of the fir balsam; and then put the strip across the wound. About a dozen similar pieces were laid across, and these held the wound together; after which he placed a couple of larger slips along the wound at right angles to the shorter pieces. He then dressed and seated himself upon a tree-bole, and once more became buried in his gloomy reflections.

It was not of his love that next he thought, but of his wretched predicament. He was aware that in his own territory he was exposed to constant danger of detection, yet he plainly saw that escape to the United States was impossible in his present apparel. The hue-and-cry would describe him accurately; the law would put a price upon his head; and what the cupidity of ordinary mankind is he well knew. He had a half dozen sovereigns and a bank-note in his pocket-book; but were he to attempt to purchase rougher clothes attention would at once be attracted to him. As the afternoon wore on hunger continued to torment him with increasing keenness. Knowing that upon the elevated ground he would be likely to find a hard-wood grove, he set out, and, after an hour’s tramp, was rewarded by finding himself in a grove of beeches. He gathered nigh unto a pint of nuts which gave him some relief; and, as he passed outward again to the pine region, he found a rowan tree loaded with crimson fruit. He ate several bunches of the bitter berries, and, having sated his appetite, filled his pockets. Then, seeking a dense part of the wood, he lay down to rest. He had resolved that when night came he would set out for Markham, and, trusting that there were several farm houses near that settlement whose inmates had not heard of the duel, he determined to obtain food. What he would do afterwards, fate alone should determine. Laying his head upon a mossy hummock, comfortable as a pillow of eider down, despite the anguish of his heart, and the stinging of his wound, he was soon asleep, and dreaming of days when their was neither peril nor sorrow.

When he awoke he could perceive through the forest a slight tinge of crimson in the west; and he knew that the day was done. At first he could not collect his wits to remember how he had come hither, but a sharp pain in his breast brought back the truth in its naked hideousness. Why should he ever have awakened? Was he not happy in that sweet, sweet state wherein the present had no place, and the happy past was lived again? For while he slept he once again met Aster. Tears were in her glorious eyes, and with trembling lips she told him that she thought he would never come. And, taking him to the bank of the little stream that brawled down the rough slope of her father's common, she made him vow that he would never again leave her pining. And taking her head upon his shoulder he looked into her beautiful eyes, and he read in their tender, glimmering depths the secret that she loved him. Ah, how happy was her lot? He kissed the upturned mouth and held her to his heart. They pledged themselves to one another for ever and ever. Then the angel who watched over his sleeping flew away, and he was awake.

A sound came to his ears, Alas! it was not the music of his beloved Aster's voice —_but the baying of bloodhounds_.

'Merciful God' what chance have I with bloodhounds in this wood?' Roland exclaimed as he arose. Then he set out, as fast as he could, in the same direction which he had pursued during the morning. He was well aware that the hounds were brought into the wood at the point where he had entered it; and that they were now far upon his track. Reflecting upon his hunting experience he concluded that the cries which he could now hear, whenever he paused, were little more than half a mile behind him.

A man fleeing through such a wood as this has little need for speed with only human pursuers upon his track. But with a pack of bloodhounds holding the trail, and that keep well in advance of their followers, it was far otherwise. It was only necessary to follow the baying pack; and pursuit could thus be maintained at a pace fully as swift as the flight.

But Roland was weak from the loss of blood, and from hunger which the scant supply of beech-nuts, and the bitter rowanberries, only in small measure allayed; so it was very plain that his capture was only a question of time. But the labyrinth of forest-aisles now began to grow dimmer, and a throb of hope came into his heart as he thought of the coming darkness. Yet in this wilderness the dogs would know their game; and there was no escape by clambering a tree!

Meanwhile he redoubled his exertions, now slightly altering his course. When it was fairly dark he emerged from the wood upon the road by which he had made his flight in the morning.

‘Thank God. Here the dogs, among so many other scents, must miss mine.’ He perceived to his great joy that there was not a star in the heavens; nor was there to be seen any of the dusky yellow in the south-east which marks the rising of the harvest moon.

The wind was blowing from the south-west, and the fugitive’s eyes could see that large masses of dark cloud were rolling before the wind, and gathering to leeward like a mighty army, which halts its forces to prepare for battle. A heavy storm was brewing, and there would be no light from the moon. Providence indeed had been kind to Roland, giving in the morning the shelter of His forest’s sanctuary, and now the kindly shadow of His clouds.

He had lost the sound of the pursuers, and concluded that they must have either returned for the night, or sped the opposite way. He had not gone far, when he was startled by the sharp whinny of a horse. His first impulse was to avoid the beast; but upon consideration he resolved to reconnoitre. Approaching cautiously he found that the cause of his alarm was one horse only, tied to a tree which grew by the roadside. His sight having become accustomed to the darkness he was soon able to assure himself that no human being was nigh. Proceeding then to the animal, which he found saddled—it belonged no doubt to one of the pursuers who had left it there while in the woods with the hounds—he tightened the girths, mounted and rode away. This was indeed a godsend! He had not proceeded far when he saw a horseman approaching, The stranger stopped and pulled rein.

‘Hullo, Oswald; that you? I thought you should never come.’ Judge the consternation to discover in the voice of the speaker that of Aster’s father, the man who was the cause of all the woe and mischief. When his emotion passed he could have smitten the misguided man to the earth. Disguising his voice thoroughly, for he was an accomplished mimic, he replied:

‘This is not Mr. Oswald. I am from York. Rode by the Yonge street road. I bear a special dispatch from the Government to the magistrate at Markham respecting steps to be taken for the apprehension. Good-bye, sir. I am in haste.’ Before the other could reply Roland was trotting away briskly. After an hour’s sharp riding

he slackened his pace and allowed his horse to walk along the road.

The land dipped here slightly and the fugitive judged that he must be in the neighbourhood of River Rouge, and not far from Markham.

The forest seemed to grow thicker, and as far as he could judge through the dark, it appeared draggled and intermixed with larch and cedar. It was a lonesome spot; and Roland marvelled to himself if this could be the swamp that concealed so many mysteries, and filled all the country-side with alarm. While he was thus musing a figure sprang out of the bush and seized his bridle; at the same moment the shining barrel of a pistol gleamed in his eyes.

‘Surrender, fugitive duellist!’ a powerful voice shouted.

‘Dismount.’ Roland did so; but move which way he would the weapon still glittered in his face. As we have seen Roland had resolved that there should be no more spilling of blood, else his courage and dexterity might have enabled him to cope even with this daring captor. He was astonished to see but one person present, and looked around him for the others. But as his searching gaze could reveal nothing but the sturdy figure at his side, and the gloom-wrapped trees at the roadside, he began to reproach himself bitterly for not having been more alert. It was bitter to think that after all the excitement, strain and strategy of the morning, it should fall to his lot to be trapped in this way in the darkness of the night.

He began to wonder that his companion gave no whistle or other call for help, but remained silently standing upon the road, one hand upon the horse’s bridle, the other holding the menacing pistol. At last the captor spoke.

‘Know you who I am?’

‘A Queen’s officer.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ And the man’s strong, cruel voice resounded far through the solitudes of the wood.

‘No! I am not a Queen’s officer; but I am captain of the sturdy men who have made yonder bush a terror to the Province of Upper Canada. I have heard about the duel and the fall of Ham. You have rid the world of at least one worthless cur, and this is why I waited for your coming, to offer you, for the present, the

security of our dense bush and treacherous bogs.’

Roland hesitated. The fellow seemed to speak the truth; therefore what had he to fear with respect to his personal safety. He had some money and a watch; this the highwayman could have had now for the asking. Yet these men bore the reputes of atrocious criminals to whom every sort of lawlessness was familiar. However, he need not compromise himself by taking part in their enterprises. The main thing was the chief of the band had offered him an asylum; and as a last resort, if the place became intolerable he could flee from it.

‘Yes; I will accept your offer.’

‘Good. I take your word. Walk at my side, keeping close; for the path is narrow.’ So saying the two moved onward, the robber leading Roland’s horse.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROBBERS OF MARKHAM SWAMP.

After proceeding a few paces the robber chief tied his horse to a tree, and then bidding Roland follow, made his way through the dark and silent masses of the wood.

Several times our hero, despite his experience of forest travel, was tripped up by tree shores, or a tangle of underbrush; and once his forehead struck a sturdy limb with such force that he became for several seconds stupefied. The voice of the highwayman recalled him.

‘Hallo, Master Duellist, are you trying to escape me?’

‘I gave my word,’ replied Roland, ‘touching that matter. But I am not experienced in such travel as this.’

‘No,’ sneered the robber, ‘you great heroes of the city and level field are mighty as travellers only upon the open road.’

‘Your opinion as to that gives me no concern,’ our hero replied. ‘But I have eaten nothing since yesterday save some beech-nuts and a few rowanberries. Besides I have lost much blood.’

‘Are you wounded?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where?’ Roland informed him.

‘Is it bleeding still?’ He likewise informed him upon that point.

‘I see you are not such a calf after all;’ and then Roland heard him mutter something about ‘an acquisition to the band.’ The words made the matter clear enough now to our hero. This ruffian had not saved him because he had shot Ham, but because he wanted an addition to his force. Knowing that there was a price upon Roland’s head, he believed that he would find little difficulty in bending him to his infamous ends.

‘Here; let us take your hand. We shall never reach home at this rate.’ It was with a feeling akin to a shudder that Roland felt the touch of his guide’s hand; but the arrangement was successful, and the two got over the ground at a rapid pace. Every maze and tree in that dismal swamp seemed to be known to the guide; and he swerved to right and left,—sometimes so changing his course that it seemed as if he were retracing his steps—with such astonishing swiftness as to completely bewilder our hero.

‘I wonder,’ observed Roland, ‘that the law does not reach you here by the aid of bloodhounds; they filled the wood with dogs this morning for my benefit.’

‘They tried that twice, but it didn’t turn out profitable,’ replied the robber.

‘How did you elude them?’

‘Why we simply posted ourselves at convenient points and caught the intruding idiots. Out of a pack of twelve only one got out of the swamp alive.’

‘Have the constabulary ever sought you here?’

‘Oh, frequently. Once they were permitted to roam about through the swamp

without molestation. They found nothing for all their searching but a shed built on the lake's edge, and evidently used by fishing parties. They then returned and declared that the story of the swamp being infested was all fudge. A couple of years passed, during which many a bloated butcher and cattle dealer was relieved of his purse; and a few who were foolish enough to dispute about the coin were despoiled of more than their money. A girl also disappeared; a buxom lass with yellow hair and blue eyes, about whom half the country bumpkins had gone nearly wild.'

Our hero shuddered at the recital; but the robber heeded not his emotion.

'Then came indisputable proof that only persons living in the jolly swamp could have stolen the girl, taken the money, and cracked the few numbskulls; so they resolved, in the words of the newspapers of Muddy York, to "clean out the odious nest."

'A force of twenty constables, with about an equal number of citizens, turned out and approached the swamp. The force here numbered ten in all. Ah! but we were a sturdy band then. Well, as I have said, they came, the intrusive damned fools, to the swamp, and scattered their forces about. They found nothing; and this is the only fact they ascertained: that when they assembled at Reynold's inn, of the force of twenty-one that entered the swamp, only nine returned. They waited till the morrow for their missing comrades, but they came not. Yet not a cry was heard, though there was no wind among the leaves, and when murders are done the people say, "you year shrill screams." Neither was a pistol shot heard, or so much as the clang of a dagger. Ah! but it was the sport to see bow discreetly the thing was managed! I see, young man, you would like to find out the modes. Well, history not infrequently repeats itself in this dark wood; and I have little doubt that you will have an opportunity of discovering how we accomplish our ends, and why the *silence*.'

'Strange to say,' the robber went on, 'the good people of York took the matter tamely enough, and many declared their belief that those men who never came back must have fallen into shaking bogs or hollow swamps. 'Ha, ha!' the fellow chuckled, 'they were not very far astray! The "hollow swamp" was almost like an inspiration. Well, youngster, we have been frequently visited by *posses* since, but for the greater part we permit them to roam our labyrinths unmolested. Now and again, however, one, or two, or three intruders are missing; but considering what a wonderful man-trap the swamp is, these small matters do not make very

much commotion in the outside world. But we are almost at our journey's end.' As he spoke the ruddy glare of a fire could be seen a short way off.

A huge rock lifted itself in the wood, and behind this the gang had assembled. Their manner at once became changed upon the approach of the captain; but they could not conceal their astonishment at the sight of our hero; for they had read in their leader's eyes that he was not destined for harm.

'I bring a friend, lads, who is henceforth a member of our family. He pinked his man to-day in a duel, and was clearing off in a devil of a hurry, when I offered him our hospitalities.'

'Pinked his man, aye?' exclaimed one of the gang, a hideous looking ruffian with small eyes, bushy eyebrows, and draggled red hair. 'He seems better cut out to pink toads.'

'If we want your opinion upon such matters we will ask for it,' the captain observed, looking sternly upon the insulting ruffian.

'We are to live together, so we may as well commence by getting acquainted with one another, youngster,' the captain said. 'This fellow, whose tongue has just wagged, is Joe Murfrey, a famous blackguard in his own particular line. Yon respectable flaxen gentleman,' pointing to a villainous looking person with a greenish skin, of flaxen hair, and an unsteady, treacherous eye, 'gives moral tone to our little household. He, on occasion, devotes himself with much ardour to religious exercises. For the sake of being familiar we call him Jud Sykes.'

The hateful looking scoundrel bowed and said:

'I am happy to welcome you to our poor abode.' And as he drew near: 'Ah, so young and so fair, to stain his soul with the blood of a fellow-creature! Oh, my poor young man, repentance, repentance with us here in nature's sanctuary, where the grandeur of God's works, without any of the disfigurement of man, is all that remains to you now. I welcome you, my poor fallen son;' and he stretched out his hand. But our hero simply gave the blasphemous vagabond a look of scorn and turned away.

'There is one other, the fourth and last of the male members of our humble dwelling, to whom let me also present you. This is a young gentleman of a very meek and unobtrusive disposition. He never raises his voice to a high pitch, or

makes a noise when performing any little job that requires skill. It would seem as if his good parents were inspired in bestowing a name upon him. They called him Lifter. We have slightly varied the name, took a small grammatical liberty with it, so to speak. We call him The Lifter. Let me, Mr. Gray, introduce you to The Lifter.' Roland bowed with the same air of haughtiness and disgust. But now that he was among the unholy crew he felt that he must make the best of the situation, conformably, of course, with his sense of honour. The description given of this miscreant by the robber chief indicates his appearance. He was somewhat below the medium height, and though not stoutly built, revealed strongly knit shoulders, and muscles enduring as twisted steel. He had a fawning air, a dark, rolling eye, and most villainous brows.

'These young women attend to the domestic portion of our labours,' the chief said, 'This one is our Nancy, and this is Silent Poll.'

Roland bowed to each of the girls in turn; and he perceived that while both were handsome, they had that bold, free stare, which must always repel a man of refined or proper feeling. The handsomer of the two was Nancy; and Roland imagined that he perceived behind the forwardness of her manner a kind of reckless despair; that indescribable sort of vivacity which arises when hope, and honour, and everything that is dear are dead, and only what is worse remains to live for. This girl had evidently at some time moved in a society different far from this; for her speech was somewhat refined, and her bearing that of a woman more or less well-bred.

From the moment of Roland's arrival she seemed to be more thoughtful; and the melancholy in her eyes became more pronounced! He seemed—if one could judge of the varying expressions in her face—to call back within her a thousand memories long dead; to bring before her mind again a world which she had forgotten. Her eyes were almost constantly upon him; and when he spoke she listened with eagerness to every syllable that he uttered.

One of the first to perceive this was Joe; and a hideous light gleamed in his dull and sunken eye.

As for Silent Poll; not one word could be said in her favour. What she once might have been God alone can tell; but she seemed well content with the vile lot to which she had fallen. Indeed, when Roland saw her flaming eyes, and heard her speech, he doubted if companionship different from this had ever been

vouchsafed her.

Preparations for supper had been progressing for some time before the captain's arrival. In front of the bluff of rock blazed a fire made of birch and maple, and on a spit before this a huge piece of venison was roasting. A hideous old woman, with eyes like a rattlesnake, and draggled hair coloured like the moss upon an aged fir, stood by the spit, which every few moments she turned. Silent Poll had some lard in a cup, and a small quantity of this she put upon the meat each time that the hag turned the spit. Nancy extended a sort of camp-table and upon it placed the drinking vessels; and Roland perceived that these lawless persons lived in a very sumptuous manner.

Nor can it be said that the white bread, the butter, the large mealy potatoes, and other vegetables, together with the juicy haunch before the fire were indifferent to his stomach after his long ride.

'I'll get the grog,' growled Murfrey; and turning he disappeared, seeming to sink directly into the earth. In a few seconds he returned with a small keg which he placed beside the table.

The rays of the fire enabled our hero to get an indistinct view around; and he observed that they were surrounded by dense tangled forest, with the face of the rock forming an immediate screen from outside intrusion.

'You wonder, I presume, youngster,' the chief observed, 'why our good company run the risk of building a fire at night in this wood. Well, such an indiscretion we are not guilty of when the moon is out; but to-night no foot save a practised one could make its way through the underwood.'

'But might they not carry lanterns?'

'I grant you; but a light is an object that we as well as they can see. Besides, coming here in the dark is about the last thing in this wide world that the guardians of order would think of doing. Their visits were too fatal in the open day for that.'

At the table the liquor circulated freely, and as it was cognac, twenty years old, as the robber chief swore, it soon brought up the spirits of the gang. To his great disgust, Roland perceived that the girls drank almost as freely as the men. After Nancy had quaffed a couple of horns, the melancholy which the new-comer had

a little while before noticed so plainly in her face disappeared; and she began to bestow marked attentions upon the handsome and well-bred stranger. Not an act of hers escaped the jealous eye of Murfrey; and as the miserable girl was in the act of passing something to Roland, the robber gave her a violent blow upon the arm.

‘You are too d—d ready with your attentions,’ he growled, and then swore a terrible oath. Nancy turned and looked upon him with flashing eyes; and ferocious and bloody as the man was, she did not fear him. A little later she raised her horn and looking the stranger in the face, said:

‘I pledge you welcome, sir; will you drink good-will and long friendship with me?’

Roland, as we have seen, had from the first resolved to make the best of the deplorable set, so with easy courtesy and good nature, he raised his horn and said, ‘I drink with pleasure.’ But before he had swallowed his sip Joe had risen from his seat and reached his side; and without word or warning dealt him a severe blow on the head. Roland’s blood boiled in his veins and were his life the issue ten times over he would not submit to the indignity. He sprang from his chair, weak though he was from his wound.

‘Infamous ruffian,’ he thundered, ‘How do you dare?’ and striking the desperado once, twice, upon the temple felled him like a beast upon the turf. For a moment the villain lay, as if he had received his death-blow; then he moved, raised himself, and was upon his feet again. At first he reeled and staggered, though not from brandy; and putting his hand to his hip he drew his knife. Roland saw the reflection of the glittering blade flash upon the front of the sombre forest; but he did not move. The miscreant approached him with his weapon raised; but our hero was prepared. Drawing his pistol he cocked it. ‘One step forward and I blow your brains out.’ Further mishap was prevented by the chief who sprang between the two.

‘Enough,’ he cried, raising his hand, ‘replace your weapons; and reserve them for other uses. You have my congratulations, youngster. You are the right stuff; just such metal as we want here. As for you, Joe, you got what you deserve richly. Not another word.’ No other word was spoken; but the robber glared upon the victor like a foiled beast.

As for the robber himself whose appearance I have not sought to describe so far, his stature was certainly a splendid one. He stood not less than six feet two inches high; his chest was full, and his neck and limbs such as a sculptor might take as a model for a Hercules. His face was not unhandsome, but it was marred by an all-prevading expression of cruelty. In his eye there was no room for pity or remorse; nor was there a feature in his face that could harbour a generous or kindly impulse; or one of honour. His hair was dark, but tinged with grey; and the cruelties of the man's career had left wide and horrible furrows extending from the corners of his mouth into his cheek. It would be too generous to say that the man had been born under an evil star; that some great cross had come to him and turned his being to evil. For there was no trace of any good; the face, the voice, the *tout ensemble* of the man were evil. Roland simply shuddered as he looked upon him; and he shuddered too when he reflected that the monster had set his heart to turning him into a highwayman.

The gang lighted their pipes when the supper was ended, and the girls cleared the board. Poor Roland, with the cold heavy hand of Despair squeezing his heart, walked a few paces away from the camp fire, and sat upon a tree-bole. In a little while the fire had grown so low that no light came from it save the scarlet glow from the smouldering embers. A deep gloom was everywhere; but it was not darker than the shadow that had fallen upon his life. Suddenly the gates of the dusk seemed to open, and a flood of silvery light fell upon the world. Looking, he perceived that the clouds were breaking, and through a rift in the pall the moonlight flood had been sluiced upon the darksome swamp. With the light came a stirring of hope at his heart; and for a minute he surrendered himself to the sweet thought that a time might come when he, with honour untarnished, could issue from the toils, and take his place in that world from which his crime had banished him.

'It will be forgotten in two or three years at most,' he mused, and at the end of that time she may still remember. And then divers avenues of escape from the hideous toils were open to his imagination. Why could he not, after the lapse of a few months, disguise himself, go boldly out of the wood and cross the frontier? In a republican city he could engage in some honourable occupation; and perhaps his beloved might care to hear something of his fortunes. His dreams had become very rosy when he heard the voice of the chief asking him if he did not want to 'go to bed to-night.'

He saw no camps, no blankets, no dwelling, and he marvelled as to where they

slept or found shelter from the storm. One by one his companions seemed to sink into the bowels of the earth, as the robber before supper seemed to have done, till at last nobody remained but The Lifter.

‘I am waiteen to show you to your bed,’ the fellow said in a voice as soft as the ripple of an oily stream.

‘Why, where on earth does your company sleep?’

‘Nowhere *on earth*,’ returned the soft-voiced Lifter.

‘Come; we go under the earth;’ and taking our hero’s hand he led him to what looked like the mouth of a pit. A faint light beneath revealed a sort of step-ladder, and by this Roland, following his guide, descended into what seemed a cavern. The air was not foul, as one might suppose, but there was an earthy smell which at first was disagreeable enough to the nostrils of our hero. Taking a taper, which was left burning below, The Lifter led the way for a considerable distance, and then turning to the right entered a sort of aperture or pocket in the clayey wall to his right. The flickering of the light here revealed a small bed; and setting down the candle the Lifter said:

‘This is to be your room while you stay with us; good night.’ In spite of the sickening sensation that came over Roland as he entered this underground lair, and the feeling of pain and shame at the part he was compelled to act, he was soon asleep, and dreaming once again of days that held no evil.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAYS OF ROBBER LIFE.

During the night a violent gale blew, rain fell in torrents, and many a proud tree received its death blow when lightning sprang from the low-brooding cloud.

But the face of nature was as bright next morning as a child’s face after its own little tempest and its tears have passed, and joy takes possession once again. The sky seemed so clearly blue, that one might think, as I myself often when a child

imagined, that in some unaccountable way the rain in falling had washed the sky, and hence it looked upon the morrow *cleaner*.

White clouds, like frail, wide tangles of thistle-down, drove across the sky and helped to form a vast congregation to leeward.

Overhead, and for a considerable way upon their journey, these clouds are white, but when they begin to form away beyond the reach of the wind, they immediately turn to a pearl grey. Sometimes you will notice a flush of rose, and often little patches of violet; and if to these hues be added no other save the semi-universal cumulus or neutral, you have little cause to fear that the tempest will renew itself. But beware of the purple and the sulky indigo. The purple sometimes clears up and dissolves itself in joyous crimson, or fair-weather pink. I have hardly ever known indigo to relent. When it rolls or steals into the heavens its purpose is tumult; and if you miss its fury be sure that someone else, some other where, will not.

Roland's heart arose as he stood once more under the pure honest heavens, the wholesome air filling his lungs, and the sunshine, despite his lot, creeping into his heart.

And although the bush that clad this swamp was hateful as woods could be, it revealed here and there to our hero's ken a touch of beauty; for among the evergreens several maple, beech, and oak trees had thrust their roots. The dull bronze of the oak, the pale gold of the beech, and the flushed crimson of the maple contrasted richly and often gorgeously with the myrtle of the evergreens.

'Smitten by the beauty of our woods, aye?' the robber enquired.

'Yes; I was looking at that flaming maple.'

'We are not so God-forsaken here as you might imagine, young man. A capital fishing stream runs through the swamp.'

'Are there fish in that lake which I see gleaming through the bush?'

'Plenty of them. Well fed too, ha, ha.' There was something in the tone of the man's voice that made Roland's blood run cold.

'Oh, yes; you will get reconciled to our ways of living sooner than you imagine;

and by the time that your wound is healed you will be longing for exercise. But we will give you plenty of it.'

'In what manner, may I ask?'

'Now, how innocent you seem, Mr. Duellist. Why, have I not told you? Have you not heard what the occupation is of the gang of Markham Swamp? Well, you will assist us in keeping up the reputation of the place. But you will not at first get work which only trained hands can do. I shall be considerate enough not to require you to go abroad while the sun is up; but you will bear a hand at night when no moon is to be seen; and when the storm kindly helps to conceal suspicious noises. Now and again, young man, if I must be so plain, I will need you to aid in breaking houses, and gagging noisy fools. Sometimes I will require you to crack a skull, if easier methods fail in the prosecution of our enterprises. I take a fancy sometime for carrying folks away to our curious quarters; some of whom it suits my humour to retain for a time, others of whom I allow to sink into the mysterious hollow swamp. We have not carried away a pretty lass for many months now; and it is quite desolate here sometimes when one has not handsome female eyes to look into his and give him cheer.

'But I have had my eye upon a girl distant far from here. Over a year ago I saw her in her father's orchard gathering peaches. Looking up her eyes met mine, which were burning upon her through the hedge. She gave a shriek of horror and ran away. Never, young man, had my eyes before rested upon a being so fair as this. I might have gone away and strove to think no more about her, but the look of loathing as well as terror with which my face filled her, decided my course. *I resolved to have her.* Before the spring buds are on the trees she shall be here; and one of the offices I shall reserve for you is to assist me in bringing her hither. I may be able to use you as a decoy; for your face, curse it, seems to find more favour with women than mine.'

'And you brought me here, then, that I might aid you in such works of infamy?'

'Precisely.'

'Then hear my answer once for all. Death shall be mine before dishonour. Rather than assist you in carrying out the least of your evil deeds *I will give myself up to justice*.' The robber's face grew as dark as a thundercloud, and a devilish light flashed in his eye. For a moment his hand rested upon the haft of his knife; but

only for a moment.

‘We shall see,’ he replied. ‘I have bent more stubborn wills than yours. You will have some time to make choice of my two alternatives. This only have I now to say: If you have any hope of being able to escape hence and get into sheltering territory put it from you. While you stay in this wood watch will always be upon you. Should you manage to escape those who guard you here, I myself will lead the minions of the law upon your track. Now get these words down into your craven heart.’

‘I perceive, miscreant,’ Roland retorted, his eye flashing, that you understand my code of honour, and take advantage of it. You are aware that falsehood and insolence from such lips as yours convey no insult. But despite your stature, your hungry knife, and your three villain associates, here, even in this den I would not hesitate to inflict chastisement if I could but do it upon grounds of honour. Now, ruffian, you know my will. But *defend* myself, save from the arm of lawful authority, I always will.’ And he faced the robber, who, probably for the first time in his evil life, quailed. Turning upon his heel the chief strode away.

‘You have my word,’ is all that he said. Roland then perceived that the captain in a stern voice gave certain commands when he joined the group. Murfrey, with a dogged countenance, descended the pit; the respectable Mr. Sykes followed him; and a little later the giant figure of the chief himself disappeared into the hole.

‘I was lis’neen. Heard your words to the capteen,’ The Lifter said to our hero, in a smooth, even whisper. ‘It is surpriseen he didn’t stab you.’

Nancy was engaged making for herself a wincy gown; the hag was sewing buttons upon a pair of breeches belonging to one of the highwaymen, and Silent Poll was kneading dough.

‘I do not regard it as surprising,’ our hero replied.

‘My, but that’s strange,’ quoth The Lifter.

‘Two can play at a game of that sort; I do not relish an encounter, but whoever gets my life will have to strive for it. But that is of little consequence. What is on now?’

‘If you will just remain standeen where you are and keep your eyes open you will see.’

Presently our hero saw a strange head rise from the cavern; and then the entire figure appeared. The disguise was most complete, and the robber, whichever one he was, held a buck-saw in his hand.

‘Off buckeen,’ whispered The Lifter. The fellow wore a very ragged coat, and corresponding breeches; but our hero could not remember having seen him before. He stood close to the mouth of the pit looking first at Nancy, and then upon Roland. The jealous glare setted the point in our hero’s mind. The disguised ruffian was Murfrey. The next moment out popped a sleek, respectable looking personage, carrying a Bible under his arm, and a walking stick in his hand. He was dressed like a dissenting clergyman, wearing at his throat the white bow that characterizes the Wesleyan preacher.

‘The fear of God is the beginning of all righteousness. Tread ye in His ways, my children,’ he said, raising his hand above the group. And then pronouncing a benediction, the miscreant departed.

The robber chief next appeared, and him our hero could never have identified. Under his wide-brimmed hat tufts of curly chestnut hair were visible; and his jaws and chin had a huge beard to match in colour.

‘Cattle dealer,’ whispered The Lifter. The robber’s clothing were such as to harmonize with a man who bought and sold horses, bullocks and flocks of sheep. In his hand he carried a heavy, knotted stick.

‘We return at moonrise,’ he said to the old woman as he turned away.

‘Good luck, good luck to ee,’ quavered the crone. ‘A pocket-full o’ yallow shiners for yourself, me fine dear.’ And she waved her withered arm after the robber many times. ‘Seventy-two years I’ve lived in this bush, girl an’ woman, an’ he’s the finest one that ever come into it; barrin’ my other son the Slugger that the p’lice bagged when he was drunk. But not apeach would he, even when they put the rope around his neck. He’s the sort of a man for you to pattern by, my young one,’ the old woman said, turning to Roland and addressing him for the first time.

‘Why, old dame, ought I be anxious to have myself hanged in the end, as I

understand this Slugger was?'

'Bah! you haven't courage enough to earn your hanging. I do not know what the captain wants to bring such coves as you here for,' she said, darting a malignant glance at our hero. 'I would be ashamed to eat other people's bread and accept their shelter, without trying to make myself useful.'

Roland was in one of his irritating moods so he said:

'I perceive that you are a very wicked old lady; and I am quite sure that if the officers could only lay hands upon you, they would give the birds something to peck at. Do you know what they do with bad old ladies like you? Why, they hang them up to trees that stand alone upon a bleak common; that the boys may pelt and the crows may feed.'

The rage of the old gentlewoman was now so great that she was unable to articulate; and when her fury reached the most impotent stage, Roland arose and walked away.

'Do you wish to take a turn with the rod?' Nancy asked.

'Yes, I should like to get out of sight of our uncharitable grandmother here.'

'Hush! I would not advise you to provoke her too far. If you knew what her career of crime has been you would shudder to bring her ill-will upon you. I am afraid you have brought a great danger upon your head.' Our hero and Nancy emerged from the wood and there lay spread before them a lake of shining water, though dark as soot. Its area was probably about twenty acres; and although its depth seemed to be great, a black stump rose here and there from the surface. The two had not walked far when the shrill voice of the old woman was heard calling.

'Nancy, Nancy!'

'I must leave you; but I will return as soon as I can. I have many things to tell you and many warnings to give. The Lifter, I think, has taken a great fancy to your ways; and I think you will be able to credit what he says to you. I will join you up the brook and we'll have a fish together. Good-bye, dearie;' and the girl flung a kiss to him from her finger tips and was away.

A minute later The Lifter came whiffling along and joined our hero.

‘Well, stranger, what do you think of the parseen?’

‘I think that he is a blasphemous villian; and I wonder that God Almighty does not send a bolt from heaven upon such a wretch.’

‘But it is said that they have a good deal of patience in heaveen. Well, I think they must or they never would suffer the Rev. Mr. Jonas to walk the earth. I often sit a thinkeen about him; and always come to the conclusion that he is not *sincere*.’

‘Cease your knavery, fellow. What purpose can it serve to talk in this fashion to me?’

‘Well, I will. I like you, because you knocked down the bully. I have a great likeen for the fellow’s gal; but till you came she cared best for Joe. I’d like to tell you summat of my brethreen. But say, are you here hard and fast?’

‘I fear, alas, I am.’

‘What did you do; kill your man in a duel?’ Roland sighed and bowed his head.

‘Then you cannot go away and peach, so I’ll give you a bit of our indoor history. You saw these as went out to-day. Wall, they are off spotteen (spotting). Joe will go to some comfortable farm house and ask for a job saween wood. He can be very good natured and obligeen; and pretty soon he gets the run of the house. If there is a silver spoon or a watch in the house he seldom leaves—though he often returns day in and day out to the same house—without bringeen it away. Sometimes he hears of a man who has a lot of shiners, and if he can be sure that he keeps it in the house, he makes himself at home for a few days about the place doeen chores cheap. His next visit is when they are all asleep; when there is no moon, and the storm makes much clatter. He escaped from Newgate in the ould country; came to Muddy York and got jugged. He broke bars and was picked up one evening as you were on the edge of this swamp. He was the very man they needed here.

‘But there is a very interesting history belongeen to the Rev. Mr. Jonas. That is, as to how he became the Rev. Mr. Jonas. Well, it was like this. He was caught when very young at Piccadilly pickeen a gentleman’s pocket. He learnt the trade

under one Fagan, a jew, the cheese toaster that you read about in that new book, *Oliver Twist*. He was sentenced to three years; but when he got out he joined the pickpockets again; was again caught and transported to Australia. From that far away place he beat his passage to Halifax; and worked his way from that town, too, till he got to York. He was prime always at workeen anything. Well, he got tired of idleness in York, and one night climbed into the residence of Sir Edmond Bond Head, the gov'nor, and stole his watch. The gov'nor fired, but harmed notheen except the glass. The next day he sold the watch to a Jew; but the detectives were on his track and nabbed him. He was sent down for six years.

'When two years were served he began to long for a more active life; and slippeen one night through the bars he came away. They pat up the hue-and-cry next morneen, and had half the country at his heels. The capteen met him; said he was just the young man he wanted; and took him to the heart of the establishment.

'And now comes the interesteen part of the story. Mr. Sykes was not an idle man; he would scorn to eat a crumb that he did not work for; so he was every day abroad, and if he could bring in notheen better he was sure to return a little after dark with half a dozen chickeens, or a couple of quarters of lamb or veal around his neck. One day he came in with something that was not lamb, nor veal, nor fowl. Now, what do you think it was? *Blow my eyes if it wasn't a Methodist parson!*

'The parson was a meek-lookeen man, with a white bow under his throat; and his name was Mr. Jonas.

'"What in thunder did you bring that Sky-pilot here for?" the capteen asked in his most angry tones; while ould missus run a ecreecheen to the cavern.

'"I have good reason, I assure you, capteen, for the capture," was the reply. "Give the man of God sometheen to eat. He must pray for us this eveneen. It'll be as good as a circus to listen to him. It's been so long since we had divine service in here."

'Ah, young man, but it was good fun to hear that parson pray and preach that night. The very

'Aisles of the dim-wood rang to the anthem'

that he raised; and I am sure he thought that he had carried our hearts by storm. He prayed God to soften our obdurate hearts; and especially asked heaven to cause these misguided men to relent in their intensheens, and permit him to go and carry the refresheen rain of the Gospel to thirsty ground. After the prayer was ended I showed him his couch, the same whereon you slept last night, and before I said good night I asked him to pray for me. He squeezed my hand and said:

‘“Is your heart softened? May I depend on you?”

‘I answered, “Fear not. I have been a burneen brand and you have snatched me from the fire.” He turned his eyes toward the clayey roof and gave thanks. When I returned to upper air Mr. Sykes had gathered Mr. Jonas’ late congregasheen about him, and thus addressed the meeteen:

‘“Brethreen and sisters, I intend to amend my life. I have been a wicked man; but he good parson below has carried the grace of God to my heart. Henceforth my mission shall be to preach the word. So zealous am I in this respect that *I intend to preach instead of Mr. Jonas!”*

‘For several minutes I could not gather what he meant; but it became quite clear when he added:

‘“This congregasheen is large and wealthy enough to retain a preacher unto itself. Capteen, with your permission we will keep Mr. Jonas!” The capteen, who long before had caught Mr. Sykes’ intention, nodded a hearty approval.

‘That eveneen Mr. Sykes took possession of Mr. Jonas’ private letters, recommendations, etc.; and likewise bore away to his own diggeens a Bible, several prayer books, and three or four hymn books belonging to the preacher.

‘“Brethreen and sisters,” he said, “I am no longer the wicked Ned Sykes, but the good and Reverend Mr. Jinas.”

‘That day, clad in the clergyman’s very robes, with a white tie under his chin, and three holy books under his arm, he set forth. He visited every Wesleyan family in the neighbourhood; presented his credentials at each house, and received from one and all a cordial and Christian welcome. Since that time he has preached regularly every Sunday; he has “the run” of every Christeen house in the denomination through the county of York. More than this, he is noted for

his piety and eloquence, and people who will not trust the banks, deliver their wealth into his hands for safe keepeen. About twice in the year he preaches a charity sermon, for the help of the widow, the orphan, and the distressed, generally; and requests that the amounts be forwarded to him for disposal.

‘During his ministerial missheen he has collected about thirty watches; close upon a basketful of silver spoons; while he has led a nightly attack upon just ten houses belonging to his parishioners. He has killed, with his own hand, in his own bed, the class-leader in the Wesleyan Sunday School, and wounded one of the church trustees. But he attended afterwards, with much concern, and read words of consolation to the wounded man.’

‘My God!’ Roland interrupted, ‘this is shocking. Does he still continue at this work of infamous hypocrisy?’

‘Bless your heart, yes.’

‘Eternal heaven, he is not the eloquent minister who preaches every other Sunday at the Don?’

‘The very same.’

‘Why, I have gone there myself and heard him, attracted by his great repute. Yes, now that I come to reflect, this miscreant who went out this morning and the preacher to whom I listened with such rapt attention, are one and the same man.’

‘I hope that you were made better by his discourse,’ The Lifter said.

‘And pray,’ our hero inquired, ‘what became of the poor minister, the real Mr. Jonas?’

‘Oh they kept him confined for several months, and he wasted away past beleiveen. Nobody here took to him like. At last the new Mr. Jonas said to him one morneen:

‘“Mr. Jonas that was, pray come down with me to the side of the lake that we may converse. I like best to contemplate the might of God through the agitasheen of the waters; and behold how the storm blows!”

‘The poor, wasted Wesleyan went with him; but he never came back. An hour

later the new Mr. Jonas returned; but he made no allusion to the real minister. We afterwards learnt that he had drowned him in the pond.'

'Great God, how horrible!'

'There now, you must not say anything against the habits and customs of the place. I will bid you good morneen.' Taking his rod and line the sleek desperado made his way up the stream; and our hero was left to horrible recollections. There was a noise among the parched leaves, and a moving of boughs. Then Nancy stood before him. She did not expect to find him here at the first turn, and she blushed deeply.

'I thought The Lifter was with you still. But I am glad that he has left you. We shall fish arid talk here. Has The Lifter told you anything about the history of the highwaymen?'

'Yes; I have heard enough to make me sick at heart.'

'Did he tell you about the Captain?'

'No.'

'Well the Captain is his own father; and the old woman is his grandmother. The robber chief's father was known as "Nick, the Highwayman," a terrible person whose name made everybody's heart beat fast fifty years ago.'

'But how came you here, Nancy? You look different from the people about you; your language is elegant and you appear as if you had been born well.'

Such words coming from *him* embarrassed the girl. But when the blood began to return to her cheek, she heaved a sigh so piteous and profound as to move every spring of pity in our hero's heart.

'Ah, yes; I knew purer, and more happy days,' she replied; 'but to commence my story is like opening again wounds that once have tortured. My father came to this country when I was an infant under the nurse's care, my mother having died a few hours after I was born. My father had served for many years as an officer in the army; and he fought under Lord Wellington, as captain, at Waterloo. He had several connections in this Province, and shortly after his arrival here, through the influence of the governor, obtained the position of sheriff for York

and the allied counties. He built a house in the heart of the wilderness, and cleared a farm, stocking it with horses, cows, oxen and sheep.

‘I found it very lonely during the years of my early girlhood; and I used to go, despite my father’s wishes, much away from home, spending a day with one friend, and a week with another. Nor was I choice at all in the selection of my acquaintances. My father frequently used to point out that as I was a lady by blood, I should seek the companionship of ladies only. But his remonstrances never exceeded words; and when I disobeyed, his orders he only sighed and wished my mother had been spared to watch my welfare.

‘When I reached my seventeenth year, my friends were pleased to tell me that I was “a beauty,” and they predicted that I would make sad work among the hearts of men. I always was a coquette, and to capture the affections of a man, I regarded as the greatest victory a woman could win. So I felt proud of my beauty and of my gifts, for I had a natural way of pleasing everybody, and resolved to make the most effective use of both. In the spring I looked to the sugar season; and wished for the dawn to break upon nights when the frost was keen. When the sun shone out I knew that the maples would merrily drip; and when breakfast was ended, tying on my hat, I hurried away to join the sugar-makers. It made no matter who the persons were, and I used to be as happy and as much at home among the servants who did our domestic work, as among the high-bred folk who were my father’s associates. In the evening I attended candy parties among the rustics; and danced and played at games. The game that pleased me most was post-office; for there was plenty of kissing when playing that. But ah! I did like kissing! I always singled out the most popular man in the room for conquest; and no other girl had any chance whenever I entered the lists. And in spite of the preference which all men gave to me, I was popular, and no unkind words were uttered about me. If anybody hinted that I was a flirt, there was sure to be someone present who would promptly say:

‘“Oh, she is not proud anyway. She is a *real* lady; and she is not too good to mix with common folk.”

‘Well, in this way things went till I was eighteen. One evening, at this period, I attended a dance which wound up a “quilting bee,” at a house about a mile distant from our own. All the rustics there were known to me; but there was a stranger present who at once attracted my attention. He had not the conscious air and movement of the country folk, but seemed as cool and as much at ease as if

he were in the woods alone. He was handsome, too, and no sooner did I see him than I felt attracted by his splendid eyes.

‘He asked the hostess to present him; and my heart throbbed wildly as he came up, bowed, and asked if he could have the pleasure of a dance. I readily consented, and before the party broke up I had given the stranger all my heart. I had never loved before, much as I had enjoyed men’s company. Yet, although I gave my heart away, I had some undefinable dread of this dark, daring stranger, with the remorseless though beautiful eye, and that dare-devil step and bearing. Many times, again, we met; frequently in the meadows when the gloaming came; and often in my father’s orchard.

‘He declared in burning words his love for me and asked if I would become his wife. I consented. Then I bade him ask my father’s sanction; but this he would not listen to. He said that our wedding would have to be kept a profound secret; and asked if I knew any clergyman upon whom I might rely to perform the ceremony. I knew that it would be useless to apply to the Episcopalian minister who preached once in the month in the district church, for he and my father were the closest friends. But Mr. Wyman, a Baptist missionary with whose family I was very intimate, contrary to my father’s commands, I felt sure would not refuse. I had an interview and he consented to wed me to my darling.

‘In a little while it was accomplished; and writing a letter wherein I stated what had happened, and telling how I loved my husband, I laid it upon my father’s desk and went away. My husband took me into another county and provided for my comforts at a little rustic hotel. I should have been supremely happy but that he was obliged to be the greater portion of his time absent upon business, concerning which he would not give me the faintest clue. I noticed, too, that he always came at night and went away before the dawn; and that he always seemed afraid of something and of everybody. Sometimes it ran through my mind that my husband’s reason was not sound; a suspicion that some act of good judgment or clever reasoning on his part would soon dispel. But his long and frequent periods of absence soon became intolerable and I told him that take me with him he must; that I was prepared to share labour, and travel, and storm with him.

‘“It you do not take me with you,” I said one day, after he had been absent for a fortnight, “I shall go home again and never permit you to see me more!” I knew he understood that I would keep my word. He was very much agitated, and he

said to me:

‘“Since you desire it I will take you with me. When I take you there shall you see more of me than you have seen since we were wedded. But hearken to what I say: I would as lief carry you to the churchyard as to the abode which is mostly mine.”

‘I was wayward; and declared that I cared for nothing provided that I were with him. One evening he came and bade me to make ready. He had a pair of horses outside, and across the back of his own steed my clothes, which he stowed in sacks, were put. For hours and hours through the night we rode; and when the faintest tinge of silver showed itself in the east we were on the edge of this hateful swamp. From that day to this I have never left it.’

‘And what became of your husband?’

‘Later on you shall hear. When I discovered who my husband’s associates were, what he himself *was*, shame, rage, and despair entered my heart. I uttered no complaint; but tearlessly resigned myself to my doom. The revelation, of course, instantly crushed the love out of my heart for the man who had betrayed me. Six months later he was shot by a farmer while committing a burglary. I shed no tears when I heard the tidings; nor have I enquired where they buried him.’

‘Whence came your husband!’

‘He was a gentleman and possessed many accomplishments. At the gaming table he squandered a handsome fortune; and he then committed forgery. He flew from justice and fell in with the gang of Markham Swamp.’

‘And how has your lot been since then?’ A flush came into her cheeks.

‘Not indeed as you surmise. Oh, no; fallen though I, am by mating myself with murderers, I have in one respect naught that can bring reproach. Shortly after the death of my husband the robber chief offered to wed me. His offer I refused; and it has never since been made. To shield myself from the advances of the rest I have permitted the odious ruffian Murfree to pay court to me. He is my constant persecutor; and he is persistently urging that I marry him, that vile man, Jud Sykes, to perform the ceremony. I promised, at the last, to wed him in May of the coming spring; but I shudder to think of his violence now that *you* have come amongst us.’

‘Why should that make any difference?’

‘Oh, he is deadly jealous of you; because he thinks that I prefer you to himself. I fear him on your account as well as upon my own. Be assured that he will never forgive you for last evening. But,’ she exclaimed, starting up, ‘we had better try for some fish, or grandmother will suspect that I have been blabbing.’

‘Why should we not go to the pond? The captain says that there are plenty of fishes there.’

‘Do not speak of it,’ she said with a shudder. ‘Ah, those dark waters have many secrets. I am afraid to tell you; the very bushes about us seem to have ears.’

CHAPTER VII.

ROBBERS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

Do not be afraid,’ Roland replied. ‘I am certain that there is nobody within ear-shot.’

‘Ah! well, these dark waters have closed over many an unhappy head, even since my entry into this hell of crime.’

‘The Lifter told me of the minister’s fate.’

‘I am thinking now of a young girl who was once like myself. She was the daughter of a wealthy farmer, beautiful and gifted. The horrible chief saw her one day riding past the swamp, and the sight of her filled him with a hideous desire. When next she rode that way he sprang out of the bush and seized her; and then dragged her almost lifeless to his lair. Ah, my God, how my heart went out in pity for the sweet young creature; but what could I do. The villain had his way; and all night long his victim wailed in a way to melt a heart of stone. They became alarmed at her constant crying; and one dreary night the old woman and Silent Poll dragged her to the edge of the pond. Tying a stone to her neck they threw her in. She lies there,’ pointing to a spot about twenty yards distant, near a steep part of the bank; ‘and the water is three fathoms deep.

‘But she is not the only victim. At a class-leader’s house Jud Sykes made the acquaintance of a beautiful girl of eighteen. On a certain Saturday afternoon Marguerite, for that was the girl’s name, set out, on foot; from her own house, to pass the Sunday with her aunt. The Rev. Mr. Jonas, who had spent the preceding night at her father’s house, was aware of the visit; and he was posted in the bush close to the roadside as the girl came along.

‘“Good afternoon, Miss Marguerite,” he exclaimed; “I was gathering these beautiful wild flowers, and heard a step. Guess my surprise, my pleasant surprise, at seeing you, my dear. How bountiful God is to give us all those beautiful wild sprays of beauty. Do you know, my dear, that I think I get half my inspiration from the flowers; not so much from those which we pamper in our gardens, as from those which grow in wild, sweet places with only His hand to tend them.”

‘“How very beautiful your ideas always are,” the poor girl said, as she looked admiringly at her gifted and pious friend.

‘“Ah, my child, I am but a very unworthy instrument in God’s hand. But come with me into this sombre wood—you have a full hour to spare—and we shall find a bouquet for your good aunt. Give her my blessing when you see her. This way, my dear Marguerite; this way. If we could reach a beautiful lake, which lies about a mile distant through this wood, I think that I could find you some lilies there —some sisters for you. When first I saw you, my dear Marguerite, you reminded me of a lily.”

‘The poor girl blushed deeply at these compliments; and she thought that it was so good of this gifted man to bestow them upon a poor, simple girl like herself.

‘“But this is the horrid swamp, Mr. Jonas, where they say the robbers live. Lots of men have come in here, and never came out again. Do you not feel afraid?”

‘“I feel no alarm, my timid child. I have wandered many a day through the aisles of this sombre wood. The boughs grow so heavy and the trees so close as you advance, that you will find that ‘dim religious light’ whereof the gifted poet writes.”

‘“Oh, if you are not afraid, Mr. Jonas, why should I be?” and this poor unsuspecting dove followed the monster toward the snare.

‘I will not harrow your feelings by describing the bewilderment, horror and despair that fell upon that beautiful maid when the naked, odious, hellish truth was put before her. The Reverend Mr. Jonas, of course, claimed her as his prey; and no one gainsayed his right. Ah, it was very horrible. A week later, through some means or another, the poor girl made her escape from the den, but the old woman and Silent Poll speedily followed. A short way from the road they overtook her; and when the fugitive saw the wretches she screamed murder, and appealed for help. But her cries were soon ended; for the old woman knocked her senseless with a club; and the two together accomplished the murder. That night she was buried beneath the roots of a great pine tree; and I often go there and sit and think; and watch the violets that I planted upon her grave.’

When the girl ended there was a speechless horror in our hero’s face; and two or three times tears glistened in the eyes of Nancy as she hurried through with the horrible recital.

‘I do not understand what motive the chief could have had this morning in tolerating your rebellious attitude. Nobody has ever dared to cross him except Joe, who once or twice while intoxicated forgot himself. But he is too good a man to put aside. I am sure that the chief must have made up his mind that you shall aid him in some desperate enterprise which he has in mind. He speaks much of some beautiful girl whom he is bent on capturing. I believe that he expects your assistance in the enterprise.’

‘He and his hellish crew shall rob me of my last drop of life-blood before I will so much as raise a finger to aid either him or them in any work of infamy or crime. He knows, that; and I do not think that he will try any more persuasion.’

‘Do not be too certain. If he did not expect to make use of you, you would have been put to death this morning as coolly as if you had been a dog.’

‘Well, to make that matter easy, more than the chief would have been needed at the killing.’

‘Ah, you know not his giant, brutal strength. I fear that he could crush you like an infant.’

‘I have no such fear. I dread him not, either with or without arms; and I rather concluded this morning that the fellow is as much coward as bully.’

‘Well; it may be so. But your safety is by no means assured. Lying as you did in a doorless room last night, you were at the mercy of Murfrey’s knife. And I well know what a stealthy murderer that is. Your danger to-night would be two-fold, for you have made of the old woman a deadly enemy; and of silent Poll the same.

‘You will require to be unceasingly on your guard against treachery; and it will be never safe for you by night or day if you have not your knife or pistol at your hand. I would recommend both.’

‘Then what is to be my safeguard in the night? I must sleep sometimes; and I shall surely be murdered.’

‘I am glad to say that the chief this morning ordered that you should have an inner room, to which there is a sturdy door. This will be locked upon you every night from the outside. I believe that the captain is half afraid you will attempt to escape because you said this morning that you would give yourself up to justice rather than stain your honour. You will be able to sleep without alarm therefore; but lest an attempt should be made by the old woman or by Joe to open your door from the outside, you had better barricade it from the inside. You have done well in making a friend of The Lifter, for he is very much devoted to myself; and bitterly jealous of Murfrey whom he detests. To me, therefore, you must appear as to Silent Poll; and henceforth I shall he more discreet than I was last night.’

‘And why were you indiscreet? Why did you drink so much of that fiery spirit?’

‘I hardly know; but I think it was the pleasure that I felt at seeing such a face as yours, one so noble, frank, and honourable, at the table.’

‘But drinking in that way, it becomes impossible for you to preserve yourself unsullied, as you say you have done.’

Here the poor girl blushed again.

‘I grant that appearances are much against me; but I have told the truth. Seldom since coming here have I indulged so freely &a you saw me do last night. But even last night I had full control of my reason.’

‘Ah! brandy is accursed stuff, my poor girl. Shun it as you would a deadly poison. I perceive by your face that your drinking habit is a stronger one than

you yourself suppose. I have therefore a favour to ask. It is this: that whatever comes, you drink no more spirits.'

She looked into his face, and the tears started to her eyes.

'Oh! this indeed is something that I had never expected. It is like a voice speaking out of the tomb of Hope. But what would be the use of this unless you have some hope for my future. I have none. Have you, oh! *have* you any hope for me?' Her voice was piteous, passionate, pleading.

'And why should I not hope for you? I cannot see that you have been an accomplice in the crimes of these horrible people. A victim you are, and naught else that I can see. Of course it cannot hut seem strange, inexplicable indeed, that you should so mutely accept your doom; that you have never made any attempt at escape.'

'Because I was afraid. They have often told me that *voluntary residence* among them makes me criminal equally with themselves. And oh, I was afraid to face the world's pure and honest face. How could I? to think what I have lived through, all that I have seen, these fearful years.' And she put her hands upon her beating temples.

'That is the talk of despair; and is utterly unworthy of any man or woman. As to your guilt because of "voluntary residence," that is not true. Besides, it would be difficult to show that it is voluntary; especially when they found it necessary to raise these fears in your mind in order to retain you here.

'Now *I* have hope; and why should you despair. Suppose we seal a compact between us to have as our highest aim our escape from this den? Think you not that we could in good time accomplish it?'

'Oh, do not raise these hopes in me. Should they grow in my heart and then be crushed again, I know not what should become of me. *I could not live.*'

'Well, this is my programme: To tarry here as best I may until the spring. It would not be safe for me to venture away any sooner, for the sleuth hounds are on my track. But the law's ire will have cooled by that time; and together we should be able to make our way to the American Republic.' The girl threw herself upon her knees and turned her streaming eyes to heaven. Never before did more hearty prayer of gratitude ascend before the throne of God. Then taking

our hero's hand she kissed it; then arose and became calm. They spoke no more about the matter; but their escape was henceforth the great aim of their lives. A minute later The Lifter joined them.

'I suppose you have been haveen a jaw together,' he said. 'I hope she told you about the lake and why the Capteen won't eat the fish there. They're too fat for his likeen.'

Nancy's air was so serious, for she had within the past hour become a changed girl, that The Lifter could not help noticing it.

'I suppose you are lamenteen because your sweetheart is away to-day?'

'I am not, Lifter. I feel just as happy with you as with him. But mind do not tell him that I said so.'

'Oh, you need not trouble about that. I am too cunneen to run risks with Joe.'

Then the party ascended the stream, and found several still pools of water varying from myrtle to coffee brown in colour. Each such piece of still water had a congregation of foam bubbles; and no sooner was the cast made than the float went down like a stone.

In the delightful excitement Roland frequently forgot the perils that surrounded him; was often quite oblivious to the fact that he was in the toils of a den of robbers. Strange to say he had come to think less of the blood upon his own hands since hearing the history of Markham Swamp, and finding himself a prisoner among the horrible fiends.

Having caught five or six dozen speckled trout the party returned to the lair. That evening the chief and Joe returned, the face of each dark and threatening. There was no hilarity, and supper was eaten in silence. Then the robbers smoked for an hour, while the girls repaired torn garments. Nancy did not raise her eyes from her work; but there was in her face a new light, the light of Hope.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDERGROUND MYSTERIES OF THE SWAMP.

Now that the reader may feel himself upon sure ground as to the facts of this true story, I may state that Roland likewise learnt from Nancy that the gang had a rendezvous in a piece of dense wood known as Brook's Bush, close to the mouth of the Don River. It is also a fact that when the den at Markham was broken up finally, some of the surviving desperadoes took up their permanent abode at Brook's Bush, where they kept an illicit still. Down to fifteen years after the date of my story the community was every now and again startled by tidings of robbery, outrage or murder at the Don; and the last notable act of the gang was the murder of the editor of the *Colonist*, one Hogan, a member of the legislature. His taking off was done by a woman who struck him upon the head with a stone which she carried in a stocking. [Footnote: Scores of persons living in Toronto now remember this outrage; but anybody can verify the fact by turning to the files of the newspapers of those days.—THE AUTHOR.] The body was then thrown into the Don where it was picked up a short time afterwards.

As for the people of Markham, they lived in constant terror of the miscreants lodged in the bush so near their doors; and they established an efficient staff of special constables for the protection of life and property.

Markham township had been settled about forty-five years before, principally by a number of Dutch families which moved thither from Pennsylvania; but to the rather picturesque little village of the same name, nestling among the pines that fringed the River Rouge, came straggling immigrants or persons grown tired of the solitude and the privations of backwoods life. But to distant portions of the province this thriving village came to be known rather through the terrible reputation of the adjacent swamp than through the thrift, comfort and progress of the people. So much then for the 'dry' but essential facts of this narrative.

On the following morning the chief and Murfrey went away again; and in obedience to the command of the hag our hero, accompanied by The Lifter, who had instructions to shoot him if he attempted to escape, proceeded to a portion of the bush not far distant to cut firewood. Although he had 'roughed it' for many a season in the woods, Roland was clumsy enough at the regular work of woodcutting. But taking off his coat he began bravely, and The Lifter swung his axe with a will a short way distant. After they had cut what would make about a horse load, they carried the billets upon their shoulders and threw them into a hole about thirty paces distant from that by which they descended to the

subterranean abode. The pieces struck with a dull sound a considerable distance down; and The Lifter informed Roland that ‘down there’ was the wood-shed.

‘But I suppose you are curious to hear sometheen about this underground place? All strangers are.’

‘I am certainly much interested in it. I cannot conceive how your gang could have hollowed so large a place as this seems to me. Why, it has been an enormous task, requiring I should say a hundred men for many months to perform.

‘Our “gang” did not make this hollow. But if you’ll excuse me, I do not like the way you have of styleen our party. “Gang” isn’t a nice word.’

‘Who did the excavation then?’

‘God,’ replied The Lifter, with an assumption of solemnity that really was comic.

‘Pray cease this blasphemy. I do not wish to hear any more of it. I am over-sick of this hypocrisy now.’

‘But God it was all the same who did this; and I shall tell you how. You know that River Rouge did not always enter Silent Lake at the place where it runs in now. It entered down there; see where that old beech tree stands.’

‘But this makes the matter no clearer.’

‘Well, you know, the ground here is very shaky, and the swamp beneath the shores of the trees is softer than porridge. A long time ago, during a heavy spring freshet, the river became dammed about a quarter of a mile from the lake, and the whole body of water was turned in another direction. But instead of flowing over the land, it sank into the great mass of soft bog below, and forced its way underground, till it reached the lake—there by that old beech.’

‘The clay into which the roots of the trees had fastened themselves was quite solid, and was held fast in the thick tangle of roots. So for many years you could hear the river floween beneath the ground with a subdued gurgleen sound. Hunters avoided the wood, for some careless persons had come here and fallen through the holes into the rusheen tide. Their bodies were afterwards found floateen in Silent Lake. One day my grandfather and two of his men came to see

the treacherous underground river; and they moved cautiously down the stream till they came where it sank into a hole in the ground, that looked like a huge sluice-way.

‘My grandfather looked at the strange sight for a time, and then at the great bridge of trees and boulders that lay across the original course of the river. They wondered why he gazed at all so earnestly; and why his eyes grew so bright. Then he slapped the capteen, who was yet a boy, upon the back, and said:

‘“Just the very place we want. Here we will have a quiet castle of our own, where no limb of the law can find us.”’

‘“But you surely would not think of liveen in this dismal swamp?” they all said at once.

‘“My intensheen is notheen else,” he replied. “Let us go away for the present.” Then they all left the wood, the young men wondereen what my grandfather had in his head. A few days after this, my grandfather and all his friends came with picks, and axes, and crowbars into the swamp. No one knew yet what plan he had formed. Leadeen them to the bridge that I have described, he said:

‘“I want that bridge cut away.”

‘“Why?” they all asked.

‘“Can you tell,” he replied, “what will happen when this bridge is cut away?” Then they fell athinkeen and my father said:

‘“The stream will go by the old bed, and will run no longer under the ground.” “Ah, father,” the capteen shouted, “you are the wise one after all. We will have a first-rate castle under the forest in the stream’s tunnel!”

‘“Exactly, my son.”’ It was all quite clear to our hero now. For a full quarter of a mile did this tunnel, covered over with shallow turf, or a treacherous stretch of moss, extend.

‘Well,’ continued The Lifter, ‘they waited till the tunnel became dry, and then they made a house and sleeping places underneath. The whole length of the tunnel was tested, and wherever they intended the roof should be strong, they propped it up; and those strong places they used as bridges.’

‘Ah; it is plain now what the chief meant about all the unfortunate men who dropped through the swamp, and were never heard of more.’

‘So he has been telleen about these. Yes; they came tumbleen down through the holes as they crossed, and they fell so sudden that they had no time to cry; and before they could know where they had got, we come along and killed ‘em. In the night they were dragged out and put in the lake. I remember how tired myself and Silent Poll were with the heavy draggen. Then it was so hard to get stones that were heavy enough to keep the body under; and that you could tie easily.’ While the toil of carrying the wood went on, The Lifter continued to describe many deeds of horror committed in the dark pit. In the afternoon, Nancy joined the two, and they examined the mouth of the passage-way. But the casual eye would not have looked twice at the spot, for young trees were so planted at the edge of the lake, that their boughs thoroughly screened the opening. She informed our hero that the other end was filled in, and trees were growing where once the flood rushed down with the speed of a mill-race. The greater part of the autumn was spent in cutting and carrying firewood, and the chopping continued till the hag one day announced that there was ‘plenty in now till next summer.’

‘Be on the look out now for the treachery of the old woman and Silent Poll,’ Nancy said when the chopping was ended. You can be of little more use now, and I am satisfied that you are marked for vengeance. I suppose you carry your pistols?’

‘Invariably.’

‘And your knife?’

‘Likewise.’

‘It is well.’

When not fishing or doing laborious work, it was customary with The Lifter, as well as with our hero, to sit among the women and assist them in such offices as the peeling of turnips or potatoes; and holding the yarn skein whilst one of the women rolled the thread into a ball; or in scouring the knives and forks. One afternoon while all the men save The Lifter were absent, the group was seated round a small open fire. Hanging from the crane was a pot of fruit which the hag was boiling.

‘Here Poll, ball your yarn,’ the old woman said. ‘You will hold the skein for her,’ pointing to Roland. ‘You may read a chapter from *Dick Turpin,’* turning to The Lifter. ‘We will not want you, Nancy. Take a turn up stream and try to get a few fish for supper. There, make haste now; don’t stand there, you lazy jade.’ Nancy, for some reason or another, had fastened her eyes upon our hero, and there was a pleading, frightened look in them.

Roland vaguely understood that she was warning him, but against what particular form of danger he could not define. Resolved to reassure her, he nodded his head in a meaning way, and said:

‘Off you go, Nancy, and get the fish. We’ll *take care* of ourselves till you come back.’ He laid emphasis upon the ‘take care,’ and somewhat at ease, Nancy departed.

As I have said, the old woman was standing at the pot, and silent Poll had so arranged the seats that while Roland held the skein upon his hands his back was towards her mother. The Lifter sat side-wise, and began to read *Dick Turpin*. For many minutes the reading and the stirring went on; when suddenly Roland noticed that the dull scraping of the ‘slice’ against the bottom of the pot had ceased. Turning his head he met the eyes of the old woman; and observed that they were aflame with a wild sort of light.

‘When I hears a chapter from that ere book it makes my blood get warm, and I thinks I am a young woman again. Attend to your holding, young man. You see the thread is slipping off your hands.’ Roland did as he was bidden, but he could not help thinking of the marvellous effect that the story of Turpin’s dare-devil deeds had upon her. ‘A fit mother for highwaymen,’ he muttered, meditating. At that moment The Lifter, who happened to raise his eye from the page, cried out:

‘Look out, Roland!’ Quick as thought our hero sprang to his feet, but in doing so received a terrible blow on the shoulder. Instantly he saw that The Lifter’s warning had saved his life; and that the blow which he had received upon the shoulder was aimed at his head. The hag stood before him with a short iron bar, used as a fire poker, in her hand; and her eyes blazed with a hate that was devilish to look upon. She approached him again with the bar uplifted, believing that he was stunned and disabled; but thrusting his hand into his pocket he drew his pistol and cocked it.

‘Advance a step, you infamous old murderess, and your brains strew the ground.’ She was foiled and let drop her weapon. But for the hell of rage that stormed within her she must have some outlet.

‘Ah,’ she screamed,’ so you have turned traitor to your own;’ and launching the bar at The Lifter’s head, she knocked him insensible to the ground. The unfortunate wretch lay where he fell, without making a move, and Roland perceived that the blood welled from a wound in his head.

‘So you warned him, did you?’ she screamed again, and stooping she picked up the bar and raised it above his head. Roland well understood the murder in the old miscreant’s eyes, and leaping forward seized the weapon, wrenched it from her grasp, and flung it far into the bush.

‘Touch him not, or your miserable life will be the forfeit.’ She made no reply, but simply scowled with the hatred of a fiend upon him. Turning then she resumed her work of stirring the fruit in the pot. At this moment Nancy, whose face was white with anxiety, made her appearance.

‘Fetch some water from the spring,’ Roland said, ‘I wish to attend to his wound,’ pointing to the prostrate Lifter.

‘How has this happened?’ Nancy enquired, in an anxious voice; though she was thoroughly familiar with such scenes of violence.

‘This old monster here was aiming a death-blow at my head, and he warned me. This is her revenge; and she would have finished her work upon him had I not interfered. Don’t go for an instant, Nancy, till I complete what I have to say, once for all: If this old woman,’ and he poked her hard upon the shoulder with the muzzle of his pistol, ‘ever makes an attempt upon my life again, I will shoot her like a mad dog, even though every robber of the cave were standing by. I shall be justified in doing this by every law. Killing is a game at which two can play; and kill I will the next person, be that person man or woman, who makes another attempt upon my life. Caution no one will ever find me to give again. Now, murderous old she-wolf, you understand me?’ and as he concluded he gave her such a thrust with his weapon that she fell across the fire. With a scream Silent Poll arose and pulled the old woman off the burning sticks; but not before the crone’s gown and apron had taken fire.

‘Water! water!’ screamed Silent Poll, for once boisterous.

‘I shall get her none,’ Roland replied. ‘It is fitting that she should go to hell in a blaze.’ Nancy seized some slops that stood in a vessel near by, and throwing them upon the old woman, quenched the flames. The murderous hag was white with terror; and Roland saw that for all her cruelty she was a great coward. Her hands were badly scorched, nor did her face escape a singeing.

‘Take me down to my bed, Poll; this villain, I am afraid, has been the death of me.’ Taking her grandmother’s arm, this precious wench led her tenderly to the cavern’s mouth and down the ladder.

‘You have conquered the old woman,’ Nancy said; ‘and it is well She is now in dread of you, and will not be likely again, unless her chance is sure, to attempt your life.’

‘Violence, I shall meet with violence,’ Roland replied. ‘Of that be sure. But now let us look after this poor wretch.’ The Lifter had lain where he fell without moving a muscle; but upon taking his wrist our hero found that his pulse beat.

‘He is not dead, Nancy; dash water in his face.’ The girl did so, and presently The Lifter opened his eyes.

‘Oh, I thought I was dreameen. I warned you; if I didn’t she would have crushed your head. I knew she was contemplateen seme harm. Where is she now?’ Roland related all that had happened; and The Lifter seemed to be more his friend than ever. After Roland and Nancy had bound up his wounds he crept into the tunnel and went into his bed. Silent Poll returned with a scowling face when the old woman, whom she had ‘dosed’ with brandy, went asleep, and resumed her yarn balling Roland lay upon the ground and read. When Poll had finished her thread she descended the cavern, and Roland and Nancy were left to themselves.

‘Suppose we go now and explore the tunnel, Nancy; I am anxious to see the extent of this retreat of murder and crime.’

‘We can descend by a hole close to the tallest of those three pines yonder,’ she said as she seized a small coil of rope and led the way. Having fastened the rope around the trunk of the pine, she said:

‘We descend by this. I go first; and I shall tell you to come when I am down.’ In a second she disappeared; and presently he heard her telling him to come. The

sensation, as he descended into the pitch dark cavern, was not an agreeable one; but when his feet touched bottom Nancy took him by the hand.

‘We go this way; presently your eyes will be of some use.’ She had spoken the truth. After our hero was a few minutes under ground the walls, roof, and floor of the tunnel became fairly visible. As for the floor it was hard and level, the flood having carried all the turf and earth away, leaving the rock bare. Here and there a mass of turf and clay had fallen from above, almost impeding the progress of the explorers; and Roland was well aware that the peril of walking through the place was not small.

When the river sank into the soft swamp, it did not take a straight course for the lake, but wound now to the right and again to the left, according to the solidity of the ground. In addition to these sinuosities there were several pockets or alcoves along the tunnel, as if the stream had here found passage for a short way, and was then obliged to recede. The walls were oozy, and little rivulets trickled through, and went rippling over the floor of the passage.

‘A short distance from the dwelling,’ Nancy explained, ‘a dam has been put before this stream, and it runs through a channel which they cut for it into Silent Lake.’

The two explorers now reached a point well lighted, and turning up his eyes Roland observed a number of holes in the roofing.

‘Ah; this is a treacherous spot,’

‘Yes; and from here nearly to the end of the passage the roof is much like that. It was all along here that the men who came into the bush fell through; and as they fell the old woman, Poll, and The Lifter despatched them with clubs. Did you never wonder why we are risky enough to light fires by night and assemble by day on the open ground?’

‘I have thought that the risk was great, indeed; but I had no way of accounting for it.’

‘Well, it is impossible for anybody to approach without having to cross this tunnel at its dangerous part. Why, the very day before you came amongst us, some young man, after woodcock in the swamp, strayed down this way, saw water glimmering beyond him and walked towards it. He fell through, sir, at this

very place. His leg was broken by the fall, and he moaned very loudly. Charge of the tunnel and everything that it may catch has from the first been held by the old woman; and either she or Poll passes through it every day. The poor sportsman was found by the old woman; and when she appeared he was astonished, and besought her assistance. But her reply was made with that very same iron poker with which she attempted your life to-day. Silent Poll and The Lifter afterwards dragged the body to the pond. How my heart ached as I heard the dog of the poor young fellow whine as it went about the wood seeking for its master. The captain sent The Lifter out to fetch the animal in, but the poor brute seemed to know that harm was intended, and it went back further into the bush. All the night it cried there; but at sunrise Murfrey crept out with a long-barrelled gun and shot it.'

They had now reached the extremity of the tunnel, and Nancy suggested that they should hasten back.

'Above all other things we must prevent them from surmising that there is any friendship or understanding between us,' Nancy said, 'and the only way in which this can be done is by your pretending to hold me in the same sort of cold contempt as you bestow upon Silent Poll. You must impress them with the belief that you look upon me as an abandoned woman and a murderess. My part shall be to show sympathy with the old woman in to-day's offence, and to denounce you. I shall speak of you to Murfrey, as well as to the woman, as a desperado. In doing this I shall serve the double end of blinding their eyes, and of making them fear your arm.' To this plan Roland cordially agreed, and the two returned to the robber's lair.

CHAPTER IX.

DISCIPLINE AND OTHER INCIDENTS.

On the morning after the foregoing occurrence breakfast was taken at the usual hour. All the robbers were present; and the Rev. Mr. Jonas thanked God for the repast, and begged that his brethren would be given strength from above to carry on the good work in which they had engaged.

The old woman had taken her place at the head of the table, and upon her hands and face were many plasters. The face of the captain was as dark as night; and he did not for many minutes speak to anybody. At last, when the meal was nearly ended, he fixed his fierce eyes upon Roland.

‘Those whose hearts are too craven,’ he said, ‘to go out for adventure among men, like to amuse themselves by assailing old women.’

‘She may thank the fiend who presides over her destiny that she came off so easily,’ Roland replied with the most consummate coolness.

‘But the fact remains,’ sneered the chief, ‘that while you are afraid to face men, you wreak your vengeance upon an old woman.’

‘If you were not what you are, a despicable villain, I should open this discussion by saying that you are a liar. I will merely say that, at all events, I am not afraid to meet you now or any other time, here or any other where.’

The effects of this daring speech was much the same as if a thunderbolt had fallen out of the heavens among the party. As Roland concluded he rose from the table and placed his back against the bluff face of the boulder. The chief did not reply or make any demonstration of violence as they all evidently imagined that he would. Murfrey looked meaningly at his captain; and then rushing from the table, approached our hero. He had his hand in his hip pocket, and there was a gleam of brutal ferocity in his face. Roland immediately drew his pistol.

‘Ruffian,’ he cried, ‘I am always prepared. If you make one step further you fall where you stand. I am not afraid of you, nor of your captain, nor of any one, or of *all*, your bloody band. I seek no quarrel with anybody; my great wish is to avoid quarrel; but as you choose, one and all, to insult me, and to attempt my life, this is my only course.’ The robber was dumbfounded, but he was speedily recalled to his senses by his chief.

‘We will deal with this fellow at some other time. I have a different matter on hand now. Take this rope and fasten an end of it to his arm,’ pointing to The Lifter.

The poor wretch knew that some horrible punishment was in store for him, and his face grew deadly pale. Otherwise he showed no sign of terror.

Murfrey fastened the cord, securely, as directed, and stood awaiting further instructions. But the chief had a lecture to deliver before he gave the order; and this was the lecture:

‘I desire one and all to know why this punishment is inflicted. *It is for treason.* My mother was about to take vengeance for insult offered her by this man,’ pointing to Roland, ‘but my son interfered in a way that you all know. Now I am glad that my mother did not succeed, for I have an object in keeping this young man here for the present. Nevertheless, the fact remains that The Lifter broke the compact which binds us loyally to one another. Hoist him up, Murfrey!’

This burly robber threw the rope over an oak limb, and directed The Lifter to stand ‘plumb under.’ Murfrey now tightened the rope but he could not raise The Lifter from the ground.

‘Since this punishment is for the promotion of one of the great virtues,’ chimed in the Rev. Mr. Jonas, ‘I may help you.’

The exertions of the two robbers availed, and in a minute the unfortunate Liller, his face convulsed in agony, was hanging by one arm four feet from the ground. Our hero had looked on, a silent spectator, while this brutal act progressed, lamenting his powerlessness to prevent it. But when the robbers coolly took their pipes and began to smoke, paying no heed to the agonised moans of the victim, a courageous resolution formed itself in Roland’s brain.

‘To save my life,’ he thought, ‘this poor wretch incurred and suffers this punishment.’ He had no sooner made up his mind than he made a step from his seat towards the group.

‘How long do you propose keeping him there?’ The captain did not reply, but Murfrey made answer.

‘Perhaps an hour, perhaps two. But what is it of your business? Do you wish to get strung up?’

‘It is so far my business, that if I can release him, not ten seconds longer will he hang there;’ and saying these words he strode towards the tree. Facing in such a manner that the entire gang was in front of him he drew his pistol, and by the aid of his left arm began to make his way up the tree. He paused on the first limb, for he perceived that Murfrey was about to spring upon him.

‘The first man or woman that makes a move to hinder me, I will shoot.’ Murfrey stood irresolute, then moved a step nearer to the tree, whereupon Roland promptly covered him with his weapon.

This was more than the bully had looked for; and upon noticing that no one seemed disposed to assist, he turned away and joined the group. With one blow of his knife, then, Roland severed the cord, and The Lifter fell like a log upon the turf.

Descending then he found that the miserable wretch had fainted from his suffering; indeed, for a time he could discover no trace of a pulse.

‘Nancy, fetch me a glass of brandy, immediately.’

Nancy looked at the chief as if to ask his permission, but he merely said:

‘I have no concern in the affairs of this whelp.’

‘Then I will go,’ the girl said, and darting below, she soon returned with a flask. Forcing open The Lifter’s mouth, Roland poured in about half a glass of brandy, which in a few seconds brought back the sufferer’s pulse. When he had recovered his consciousness he said in a low voice:

‘Stranger, you have made me your friend. You are a *man*.’

Meanwhile the old woman had begun to storm and gesticulate.

‘What has the place come to?’ she screamed, ‘if the master is to be bullied before us all. Is there no one here who will take this impudent upstart and tie him up?’

Nobody moved.

‘Pack of cowardly curs,’ she screamed, ‘to allow a thing like him to frighten you so.’

‘Peace, mother,’ interposed the Captain. ‘Some things are to be punished, others to be tolerated. I think you may safely allow, all these matters, to remain with me. For the present let nothing further be said about this business.’ The old woman subsided with a scowl; and Murfrey’s eyes gleamed like a beast who has resolved that his prey shall not escape him. The robbers threw themselves

around on dried bushes strewn about for such purposes; but Roland and The Lifter took their guns and set out through the bush to hunt partridge.

‘You saved my life to-day,’ The Lifter said, as he looked in our hero’s face; ‘and if ever the opportunity comes I will show you that, wicked as I am, I can be grateful.’

‘Peace. There is nothing to be said on that point. You saved my life; and we are square.’

‘Ah, but it was different. I did it among my friends; you among your enemies.’

‘I should like to ask you a favour in return for what you consider my generosity, then,’ Roland said, looking at his companion.

‘Name it; and if the thing be possible, I shall do it.’

‘I would not think of asking if I did not know it to be possible.’

‘Well, the favour I ask is not for myself, but for an-f other.’ His eyes had sought those of the robber, and held them in their earnest, entreating gaze.

‘And who may it be that you ask this favour for?’

‘For yourself.’ The Lifter was exceedingly astonished; and he did not interrupt by words. ‘Yes; my greatest wish is now that you will do me the favour of doing something for yourself.’

‘And what is that?’

‘To make the resolution, to give me your word, now, here, that as soon as possible you will give up this life of crime, leave this odious lair, and seek your living among honest men.’

‘Ah,’ his companion replied, with a deep sigh, ‘you ask me to do what is impossible.’

‘And why impossible? Is it that you are too deeply attached to the ties of this place, to your mode of life, to break the one and give up the other?’

‘It is not that; no, indeed. But what would become of me were I to leave this place? I am not so good at disguises as the rest. I would certainly be caught and given to the gallows.’

‘You will allow that I know as much, at least, as you can know on this matter. I do not consider the risk great at all. Your disguise would carry you through Canadian territory, and once in the United States you would be free to go among good men and earn your bread. It is true that you never can make thorough reparation for all the crimes to which you have been an accessory, or all the misery that you have helped to create. But you can atone to some extent for the past. You have many gifts, and I am sure that you would win a comfortable position for yourself in a world that guessed nothing of the early chapters of your history.

‘Suppose that instead of doing this you elect to remain here. There is one chance that you may go free through all the dangers of your trade of blood; but there are ninety and nine chances that a violent death or the halter shall be your ultimate fate.

‘Besides, you may be sure that the law will not much longer permit this lair to remain undiscovered. Your captain is now busy planning the abduction of some young lady, who is, so far as I can judge, a person of note. This will once more incense public feeling against your band; and judge how it must fare with you should the law be triumphant.’

‘Upon earth there is notheen that I should prefer doeen to what you say. But do you really think it is sometheen I ought to look to?’

‘You have my opinion.’

‘Then I pledge myself to do as you desire, and I shall be ready to leave here when you say “go” or “come.”’ Roland stretched out his hand.

‘It is well; it is a bargain. Leave you all the rest to me.’

After they had roamed the woods for some hours—during which they secured a dozen brace of birds—The Lifter said:

‘Are you aware that you are to be a prisoner to-night?’

‘No.’

‘Well, there is a highway robbery on hand to-night, and. I am to go with them.’

‘Do you know what the robbery is?’

‘Yes; a negro lad, the servant of a very wealthy stock-raiser in a distant part of the township. The servant is to return home after moon rise with a large sum of money, from the sale of several droves. The cattle dealer is gouty, and he has no faith in anything. His servant brings the money home, because he will not trust the banks. The Capteen does not care about entrusteen you to the keepeen of the women; so before we depart you will be fastened securely in your own room. But you will have one friend at home. Nancy, I believe, like myself, would do much to serve you, although she is obliged for her own safety, to pretend that she considers you both dangerous and untrustworthy.’

When supper was ended that evening Roland noticed that the robbers made unusual preparations. Before they departed the chief addressed our hero:

‘I have no reason to put any trust in you. Therefore you shall henceforth be treated as a mad dog. Go now to your room; for the door must be made secure before I leave.

‘My only regret to-night,’ replied Roland, ‘is that it lies not in my power to thwart you in your infamous plot. It is well that you set this watch upon me; else I should go from the wood and inform your intended victim of your designs.’

‘To your room, sir. Some time you may go too far.’

‘This is a point that I have no desire to discuss, you odious robber. My word you have heard, and you hear again, that I care not for your threats; that I defy you and declare you to be as cowardly as you are bloody and bad.’ He had faced the band, holding his pistol in his hand; and he moved backward towards the pit. He then noticed that Silent Poll was not among the rest; and he was unwilling to trust himself to the mercies of this creature.

‘I shall not descend till the girl joins the rest;’ and he now stood in such a manner as to have a view of the robbers and the old woman, as well as of the tunnel’s mouth.

The chief shouted, and Silent Poll came forth with an extremely hang-dog expression. Then Roland descended, entered his room, and closed the door. In a moment it was securely fastened upon the outside with sturdy iron bars.

The robbers then set out through the wood for the road, by which the unsuspecting negro must pass. The heavy clouds which had crept in upon the sky at the set of sun now began to part, and, before the miscreants had emerged from the bush, the deep dark of their path was here and there parted by a shaft of silvery light. Through the tree tops a glimpse of the sky could be occasionally obtained; and although no leaf quivered in this sombre swamp the clouds raced across the face of the moon, sometimes shutting up the heavens in dark, again allowing the glory to stream forth and bathe the sky in pure splendour.

‘We had better be mounted,’ the chief said. ‘The negro is a good horseman, and he will likely have one or two others with him. We have little time to lose.’ The robbers then bent their steps to the stables, where the horses of the band were kept. A deaf mute cared for the horses, a man with a face so villainous looking, as to make it entirely indescribable. Standing upon the top of the bleak common, with drifts of moonlight shot from the openings, with flying clouds above, every now and again falling upon it, it looked well like the lair of mystery and crime.

The robber chief laid his finger-tips with a gentle sound upon the door, and immediately the mute pushed back the bolts; and then stood aside to let the robbers in.

‘Well,’ enquired the chief, ‘have they passed to York?’ and the dummy answering (for it was only to the country side that he was deaf and dumb) said:

‘Yes, he and a big country loot passed about twelve o’clock.’

‘So early!’ ejaculated the captain. ‘Then we are not here any too soon.’

‘Shall I saddle?’

‘Immediately—Do you think these fellows will fight?’

‘They were both heavily armed. The negro carried a heavy cutlass and a pair of pistols.

‘Ah, then the swamp has its terrors for them.’

‘I am sure,’ put in the evil looking mute, ‘that this nigger will fight like a devil. But as for the galoot that goes with him, I’m sure there’s no sand in *him*. Easy,’ the fellow exclaimed, ‘I hear hoofs now; and no doubt ‘tis your man.’

‘Into your saddles,’ was the Captain’s order; and immediately the four men sprang out upon the road.

A heavy cloud had drifted across the moon, and when the robbers rode down from the stables, the night was as dark as pitch. When they reached the highway they found themselves close to their victim, who, for some reason had halted.

‘Surround him,’ said the Captain in an audible whisper. While he was yet speaking the cloud drifted off the moon, and the situation became clearly revealed. The negro sat upon his horse, his head thrust out as if anticipating mischief. The country loot of whom the groom had spoken was not with him.

‘Surrender!’ shouted the robber chief in a carefully disguised voice. The black immediately slid from his horse, and stood in such a manner that he had the protection of the animal.

The robbers then rode toward him but raising his arm he fired at the Captain. The chiefs horse received the shot in the breast, reared high, and then fell sidelong upon the road. The next shot fired from the plucky negro hit The Lifter upon the right arm, breaking it close to the shoulder.

The suddenness of these casualties deterred the highwaymen for a few moments; during which time the black was edging towards the woods. Nature seemed now as if in conspiracy against the robbers, for at this moment another heavy cloud rolled across the moon. In the sudden darkness that followed the negro escaped into the bush, through which he moved with a tread as noiseless as the rabbit. From the road he could hear the curses of the outwitted highwaymen.

‘I will follow this black imp,’ the Captain said. ‘Get this beast off the road,’ indicating the dying horse; ‘then go home. You can set bones, Sykes?’

‘Yes, God has so blessed me,’ returned the pious Mr. Jonas.

‘Then attend to his arm at once upon your arrival.’ The Lifter was exceedingly pale from the pain of his wound and from the loss of blood. He seemed to have no heart in the affair before the rencontre; and noticing this the Captain

wondered much. And if anybody had been watching the face of the wounded highwayman when the negro escaped, he would have seen his eye lighten with satisfaction. The Lifter was in very truth a changed man. So much for the influence of one who is good, zealous and strong of purpose!

Like a sleuth hound the Captain set out along the road which he believed the negro would soon take; and we leave him in pursuit, while we go back to the lair, where the life of our hero stands in grave jeopardy.

CHAPTER X.

BURIED ALIVE IN HIS ROOM.

For some reason then unknown to Roland, there was no candle in his room when the robbers shut the bolts outside; so he was obliged to make the best of the darkness and the solitude through the long autumn evening. As may be supposed, no air came to the sleeping rooms save through the mouth of the cavern; and as the aperture above our hero's door had been likewise closed, the air was oppressive almost to suffocation.

He shook the door, smote it with his heel, and called aloud many times for Nancy. After a while he heard her voice in the tunnel and knew that she was coming.

'Well,' he heard her say, 'it can't do any harm to ask him what he wants.' He knew then that the old woman was protesting against the girl's response to his call. Again he shook the door and cried out.

'I am suffocating for air.'

'Ah,' screamed the hag, 'I knew he wanted to get out. Now stay in your pit, my gamey young'un, and thank heaven if you ever come out of it alive.'

'I am speaking to you, Nancy; I do not want to come out, nor do I ask you to open the door. All I need is the removal of the hatch above my door, so that some air may come in.'

‘May the devil take me if she’ll move the hatch. You want to creep through it. I know what you’d be at. Back now to your bed, Nancy; an’ if I ketch you about here again to-night, beware.’

‘Good-night, sir,’ Nancy said; ‘when the Captain gets back, I shall tell him about you. Then you will get what you want.’

Roland fell into a sort of reverie a short time afterwards; and how long he so remained he could not afterwards say. But he was called to consciousness by hearing something soft fall, and smash, as it seemed to him, into small particles upon the stony floor of his room. Something fell then upon his face, about an egg’s weight and size; and taking it into his hand he discovered that it was clay.

Springing to his feet, he lighted a small ‘taper’ match and examined the ceiling. To his horror he now discovered that the beams which stretched across to prevent the clayey roof from falling in had been removed. He was certain that they had been there that morning, for as he arose he observed a spider weaving a net from beam to beam, and wondered what she expected as prey. He was certain that the beams had been purposely taken away; and his blood became chilled with horror as he reflected over the motive.

The clay and turf still continued to fall, now in small pieces, and again in huge flakes, till the rock and his couch became covered. ‘Could the dropping be accidental?’ he asked himself. ‘Would the clots if undisturbed, fall so rapidly? How was it that when he first entered the vault this evening, not a particle of anything came down?’

He stood still, his head almost touching the ceiling, listening as if to catch some sound. But for a minute he could only hear the tumultuous beating of his own heart and the occasional downfall of a fragment of clay or turf. At last he did hear something; or rather more *felt* than heard it. At intervals of a few seconds apart he felt the walls of his room vibrate as if under some powerful blow; and succeeding each vibration was a shower from the ceiling. The truth, naked and horrible now rushed upon his mind: *his enemies were trying to bury him alive*.

Gradually the sound of the blows grew more distinct, from which he gathered that the miscreants were not about to content themselves with pounding the surface, and trusting in that slow fashion to accomplish their crime. Plainly they were delving through the covering which Roland judged was about four feet

thick; but as to the manner of implement they were using he was puzzled. He had not long to wait, however, to determine this; for in a little while the ceiling began to shake violently, as if something like a pile-driver were being forced by a series of blows through the yielding turf. What the result must be, too easily could be foreseen. The ponderous driver would first send all the lower portion of the ceiling into the room, and a pressure from above would force the outer portion in.

He had a large knife in his girdle, and bitterly did he now reproach himself for his lack of caution. Why had he not examined the room when he entered it in the early evening? Then with all these long hours before him, he could have cut his way through the door. He understood now why the candle had been taken away from his room. Yet another form of question ran through his terror-tortured mind: who were the miscreants at work above him? That the old woman and her daughter had a hand in the undertaking he felt quite certain; but surely all those mighty blows could not have been dealt by the old woman and her daughter. Had the robbers returned from their mission to the road, and if so, was the Captain privy to the proceedings? He would not believe that he was, for he knew that the chief was reserving him for some selfish end. He then gave up his questionings and rushed at the door. But an elephant flinging himself against those sturdy oaken boards and posts could not force his way; and Roland recoiled with a feeling of numb despair in his heart. Then with one of his bed-posts he began to pound upon the door, calling upon Nancy and The Lifter to come to his rescue.

At this moment an enormous mass fell from the roof, and striking him upon the head and back, felled him senseless to the ground. * When he recovered, a kind voice, Nancy’s, was whispering in his ear:

‘We outwitted them, didn’t we? Are you better now?’

‘We were just pulleen you out as the whole thing caved in and filled up the room,’ said The Lifter, who ended his words with a groan. The pain of his broken arm was very severe.

‘It will be rather good fun in the morneen, when you appear among them at breakfast: they think you are buried alive. You will come to my room to-night, Roland; there’s room enough for two.’

Roland’s brain was still bewildered, and he had many questions to ask

‘Good night,’ Nancy said, softly, ‘I must be away. The Lifter will tell you all about it.’ When The Lifter reached his room Roland noticed that his arm was in a sling, and learnt full tidings of the attack upon the negro, and how the captain was absent from home in pursuit of the prey. Joe Murfrey, who had been in league with the old woman and Silent Poll, assisted by Rev. Mr. Jonas, had driven in the earth-roof with a heavy log made like a pile driver. The conspirators believed that The Lifter and Nancy were sleeping; ‘and they will never know,’ concluded The Lifter, with a joyous chuckle, ‘how you got out.’

In the morning all save Roland had assembled about the breakfast-table, and a sound of triumph was in the voice of the hag.

‘The living cannot subsist by the dead,’ murmured the Rev. Mr. Jonas. ‘Even though our poor brother lies ready-tombed we shall begin our repast, thankful that *our* unworthy lives still exercise His care.’

‘Here’s brimstone and blazes to the whelp in hell,’ shouted Murfrey, as he swallowed nigh upon a tumbler of brandy.

‘You ruffian!’ They all started, and turning, observed Roland standing by the mouth of the tunnel, whence he saw and heard all that had passed. The two leading conspirators were simply speechless from amazement and rage; and then Murfrey’s eyes fell upon Nancy with a dark look of suspicion. But the girl returned his look with one of such innocent, enquiring wonder that he was at once satisfied she had nothing to do with the thwarting.

The old woman seemed for a time to have lost the use of her faculties, and she raved in the most incoherent fashion. Taking little heed of their disappointment, Roland helped himself to many of the good things upon the table, and retiring a little way he seated himself at breakfast upon the dry turf. Before doing so he coolly drew from the pocket at his hip one pistol, and from that at his breast another, laying both beside him on the ground. With the knife in his girdle he cut his bread and meat; and when his meal was ended, sharpened it, most ostentatiously, on a stone near by, now and again giving a glance, in which there was threat as well as defiance, towards Murfrey and the Rev. Mr. Jonas.

‘Mother hag,’ he went on to say,’ I do not think that I can offer you any more grace. The attempt to bury me alive I attribute to your charitable brain. I suppose you think that you have me at your power now that you have deprived me of a

sleeping room. Well, these are my terms, dear old lady: unless you give me up your bedroom, which is substantial enough for my needs, I shall shoot you the first slant I get. Then I can hold my own against this precious preacher of the Don here and his confederates. But should the strain of holding my life against these prove too great I shall fall back in good order into the wood, and make my way to the nearest magistrate, where I will render myself up.'

'You seem to have forgotten,' he went on, with a peculiar voice, 'that if I choose to turn King's evidence against you all that the den contains will be unearthed while I go free.'

Every word of this harangue had been heard by the robber chief, who was returning from his expedition, but whose footsteps were so noiseless that they could not be heard.

CHAPTER XI.

SCENES LEADING TO THE CLIMAX.

The robbers soon dispersed and left our hero alone by the bole of a fallen pine. Nancy appeared in a moment, and, as she passed our hero on her way to gather branches for fire kindling, she said:

'They are all afraid. Are holding a consultation now. They will give you the old woman's room.'

Then Nancy was gone. Everything was as still as the solitude of the tomb; and Roland could hear the partridge 'drumming' among the silent aisles of the wood.

He sat upon the tree-bole meditating, and the words of Nancy somehow gave him courage. Presently he heard a rustle in the dry bushes beside him, and, looking he saw a fallow doe making her way with quick but dainty tread towards the lake. He saw that she had not seen him, and that she was coming for the very spot where he sat. So he laid himself noiselessly down in the shelter of the huge trunk, and drawing his heavy pistol awaited.

In a few seconds the unsuspecting animal was within half a dozen paces of him, when, rising, he fired, one, two shots, and the pretty creature fell over, headlong, dead.

Running over he opened the jugular artery so that the blood might run out of the meat, and cause it to be white,—although some of the *connoisseurs* of game prefer the retention of the blood, as the meat, they affirm, becomes ‘gamey’ in a shorter period.

The pistol report brought the robbers instantly from the lair with alarm in their faces.

‘What is this?’ demanded the captain.

‘A fallow doe was passing down toward the lake, and I fired.’

‘And *missed* it,’ sneered Murfrey.

‘It is a fine fat one, captain,’ Roland said, taking no notice of the ruffian; ‘come and feel it.’

‘It is more than you could do with a pistol, Joe,’ the captain replied, turning to the hang-dog robber, who, with a very disconcerted air, hulked away from the scene, probably in search of Nancy.

It may be objected here that the robbers would not be likely to give their captive the opportunity of escaping which he must have had by being alone. I have to reply for the sake of the small critics who read my book, and to whom the publishers are very glad to *sell* it, that there was only one means of escape for Roland, and that was along the lakeward side of the tunnel. But the passage here was commanded by the eyes of the gang, who had been underground in consultation.

After the doe had been quartered, The Lifter, taking Roland aside, said:

‘You have frighteen’d ‘em. You are to have Granny’s bed; and the Capteen swears that he will punish the next attempt upon your life as if it was made against his own. “If I want ‘em made away with,” he said, “I’ll tell you, and will make the way known.” I think he rather likes your pluck, although he is as mad as blazes that you will not take a hand with us. But I don’t think they’ll try your

life any more, though you must be always on your guard.' Although the conversation of this young robber was most sincere, the above words slipped from his lips like dripping oil, and he had in his face a cunning look, strange and repellant as of yore. But the cunning was now against his confederates, and active upon Roland's side.

'Suppose,' he said, 'we take our rods up the brook. We may catch sometheen.' They went and had extremely good luck; and many a day thereafter, till the stream became covered with a thin crust of leaden-grey ice, did they continue the sport.

In the meantime the robbers went abroad, and Roland occupied the room of the hag, who went with Silent Poll. When the first snow drifts came swishing through the bush a large tent was erected near the mouth of the cavern, and in this the meals were eaten and the household work performed.

This season became very irksome to Roland, who, at the first, had no books to read save 'Claude Duval,'

'Dick Turpin,' 'The Lives of Forty Robbers,' and 'Sixteen-String Jack.' But one day as The Lifter left the lair to go to Muddy York he put a guinea in his hand and a slip of paper containing the titles of certain books that he desired him to bring back. These were 'The Abbot,' 'The Monastery,' 'Zanoni,' and 'Anson's Voyages.' He likewise put a sealed letter into his hand directed to

'Miss Aster Atwell, 'Oaklands, York County.'

This letter has been placed into my hands. It is yellow now, and worn so where folded that it makes eight different pieces when spread out. But the writing is legible, and I transcribe its contents, which were as follows:

'My Own Beloved Aster,

'I do not know how I ought to commence a letter to you, or in what terms to write it. I do not know whether you share in the general horror and detestation of my crime; or whether you look upon it as an act forced upon me, an act unavoidable, in defence of my honour. The blame for the lamentable occurrence, I feel, after long deliberation, ought to be laid at my door; for I was too precipitate, and by my haste no doubt provoked the insult.

‘I did not at the unlucky moment know what it was that aroused the evil spirit within me; but, oh, Aster, it was in the depths of the sheltering forest, wounded, and set upon by the bloodhounds of the law, I discovered first the reason. Ah, my darling, it was then, and then for the first time only, that I knew how dear you were to me; that above all things in heaven or on earth I loved my own sweet Aster. But how helpless now, how agonizing was that love which my misfortune had fanned into such a sudden flame.

‘Well, as you know, my beloved, I escaped from the officers of the law, and the impression is abroad that I am in one of the neighbouring States of the Union. I am in Upper Canada and quite near to you, “so near and yet so far.” Where my place of hiding is I may not tell you. Yet this much, Aster, I may say, I am not here of my own choice; I was taken here by force, and by force I am detained. Ah, may I hope that the day yet shall come, when it will be meet for me to present myself to my own darling, the first and only love of my life.

‘Yet, why, Aster, should I address you thus? I am a murderer before the tribunals; and whatever I be I am perhaps only a friend in your eyes. Some other one may now find the place in your favour which once I fondly thought I held.

‘Oh Aster, if I have done wrong, most bitter has been my punishment. I could not for *shame* write to my beloved what my lot has been since my painful parting. I may escape the toils set about me, or I may perish in them. But oh, my Aster whatever issue fate allots to me, believe this that my love for you shall be my only star to the end.

‘Roland.’

‘Let nobody be aware that you bear this letter,’ Roland whispered when an opportunity offered.

The Lifter raised his finger to his lips.

It appears that Murfrey, whose eyes were ever on the alert, noticed that Roland gave some injunctions to The Lifter, and he likewise observed the latter lay his finger upon his lips. Turning to the Captain, he muttered a few words in a voice that was inaudible, and the chief turned and said:

‘Treachery has been charged against you. I do not know whether the charge is true or false. Murfrey says you are the bearer of some secret correspondence for

the duellist.

‘I know not whether he speaks the truth or not. But I will make no investigation, for if I did and found the charge made good, I should shoot you where you stand. I will take your word upon it.’

The Lifter did not wince under the harangue. He did not, indeed, look at his father at all, but kept his eye upon Murfrey.

‘And,’ said he, ‘before I reply, may I ask what you ought to do to anybody guilty of slandereen? He looked with a full face of hate upon Joe. It will be perceived by this that he was not in the fullest sense ‘converted;’ for you ‘must pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.’ I am like The Lifter in this matter. I never pray for my culumniator, but I pray for guidance as to how I may *crush* him. My prayer, I may add, has now and again been heard.

‘With respect to the charge,’ resumed The Lifter, ‘Roland gave me a coin and with it a slip of paper on which were written the names of certain books that he wanted me to buy for him in Muddy York. As I passed him he whispered me not to let anybody know; because I suppose he was afeered that you might object. I put my fingers upon my lips; because I thought ‘twas no harm to bring the books. That’s all.’

The moralist tells us that ‘no lie can be lawful or innocent.’ Now I take it that some of the old numbskulls who wrote such things in the church catechisms and books of that ilk ought to be drowned in the bottom of a well. A good clever lie of this sort would raise The Lifter more in my estimation than if he were able to repeat the Forty-Nine articles off by heart, or begin in the Vulgate with ‘*Pater Noster, qui es in Caelis,*‘ and go through without drawing his breath to ‘*Sed libera nos a malo.*’

‘I accept your explanation,’ the Captain said, and The Lifter hurried away on his errand to town.

The books were little short of a blessing to Roland; and when nothing else was to be done in winter, he sat in his sleeping-room —which was the one best ventilated among the lot—and read by the light of a candle. How often he laid the book upon his knee and sighed, thinking of his beloved Aster, wondering how she had regarded his letter. In this way many a dreary week went on during which he grew pale and weak from pining and incarceration.

When The Lifter's arm became well, that repentant and unwilling robber was obliged to make up for lost time. His first most important enterprise was to obtain entrance into the house of a large cattle dealer in York, the testy old person by the way, whose negro servant he had endeavoured in vain to rob upon the highway. It became known to the Rev. Mr. Jonas that there was a strong box in the old gentleman's house, and the same was full of 'yellow shiners.' It was secured, the clergyman observed, by three padlocks besides an ordinary lock. In the picking of locks The Lifter was an expert by instinct; and when the worthy father discovered this gift he at once sent him to a locksmith in York for a period of six months.

'Make him as expert as you can in his trade by the end of that time, and forty pounds shall be yours.'

The honest locksmith looked wonderingly at this burly cattle dealer who would pay so much money for giving his son a smattering knowledge of the trade. But he consented, and at the half-year's end The Lifter came out, prepared, as he said with an oily chuckle 'to tackle any lock.'

Well, as I have said, the scene of operations chosen for The Lifter now was the house of this old man; and the money in the box was the object.

'I am sorry that I have to go stealeen again,' the fellow said with a sigh to Roland, and then he explained his mission.

'But that is more than stealing. That will be robbery; and if you are obliged to enter the house after night, it will be burglary. Do you know that the law provides death for burglary?'

'I am goeen to get myself invited in. But I have often burglared, an I did not think they could hang me for it.'

'They could; because the law presumes that a burglar will commit murder, and comes prepared to commit it, rather than suffer himself to be taken in the act.'

'Oh,' groaned the poor wretch. 'Many a hangeen have I earned. But all the same I must do this. Say,' he cried, suddenly turning and laying his hand upon Roland's arm, 'when do you think we will be able to escape out of this place? Nancy would like to come too, I know. I am very fond of her; and would like to marry her and live in the States.'

‘I shall let you know when I think the time is opportune. Meanwhile, do as little evil as possible; and if you can deceive the captain in this present enterprise, do so, and leave the locks alone.’ Then The Lifter was gone.

That same evening towards the set of sun as ‘Old Snarleyow,’ as the miserly farmer was called, was limping in from the out-houses to his residence, he saw approaching his gate a lad with a pale and dejected face. His hair was flaxen and his skin had in it just the slightest tinge of apple-green. Imagine wasting such an exquisite colour upon the complexion of a robber! He hobbled towards the gate of the stately old mansion, towards which Snarleyow was also hobbling; and he called in a feeble voice in which you could catch a note of pain:

‘Good sir, I pray you to give me the shelter of your house for the night. Please, sir, do. Snow is driving out of the east, and the wind is bitter cold. I cannot live this night if you do not take me in; for I am ill and lame.’

‘Go to blazes about your business. Be off to the poor commissioners; they’ll attend to your case,’ replied the old man as he looked around, bent, and crabbedly thrusting the end of his stick several times into the ground.

‘But I shall die before I reach the poor commissioners,’ answered the invalid in the same soft, sad voice.

‘Then die, and be d—d to you for a tramp,’ the old man said, poking his stick once more into the ground and resuming his way. But he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and almost tumbled upon his turned up, cross old nose. When he recovered he turned round and fairly danced with rage, shaking his stick at the poor wayfarer, who stood meekly by at the gate, shivering there like a dog.

Never a move did he make as the old man with menacing stick approached him, which so incensed Snarleyow that be hastened his pace to a decrepit run. But, as perverse fate or the green-complexioned gentleman at the gate would have it, the old man tripped across a pump handle which was frozen in the ground, and fell directly, and with all his might, upon the tip of his *nez retrousse’*.

Upon the ground he lay spluttering, writhing, and giving vent to an occasional shriek till there was a hurrying of feet in the mansion; then the meek and jaded traveller moved gently away till his person was hidden in the pines. Standing against a giant bole the traveller thus soliquized:

‘To please Roland I promised to be good; and I felt much good in my heart. I was goeen to find some way of deceiveen my mates; but the old Christeen was too uncharitable, and I shall pick his locks. He would not care if I was dyeen, starveen on the very snow before his eyes. Yes, I’ll pick his locks; and what comes to my share I’ll give to the poor.’

Now which of these two men, that robber or the respectable old miser Christian, finds more favour in God’s sight, think my readers?

Well, The Lifter decided to rob him, and I am glad that he did. I am not dealing with a case in the moon either. I know this old man well; and I am acquainted with some others of his kind.

About an hour after the soliloquy above recorded had taken place a weak set of knuckles rapped upon the back door of the miser’s dwelling. The fairies had put, in crystal Chinese white, many ferns and much delicate but tangled tracery upon the panes of the kitchen, yet through them the flaxen-headed stranger saw a round face, and a pair of bright blue eyes. The door was then opened and the head asked:

‘Who are you?’

‘A poor wretch, tired, ill, lame and hungry. If you will but let me go into the kitchen a rug will serve me for the night.’

‘You’re the same one, bad luck to you, that so irrithated the masther?’

‘I merely asked him for shelter. I said nothing else,’ replied the Lifter, in his very softest and, meekest tone. ‘I am a poor Catholic boy, and the Protestants about here have no mercy on us.’

He had guessed Bridget’s religion from her tone.

‘Divil a bit of me blaives you’re a Catholic. Not one.’

‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, etc.,’ said the Lifter, piously crossing himself. ‘And I can give it to you as the priest does in the morneen at the mass, *“In nomine Patris, et Filio et Spiritu Sancti!”*‘ again crossing himself. ‘And I have been at confesheen, and said this,’ striking his breast, “Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.”’

‘O begorra, you’re one right enough, God bless you; come in out o’ the cowld, you poor cratur.’ Now the truth is that The Lifter was not a Roman Catholic, but he made himself acquainted with a little of everything to serve him in his diabolical profession.

Poor Bridget tended him as she would a weakly infant, and made many enquiries touching his friends, pursuits, etc., all of which he answered promptly, in his smooth, insinuating voice. Indeed, before he was in Bridget’s company an hour he hobbled over and kissed her, whereupon she blushed, put up her apron, and said that he was ‘revivin’ purty fast since he got into the hait ov the fire.’

‘My, but your poor knee must be very sore,’ she said, looking at the huge swathing that enveloped that part of his body. ‘What’s the matter wid it? An evil?’

‘Ah, yes, Bridget; a runneen sore. My life has been ebbeen through that hole since I was a child of twelve.’

Poor Bridget looked with moistened eyes upon the smooth-faced sufferer; and he struggled to his feet again, and saluted her wholesome lips.

The reader, of course, is not imposed upon by The Lifter. Inside these ostentatious wrappings our convert carried his skeleton keys, picklocks and screw-drivers; instead of a ‘runneen sore’ upon the knee, he had an entire tool chest there; yea, little files with teeth so fine that the noise they made would not be nearly so loud as the gnawing of a mouse.

Wonderful stories did the converted robber tell to Bridget before the glowing fire that winter’s evening; and when the last sounds of the retiring inmates had died away he was not yet ended. Neither was Bridget willing to part from such sweet and interesting company. The sleek rascal saw this, and looking slyly into Bridget’s delf-blue eyes, he said,

‘Only for my affliction I think I might get some girl to marry me.’

Bridget sighed and looked down upon his amber hair. Indeed, if The Lifter is to be believed, she passed her fingers caressingly through these insinuating locks.

When the visitor was certain that everyone was asleep, he arose, and looking about him, said,

‘This must be a very large house. Many rooms in it?’

‘Oi; a morthal large number.’

‘I have never seen the house of a rich man. Would you show me through? My eyes are acheen to see the valuable furniture and things.’

‘Aisy, till they get asleep, my lammie.’ He was so gentle that he suggested a lamb to her Milesian imagination. He therefore told her some new version of the banishment of frogs from the Island of Saints by St. Patrick, and expounded the trinitine mysteries of the three-leaved clover. She was delighted; and I believe that had he ‘popped the question,’ she would have said ‘Yes, me darlint,’ straightway.

Presently the two are making a tour of the lower part of the house, and The Lifter expresses his wonder at the luxury by a series of aspirated ‘Oh’s!’

‘This is his library; that place beyant.’

‘Let me see *it,*’ quoth the Lifter; and the two went silently in.

‘And that little room at the far end; what’s that?’ said the visitor.’

‘Oh, I couldn’t show you that at all, at all. It’s locked; bekaise he keeps all his money there.’

‘Ah; he’s a miser,’ The Lifter said in a low voice. ‘Show me where I am to sleep.’

She would put him in the attic, but he refused. The kitcheen was good enough for him, if she’d just bring him a pillow to put under his head, and a rug to throw over him.

This at last she consented to do; then stooping down she sturdily hugged his green, hypocritical head, kissed him square on the lips, and went to bed.

‘Don’t go till I give you some breakfast, me poor dear,’ she said as the went. He *looked* his gratitude.

‘I shall be waiteen when you come down—(to himself) for the capteen to divide

the plunder. But I'll divide mine with the poor;' and he laid himself across the rug to listen. For an hour or better he remained there, and then set up a low but regular snore. For this cunning invader had a notion in his head that Bridget might possibly be hovering still about the lower regions. For five minutes the monotonous, low-rolling snores went up, and then there was a creaking upon the stairs. It was quite plain, and evidently near at first; but The Lifter was soon satisfied that the listener had gone to bed. He had no doubt that it was Bridget, whose honest heart perhaps misgave her after leaving the house at a stranger's mercy. But she was evidently off her guard now, and had retired in good earnest.

Upon the kitchen table stood a candle, and this, after the lapse of another half-hour, the convert took into his hand. Moving noiselessly as a cat he entered the great drawing-room, but did not yet venture to light his candle. Once into the library he breathed more freely, for light could not be seen or sound heard from this retired and distant part of the mansion. The glare from the dip was small in circumference, and yellow as tarnished brass, but it revealed plainly enough the locks of the door to the secret room. Unwinding the bandage about his leg he laid his tools upon the carpet and then began operations.

At first he introduced a long key hooked a little at the point, and with this he began to probe, and feel, and measure. A gleam came into his eyes as he drew it forth. Then he selected two keys and looking first at one and then at the other, decided, in a second or two in favour of the larger. This he inserted; and in a moment a bolt turned back with a slow, dull sound. Turning the knob, he pushed the door, and was inside the secret chamber. This room was certainly a 'Camera obscura;' for it had no windows or any outlet save the door by which the robber had entered. In the most distant corner was a vault, the door of which was fastened by heavy clamps of steel and padlocks. But the padlocks were of the very kind with which The Lifter was most familiar; and ere a minute elapsed the heavy bolts were let down. But it took all the muscle of which the robber was master to open the ponderous door; and when it did move out, snowing the dark cavity through the yawning mouth, it gave no squeak; for the operator had deftly placed a few drops of oil within the hinges.

'*Fortuna favet trepidis*,' he said, never having heard of an accusative case.

The next moment he was kneeling before the safe and studying the difficulties that lay in his way. The combinations that so completely defy the picklock in these modern days were not known then; so that after five minutes' operations,

the convert had the heavy metal door open.

He expected no doubt to find the coin in one great glittering heap, but he was mistaken; for the cautious miser had twelve compartments in the safe, each one of which was secured by two locks, no one of which resembled the other.

‘This,’ thought the prying gentleman,’ reminds one of the story of the Sleepen Beauty—it was so hard to get near her. Drageens, serpents, firey horses, and terrible birds with steel bills. But here goes.’

One compartment was soon opened, and from this our friend drew a little tin box which was also locked. It was very heavy, but The Lifter had no mind to carry away possibly a bit of lead. So he opened the box, and found a mass of sovereigns, shining as if they had just come from the mint.

‘All right,’ he muttered, and laid them upon the floor.

At this instant, a mouse ran across the floor, and then about a dozen others, shrieking like a sharp blast of autumn wind. The Lifter rose to his feet and glanced about, and then shaded the feeble glim with his hand.

Many of the locks that he found were very intricate, and more than two hours passed away ere he secured the contents of five of the lockers. Then it seemed to him as if he heard a noise outside, indistinct at first, but very soon audible enough. The noise resembled the cry of an angry bear, and this he knew to be a signal from the chief calling him forth.

‘I will not go till I get one more locker open,’ he thought; and then set at work again with his picklocks and skeleton keys. This compartment was the easiest of all rifled; the box of coin was secured and put into his sack. He then carefully closed and relocked the doors, hoisted his bag, now extremely heavy, upon his back, and retraced his steps.

The door of the secret room he likewise carefully reclosed; then passed through the library, the drawing-room, and into the kitchen. There was no stir, and he laid his bag of booty upon the bed which poor Bridget had so kindly spread for him. The cat, a great male tortoiseshell, came from the corner with tail erect and back curved, and he rubbed his handsome side, against The Lifter who calmly proceeded to put on his boots.

The robber did not show the least anxiety but calmly proceeded, by the light of his candle, to tie his boots and prepare himself for a start. When tightening the lace in his last boot, he thought that he heard a noise upon the stairs; but it ceased and he went on with his work. Then there was a sudden rush as if somebody were descending many steps at once; and simultaneously with the rush a loud cry.

‘Buglahs! Buglahs!’

‘The d—d nigger,’ the Lifter ejaculated, and seizing his booty he made a plunge for the door, which, with his usual precaution, he had unlocked before going upon his exploit. Through the door he escaped safely enough, but he had scarcely reached the yard before the negro —the same, by the way, to whom my readers have already been introduced—was upon him.

‘Help, mates, help!’ shouted The Lifter, as he felt the hand of the darkey tighten about his throat.

‘Help, buglahs, buglahs!’ shouted at the same time the faithful negro; and in response to the alarm, there was a hurrying of many feet inside, and much hallooing.

But it was too late with the Ethiopean; for as the word ‘buglahs,’ issued the second time from his lips, he was struck upon the head with a club and knocked senseless.

‘Here,’ said The Lifter, ‘take this,’ handing the bag of booty to Murfrey.

In an instant the band of desperadoes were making their flight through the pines; but not before several bullets had been sent whizzing among them. At the roadside stood the horses, and each man vaulted into the saddle.

‘Here, Capteen, you better have the shiners,’ the Lifter said, taking the heavy and rather clumsy sack from Joe, and flinging it across the croup of his father’s saddle. ‘It is worth carrying, and worth fighting for.’ Then the robbers were away over the frosty road like a sudden blast of a wintry wind.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE ‘MOST’ BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN.

The ride was a most furious one and there was not the ghost of a chance, had the sun been at the meridian, of overtaking those fleet-footed beasts. When they were many miles beyond the old farm-house the Captain pulled rein and waited for his son to gain his side.

‘What has been your luck? I think that it has been good.’

‘I am thinkeen the same myself. I eased him of half what he has.’ Then the Convert entered into a careful detail of the robbery, the circumstances of which my reader already knows. When he was ended the robber chief extended his hand.

‘Well-done, boy; this is worth all the house-breaking we have had since we came to the swamp.’ As he said these words he turned half towards Murfrey, who, despite his jealousy, and his anger at the remark, was, nevertheless radiant as he contemplated his share of the booty.

‘You have done bravely, and like a man. I do not think that your loyalty will be any more called in question.’ Another sidelong glance at the glowering bully; but he uttered never a word.

‘You never boast, my son, and you never bully,’ the Chief went on; ‘but when a delicate measure and an important one is on hand, you are to be trusted. There is no other man in my band in which I can place such faith.’ Still another malignant glance at the ruffian with the dogged face. But that villain was bent upon keeping his temper and holding his tongue; and he rode along in glum silence.

‘By the Eternal,’ shouted the robber chief, ‘if slur is ever again put upon you, I will shoot the coward who offers it.’ It did almost seem as if the Captain were courting a quarrel with his ally. But he really was not. In the intensity of his satisfaction his imagination went back to all the indignities that had been put upon his son—whom he really loved—by Murfrey; and he remembered how patiently it had all been borne.

‘Hush, father!’ The Lifter said, putting his hand upon the chief’s arm. ‘We all try to do the best we can. It would spoil everything if we quarrelled now.’

To this the chief agreed; but he had made up his mind that there should be no more persecution of his son.

The money was divided upon the return of the band to the camp, the Captain taking a double share, one going to Murfrey, one to Rev. Mr. Jonas, a half to the old woman, and a fourth to each of the girls.

‘I have reserved half a share for you, sir,’ the Captain said, addressing Roland, who had been a spectator of the division, ‘although you have not chosen to give us any assistance in our enterprises.’

Roland arose.

‘I have to thank you for your offer; but you must know that its acceptance is impossible.’

‘Well, be it as you say. I think The Lifter is entitled, then, to this extra amount, for the skill and cool-headedness that he has displayed in the matter.’

The sum that fell to the robber chief was a few shillings short of 3,000 [pounds] stg.

Several days passed away, during which there were many slight snow-falls in the wood. The snow, it may be added, was always kept removed from the covering of that portion of the tunnel over which the intruder must pass before he could reach the open-air rendezvous of the robbers.

One evening, as Roland sat in his room reading, Nancy entered with fight tread, and took her seat beside him.

‘I think that the chief will soon require your services.’

‘How comes this?’

‘To-morrow I think he sets out upon the expedition of which you have already heard some mention. The girl is to be brought here to-morrow night; and he believes that you can assist him in two ways, first by turning your knowledge of the district to be visited to account: and second, by acting as a decoy for the young lady.’

‘I shall die before he force me into such a work.’

‘As I expected. Of course you will refuse, and he will rave and rage. See to it that you are armed, for he would shoot or stab you as he would a dog when he finds that you thwart him in a matter that he has so much at heart.’

‘I shall be prepared, Nancy. When do you think he will make his request?’

‘I should judge to-morrow morning.’

‘Nancy, it seems to me that the time is not far away when we shall escape from this pit of infamy. If it lie within my power this girl shall be saved from her odious abductor. We can depend upon The Lifter—you of course will not flinch.’

‘So far from flinching,’ the girl replied, ‘I should be delighted to lay down my life in helping you in the noble resolve which you have formed.’

‘Be it so, then. Can you use firearms?’

‘I can; indeed since a child I have been expert with pistols. I know what you can do; The Lifter is brave at the proper time, and you will not find me useless. I think that we need not despair.’

‘Still, it will be five against two.’

‘Oh, to-morrow is Sunday, and the Rev. Mr. Jonas is to preach at the Don. In fact he is holding a series of revivals there, and will not be back before Tuesday next.’ Then she bade our hero good-night.

The next moment The Lifter entered. He corroborated what Nancy had told, and declared his willingness to join Roland.

He may try to shoot you to-morrow morneen when you refuse; but remember you will have a friend standeen by your side who can shoot too.’

Thank you, and God bless you, my *friend,*’ Roland said, giving his hand to the robber. It was the first time that he had ever used such a term toward the outlaw. The poor outcast felt that one word, ‘friend,’—uttered as it had been with such peculiar emphasis—more than any other experience in his whole chequered and evil life. His face quivered with emotion, and his eyes became moist with tears.

Yes, that word strung his nerves up to cords of steel, and set a seal upon his resolutions that nothing upon earth could move.

The morning broke cheerfully enough. Troops of shining white clouds held themselves shyly aloof in the liquid blue sky. The ice upon Silent Lake gleamed and sent out radiating lines of light, fine as the threads of a spider's net. Troops of blue jays went in silly procession from tree to tree, and some of them came about the camp of the robbers and began feasting upon the morsels of fish and meat scattered around. Roland was early astir; and he saw the sun through the pines, its face seeming as if covered with blood. This was not an auspicious sign; and little as our hero was given to belief in omens, he could not help being impressed by the spectacle.

But when the great orb got above the tops of the trees its face changed from quivering crimson to brass; and with the change the foreboding passed from the mind of our hero.

'How my beautiful Aster used to glory in the spectacle of the setting or rising sun,' he thought. 'I have ridden through York [now of course Toronto, AUTHOR] when the whole west was a mass of crimson fire; and once grasping my hands pointing to cloud-specks in the arc of red, she said, "*See the spots. They look like drops of blood*," while her beautiful eyes grew larger and shining with poetic fervor. Alack-a-day! I wonder if I shall ever see my love again?'

His reverie was ended by the appearance of Nancy, and immediately afterwards of Silent Poll, both of whom busied themselves preparing breakfast.

When that meal was ended the chief sauntered about smoking, and at last stood before Roland.

'I have to talk seriously with you this morning,' he said, in a tone that was intended to be conciliatory as well as authoritative.

Roland had placed his back against the trunk of a large pine, with his hand—carelessly, as it would seem—in his hip pocket, and he looked the chief steadily in the face, as he replied:

'I am ready to hear what you have to say.'

'It is soon said, I purpose now to bring all those plans of mine to fruition. There

is a young woman whom I purpose carrying here to-night. I do not know anything about the interior arrangements of the house, nor of the habits of the family. But you may sometime have met the lady, and could therefore help my plan. Will you consent to do this?'

The look of mingled indignation and scorn upon Roland's face was simply beyond description when he heard this barefaced and monstrous request.

'So far is such an act from me,' he replied, looking into the eyes of the libertine robber, 'that I refuse to discuss a proposition so odious and full of infamy.'

'That is your answer?'

'Aye, it is.'

'Dog! is it for this that I have spared you?' and he drew hastily from his sheath a knife with a long, keen blade, and raised it.

But Roland was equally as quick as the desperado; and holding his pistol in the very face of the robber, he said:—

'Move that hand, villain, if you dare!' and as he said these words he moved gradually back, for Murfrey was coming towards him.

The chief saw that there was no glory for him in such a scene as this. He lowered his arm, and beckoned Murfrey back to his place.

'I was in a rage,' he said, looking at our hero,' because you refused this favour; but I did not mean to strike.' His looks, however, as he spoke, belied the declaration. 'I will need you,' he said, nodding to The Lifter; 'and you come, of course,' to Murfrey. Roland said nothing, but sat apart, his weapon in his pocket, ready for immediate use. But he did not need it, as the three robbers speedily left the den and passed out into the wood.

As the evening fell that day, the robbers, disguised as three log-choppers, with axes upon their shoulders, approached a large, comfortable and rather imposing residence. In this house, to judge from the cautious looks of the party, dwelt the object of the expedition. How to obtain the girl was the problem that now presented itself.

At first it was proposed that The Lifter should go in and enquire the distance to Sloan's tavern, a well-known rendezvous for lumbermen in the neighbourhood. But this plan was rejected. These desperate men would have no hesitation in boldly forcing their way into the house with axes uplifted, but the girl might not be there; and the enterprise, for the future, would be rendered more difficult.

The robbers, as has been said, were standing in a group among a pine-clump that stood a couple of perches from the road. In this same clump stood two horses saddled and one harnessed to a sled. The latter was the chiefs horse, and of course the vehicle was intended for carrying away the prize. While the villains stood together, planning a way out of the dilemma, the jingle of sleigh-hells was heard upon the road leading down to the dwelling.

'Suppose she should be in this,' exclaimed the chief. 'Let us down to the roadside. I know the old chap's pair, a dappled gray and a chestnut.' By the roadside they posted themselves, the sleigh moving swiftly along to the merry tune of the bells, made far more merry by 'the icy air of night.'

The moon was nearly full, but while it waded through the heavy cloud-masses half the world was dark. It would seem that Diana ought to keep her fair, chaste head in nubibus when any of her maidens stand in danger. But she has often been known to suddenly illuminate a dark place, and show the assassin a victim.

On the memorable night which I am describing she must have been in one of her heartless fits. Perhaps she was thinking of some of Endymion's flirtations with the rosy-cheeked mountain lasses, when ranging among the pastoral hills. Be this supposition correct or not, just as the approaching sleigh reached a hundred paces of the gate by which the robbers were concealed, a flood of moonlight burst upon the road.

'The very pair, by heavens!' exclaimed the Chief, excitedly. 'Three persons; she is there, too!' The sleigh had now reached very near the roadside; and one of the men jumped out to open the gate.

'You attend to him,' the Chief whispered to Joe; 'you gag the girl's mouth with this handkerchief,' to The Lifter; 'Come.'

The robbers rushed out and Murfrey felled his man to the ground with a blow of his axe-handle. The chief pinioned his man and stopped his mouth, not before he had cried out twice:

‘Highwaymen! Help!’

The Lifter was not so dexterous in his work, for the girl gave several shrieks before he succeeded in stopping her mouth. At first he had not the heart to bind this beautiful girl, who looked at him with such frightened, appealing eyes. But in spite of the hesitation on The Lifter’s part, the terrible business was despatched with wonderful swiftness. The chief seizing the girl in his arms bore her lightly as if she were an infant to his own sled, and placed her upon it, holding her there with one arm, while with the other he held the reins; then giving the word to his followers, the band was speedily flying over the frosty road towards their lair. When they reached the edge of the swamp, the dawn was breaking in chilly, silver streaks, and the robbers dismounted.

‘Why am I torn away from my home?’ the girl asked as soon as the bandage was removed from her mouth. ‘Where are you taking me?’

‘To my home, to be my bride,’ the robber replied, bending suddenly down to kiss her. But she evaded his polluting lips, and stood looking from one to the other of the rest for help. The Lifter turned away his head; for he was sick and sore at heart.

‘Now, my dear girl,’ the Chief said, ‘we have to get to my home immediately. It lies in yonder bush. Will you walk, or shall we be obliged to carry you. I do not care to take my horses to the wood.’

‘God have mercy upon me! God have mercy upon me!’ was all that the unfortunate girl could say.

‘Do not lament so. You will not find me such a tyrant.’

But despair had now chilled her heart. She did not hear the words he spoke, and looked about her bewildered and helpless.

‘We had better be moving, Miss,’ Murfrey said, walking to her side; for it was arranged that the Captain should stay behind to blind the track made by the single sled, and, with the deaf-mute, put pursuers on the wrong scent. He was very skilful at this sort of thing and the rest were not. Hence his remaining behind.

The captive did not seem to hear the words addressed to her, but stood there

most hopeless and *distrait* in the opening dawn, tears streaming out of her beautiful eyes.

Murfrey turned away for a moment to speak with his leader as to what he ought to do. This gave The Lifter who was standing near an opportunity to whisper in her ear, for he had drawn quite close to the girl.

‘Fear not! I am your friend. Another captive at home. He will help to release you. I’m forced *now* to act like this. Fear not! and don’t speak.’ She looked into his face, and by the earnest, anxious gleam in his eye, she felt instinctively that he told the truth.

‘Why should he tell falsehoods about it?’ she mused, they can carry me whether I want to go or not.’

‘Come,’ The Lifter said, and meekly she followed him.

‘This augurs bad for you at the beginning,’ Murfrey said with a chuckle. ‘Your son seems to have the inside track already. She is following him tamely as a poodle.’ ‘He’s the devil at coaxing,’ the robber replied. ‘You can’t tell *what* yarn has prevailed with her. Be off now, and take good care of my pretty bird. Don’t you think she’s a beauty; a what ‘ill I call her? a Diana! yes, that must be her name. Now go and take care of Diana of the Swamp.’ The chief had become jocose; for here was the lovely prey safe within the toils. A minute later he called.

‘Here, Joe’ and Murfrey came. ‘If you get a chance to make an end of that d—d fellow Gray, do so. I do not, want the two to begin coddling. He does not know her, I suppose, but if she found him with his handsome face, bad luck to it, likewise a captive, it would be “love at first sight” with a vengeance.’

‘If the thing is possible, rely upon me.’ Then the ruffian sped away through the woods.

When Roland arose that morning The Lifter came to him.

‘The hour is come,’ he said, ‘if you are to save the girl.’

‘Is she here?’ he asked with astonishment,

‘Yes; she is now upstairs among the women. Nancy is trying to give her some comfort. O, she is so beautiful and innocent lookeen that it pains my heart to see her here.’

‘Rely upon me. Here she will not remain if you be true. I swear it before the God who made me,’ and he fell upon his knees while he made the oath. Then he arose. ‘I will send Nancy to you, though I think she is also ready for a start.’ In a moment Nancy was beside Roland.

‘Is the hour come?’ she asked with the slightest tremor in her voice; but it was not a tremor of fear. She was simply quivering at the thought of freedom.

‘It is. The chief is absent, and we may reach the road before he enters the bush. Joe, I learn, is sleeping.’

‘Yes, but the shriek of a mouse will awaken him.’

‘I am prepared for that ruffian. Silent Poll and her mother we must gag.’

Both then ascended into the upper air, and Roland stepped quickly forward to see the intended victim of the libertine outlaw. She was sitting with her head upon her hands, and the tears were still streaming from her eyes.

‘All merciful heaven, it is Aster!’ and looking up, the poor girl saw her lover. She had only power to rise and throw herself into his arms, when she swooned there.

‘Water, quick,’ and he stretched her upon a lounge and dashed several handfuls upon her beloved face. She speedily revived, and opening her glorious eyes looked again upon her lover. But she seemed unable to realize it She believed indeed that her reason had forsaken her or that it was all a dream.

‘Is it you, Roland,’ she exclaimed, taking his hand. ‘Where is this, and what are you doing here.’

‘This, Aster, my love,’ he replied, ‘is a robbers’ den. This is the head-quarters of the miscreants of Markham Swamp. On the day of the duel I was captured and brought hither, and watch has since been kept upon me. I resolved many timed to leave and endeavour to reach the United States, till the feeling over my crime had subsided.’

‘What do you mean?’ Aster enquired, laying her hand with its crooked little finger upon his.

‘The duel, of course.’

‘Why, haven’t you heard? Why, he recovered from his wound.’

‘Merciful heaven, then I am free to stand up among my fellow men, in my own place again! No; they told me nothing of it, though the villainous chief must have heard, for nothing passes without his cognizance.’

During this conversation the hag looked as if the world was coming to an end, that such language should be used by the upstart in the very midst of her stronghold.

‘Poltroon,’ she shouted to The Lifter, why do you not strike him down?’

‘That is all over now,’ Roland said, suddenly seizing the old woman and forcing a handkerchief into her mouth. This act was the signal for The Lifter, who at the same moment accorded similar treatment to Silent Poll. Roland bound the old woman, and The Lifter secured the young one.

‘Granny,’ The Lifter said, bending down to her ear, ‘I am going to leave and to try to be an honest man. I shall watch constantly in the papers for news of your hangeen. As for you,’ stooping down to the ear of Silent Poll, ‘I believe the devil will carry you off before the gallows gets you. I know you must always have been a great favourite of his.’

Silent Poll replied by spitting in his face.

‘Are you ready, my friends?’ Roland said, looking at his confederates.

‘Yes, yes,’ both had answered.

‘Come, my darling,’ giving his arm to Aster, ‘we go from this spot: these two are faithful; but there will be some hot work before we get out.’

She only replied by a fervent pressure of his arm and a glance of proud confidence in her lover.

‘What is this?’ thundered a hideous voice. ‘Where going? Where off, Lifter?’ This was Murfrey, with rage, hate and apprehension written in his face.

‘I am away from the bush forever. If nothing better happens, Joe, I’ll give myself up to the law.’

‘And where are you off, Nancy?’

‘To seek an honourable life. In a way, I leave this place stainless, and I go to give myself back to my father.’

The terrible oaths that this foiled ruffian swore, I could not repeat here. He resembled a devil fresh from the infernal regions. His flaming eyes were turned anxiously along the path, expecting the captain; then he drew near with a brace of pistols in his belt.

‘Nancy,’ our hero said, ‘you lead off with the lady and we shall cover your retreat. Keep a sharp look-out ahead.’

Blinded with rage, Murfrey drew forward, hastily raised his pistol and fired. The ball grazed Roland’s cheek and left a pink streak across it. But he had no sooner fired than Roland discharged his weapon, and with a loud cry the robber drew his remaining pistol with his left hand, our hero’s shot having broken the right arm a little below the shoulder. ‘Put down your pistol or I will shoot you without mercy,’ Roland thundered; but the fellow was insane with rage, pain and disappointment, and heeding not the warning, he took new aim upon Roland. But he had not time to fire before he fell, shot in the leg.

‘On now,’ cried Roland, ‘we have only one other to deal with’. Aster, with Nancy leading, made slow way through the deep snow and tangled bushes. Nancy had a quick ear and an eye of unusual sharpness, and this was well; for about three hundred yards distant, she saw the robber captain coming towards her.

‘This way, miss, this way,’ she whispered to Aster. ‘We shall keep in shelter of that duster of cedars yonder. The robber chief comes this way.’ Aster followed her guide without question; but she turned her head every few minutes to look for Roland. He was now far in the rear, but he was following the lead of the girls by their tracks.

Suddenly Roland and the chief found themselves face to face. The robber's brows grew dark as the night.

'What is this,' he demanded of his son.

'We are both leaveen the place.'

The villain was simply struck dumb with amazement. When he did speak, he asked,

'Where is Murfrey?'

'We just have been disableen him.'

'Where are my mother and Poll?'

'We have just done gaggeen them.'

'Where is Nancy; where is the young lady?'

'They are cleareen out of the swamp.'

'Hell and—' he did not finish his pious ejaculation, but felt for his pistol. It was not there; and he gave a cry like a baulked lion.

'Here's at you,' looking at our hero who just then remembered that he had no charge left in his pistol; and like a jaguar he sprang at Roland's throat. But this brutal robber had no child now in hand; our hero was slight, but his sinews were elastic and reverberant; and they were as enduring as twisted steel. A fair hold was taken on either side, and it was a nice test of the respective powers of the combatants.

The robber was the heavier man by far, but the activity and the skill were upon the other side.

'I would put a pistol to his head,' the Lifter said,' but bad as he be he is my father.' There is no need to describe the *rencontre*, further than to say that After about a minute's fierce strife the chief vent down and Roland's knee was planted in his breast.

‘Cords now,’ he cried to the Lifter.

‘I’ll help to do the bindeen,’ The Lifter replied cheerfully, and he did so. When his father was bound he stood before him and thus spoke:

‘Father, I leave you to the mercy of the laws which you have all your life been a breakeen. I will try to get out of the country and go to the States; there I hope to become an honest man. I do not think that I deserve to suffer, because in breakeen the law I did not know I was do’een wrong. You deserve to suffer because you broke them knoween it was evil, and you brought me up to break them, which was worst of all. So I leave you, capteen. In a little while the law will come here and catch you. I will not cry when I hear of your swingeen.’ The unfilial convert then joined Roland and the two quickening their pace soon overtook Nancy and Aster.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.’

When the turmoil and the hideous danger was over, it was very sweet for these two lovers to sit alone and talk about the past. She had received his letter, and marvelled what he meant when he spoke of being detained in some place ‘so near and yet so far.’

‘Did you, my darling,’ he asked her, as he held her hand, with its crooked little finger—which small deformity I always take as a sign of gentle blood—in his, ‘care for me on that day that separated us for all this bitter time?’

She put down her head, and looked at him very archly.

‘Well, I don’t care, my beloved, what you say in answer, but do you think you love me now?’

For answer, she put her beautiful head upon his breast. I do not know what they said, but when they stood up—she to answer the door bell, for the servant was out—they were engaged; and she had his ring upon her finger.

He was at Aster's own house, sitting with her during the anxious hours of her father's illness. The shock of the abduction had actually over-set his reason; and it was not till he saw his daughter standing over his bed, and felt her hand in his, that consciousness came back. In a little while he was able to listen to a recital of the entire story from her lips. When she had ended, tears stood in the old man's eyes.

'I have treated that young man with cruel injustice. If he wanted to wed you now, my love, it would give me great joy to say "yes," and bestow my blessing.'

'He has asked me, papa;' and she hid her head to cover her blushes. 'He now wants only your consent. He is in the house.'

'Send him to me, dear, at once.'

In about a quarter of an hour, Roland returned from the room, radiant with happiness and leading Aster by the hand.

They were sitting before the cheerful winter-fire, when he asked her,

'What has become of Mr. Ham?'

'O! a fearful vulgar girl named Lydia Estabrooks, a Yankee lass, is about to become his bride. She covers herself with chains and ribbons, and her fingers blaze with stones. He has given it out in an underhand way that he has thrown me over.'

'What?'

'O! pray, love, do not look fierce like that. Nobody but Lydia believes him. Now that *you* are back again, I am sure that he will retract.'

'He shall be notified to do so.'

'There now, surely, darling, you are going to have no more quarrels. Had I thought this, I never should have told you.'

'Be easy, love, be easy,'—he kissed her between sentences—'there shall be no more parting for us.'

From all that I can learn, Roland was thenceforth a constant visitor at the house; and speedily a day was fixed when she was to drop her maiden name.

‘On the first day of sweet May,’ she said to herself, ‘I shall be Aster Gray; what a pretty name!’ It was agreed that Roland should come back to Oatlands after his wedding tour and reside there; for on the marriage day, Mr. Atwell had resolved to endow his son-in-law with all his houses, every acre, every beast and every head of cattle that were his.

As for Nancy; Roland accompanied by Aster, went with her to her father’s house, and Roland told the old man the story of his daughter’s life. He at once forgave her and took her to his heart. I may bound a couple of years ahead and state that Nancy married a respectable farmer who was pleased enough to get a handsome wife and a valuable homestead. This couple had a family of four children afterwards; and one of these is now a member of the Legislature of Ontario. I shall not say whether he is a Grit or a Tory, for that would be getting upon too dangerous ground. Nancy died a few years ago and she sleeps now under the shade of a weeping willow.

Roland induced the officers to shut their eyes while The Lifter passed over to the States. In that country the smooth-tongued convert rapidly amassed a fortune. His son is a partner in extensive car works now, not a thousand miles from Detroit. I have met his grand-daughter and she is a most bewitching blonde.

The old woman and Silent Poll were caught; and they perished in prison, to which they were condemned for life. Murfrey was taken, tried and hanged, and went to his grave without a ‘*pax vobiscum*‘ from man or woman.

But when the officers came to the spot in the woods where Roland had left the captain tied, they found not that robber. There were marks of a violent ‘personal’ struggle, and it was concluded that he had freed himself. Thereafter he went to another wild place in Upper Canada, where he gathered two or three desperadoes about him, and the fame of his doings in that region went far and near. To his actual deeds were added many legends, and stories imported from English books, till the man’s name was wrapped around by amazing web of history. I may, some day, sift the grain from the chaff, and make a book. There is certainly fact enough there, from which to create a thrilling story.

On the day of Aster’s rescue, the magistrate came to Roland.

‘I understand,’ he said, ‘that one of these robbers is at large; the fellow who goes masked as a Wesleyan preacher.’

‘Yes; he is holding “revival” meetings at the Don. I shall go with you and your *posse*, if you wish it.’

When they reached the church door, a little church looking upon the Don River, they found a great number of people assembled. On enquiry they learnt that the Rev. Mr. Jonas had not yet arrived, but that he was expected every minute. Roland stood behind the door, and the magistrate and the constables mixed for the nonce with the crowd.

Presently a murmur went round.

‘Mr. Jonas is coming;’ and peeping out, Roland saw that saintly individual in a pung, sitting in pious state beside the foremost class-leader of the church. He bowed cordially to all as he drew near, and as he passed through each knot of people he gave some such salutation as:

‘I hope God is blessing you,’ or ‘Is the good work improving?’ or ‘Shall many declare for Emmanuel to-day?’

He passed into the pulpit, and stood there, his eyes closed, while he uttered some silent prayers.

The magistrate and the police had obtained a position directly under the pulpit, and just as Mr. Jonas opened his book, and after the usual notification read the line:

‘God moves in a mysterious way.’

The former jumped upon the dais, and holding a large sealed paper in his hands said:

‘Jud Sykes, I arrest you for murder, robbery, and divers other crimes.’

No thunderbolt that ever fell could have created sach a sensation as this.

Not one in the congregation believed the charge. Indeed, amazement had stupefied everyone, and there was no reasoning about the matter. They simply

believed in their gifted and saintly preacher.

Roland now stepped forward.

‘I know this man;’ then turning he looked Mr. Jonas full in the face. That stare was as fatal to the preacher as a musket ball. He said nothing, but folded his hands, which the next moment were bound together affectionately with wristlets of steel. There is no need to chronicle anything further respecting this event. Three months afterwards this pious servant of God was publicly executed at the town of Little York.

Mr. Ham was anxious to proceed at law against Roland for having challenged and wounded him, but the lawyer to whom he applied said:

‘By the way, Ham, Gray was wounded, too. They also say that you fired first. Besides, your *acceptance* makes you equally culpable with the challenger.’

Mr. Ham went away and continued his preparations to marry the glittering Miss Estabrooks.

When news reached the Hams that Roland and his beloved Aster were wedded, Lydia, who was by this time likewise a wife, said:

‘I don’t envy that ‘ere one her bargain. *You* would never now, would you, dear, ask anybody out to fight a dool?’

Lydia, at least, told the truth.

Aster lived very happily with Roland, and she still retains the beauty for which, in those olden days, she was so noted. Before handing this manuscript to the publishers, I went to her dear, cosy old home and read the sheets.

‘Why,’ she said,’ you have it all down just as accurately as if you had been with us during that dreadful time. But you make me too beautiful; that is the only fault. I want you to look up my grandson; he attends college at Toronto.’

Kissing her dear hand, I said good-bye; and I beg likewise to say good-bye to my readers.

THE END.

MARY HOLT’S ENGAGEMENT

BY CATHERINE OWENS

‘And I am really engaged! I can hardly believe it. How often I have thought and wondered who my husband would be, or if I ever should marry. But I suppose all girls have the same thoughts; at all events my future is now settled. I wonder if Tom will always care as much for me as he does now?’

Mary Holt sat in the bright firelight, watching the flickering flames, and thinking of her new position.

She was very young and inexperienced, and Tom Cowell’s declaration of love and somewhat masterful wooing had taken her by storm. She had hardly realized that he was dear to her beyond friendship, when he asked her to be his wife, and, in spite of the suddenness of her betrothal, if the bright, dimpling smile and sunny eyes might be taken as a sign, she was a very happy little woman indeed.

Tom had not been very long in Mapleton when he met and fell in love with Mary, who, for her part, much as she liked his great broad shoulders and honest, handsome face, was long before she could believe that she, who was said to be the prettiest and most admired girl in that part of Pennsylvania, could ever love such a very different man from the one she had pictured as her conquering hero.

Her ideal had been such a very superior creature—quite unlike good-natured, handsome, but, to Mary’s eyes, who judged by the Mapleton standard, somewhat common-place Tom Cowell.

He had seemed to her, too, to have an unpleasantly good opinion of his own people and his home, which was Limeton—as every one knows, much behind Mapleton in culture and refinement, although it could boast of its greater wealth; but wealth in such a sooty atmosphere lost all attraction for Mary. Yet he quoted Limeton, and, what the Limetonians did, thought, and intended to do, and the effect of their intentions on the coming election for President, which was exasperating to Mary, who, like all loyal Mapletonians, was quite sure their own city was the brain of the State, even if Limeton did represent its wealth; so that what the former said and thought was of far more importance to the country, and she would smile at the purse-proud ignorance of Limeton.

Even when she saw Tom’s honest admiration for herself, and found that she

enjoyed his visits and attentions, she believed it was only the magnetism of his good humour, and breezy, healthy nature that pleased her; she was sure it was nothing more.

And yet the day came, as we see, when she had been brought to know that she loved him, and to look forward to being his wife as her greatest good. But then, in his growing affection for her, and his absorbing anxiety as to its being returned, he had left off quoting ‘my mother’ and Limeton quite so often; and Mary flattered herself it was because he was beginning to see the superiority of Mapleton, and thus tacitly acknowledged it.

A few days after her betrothal she received a letter from Mrs. Cowell, inviting her to go and stay with her for a few weeks, in order that they might become better acquainted.

The letter was kind and motherly, and Mary felt that it was so: but although there were no actual faults of spelling, it was evidently not the production of a cultured woman, and she thought with some dread of her future mother-in-law. It would all be very tolerable if Tom did not think so over much of his own kin, but he evidently looked on his women-folk as the most superior of their kind.

However, she had to meet them sooner or later, and as Tom was so anxious, it was best to go.

Tom was delighted when she told him she would accept his mother’s invitation. His face glowed with satisfaction as he expressed his thanks.

‘You will like my dear mother so much, Mary, and Louise will be a delightful companion for you, darling. She is such a sweet, sensible girl, and a prodigious housekeeper. You will learn a great deal from her.’

‘I have no doubt I shall like your mother,’ says Mary, not very enthusiastically, it must be confessed.

Tom’s face falls.

‘And Limeton, Mary; it’s such a splendid city—quite different from this place.’

Mary fancies she detects a slight deprecatory tone in the way he says ‘this place.’

‘Yes, I suppose it is very different. Horridly dirty, isn’t it?

‘Not more dirty than a prosperous manufacturing city must inevitably be, and within a mile all round there is the loveliest scenery you can imagine. Our place is about a mile from the city, so the dirt will not annoy you; and you will meet such pleasant people there that you will not mind the smoke. I am sure, Mary, you will come away quite in love with Limeton, and prefer it to this prim old place.’

‘Prefer it to Mapleton? Never.’

‘Well, well, we’ll see;’ and in his proud confidence he kissed her and left her.

Mary felt indignant.

‘I’m sure we shall never get along if Tom remains so wrapped up in his mother, and sister, and Limeton. A great deal to learn from Louise, indeed!’

Mary could not get it through her little Mapleton head hut that she was about to honour Limeton infinitely by going there, and that her Mapleton manners and dress would be envied and copied by its unsophisticated people and now to be told that she was to learn from Louise!

Of course, she had a little cry, and made several foolish resolutions, and then set about her preparations for an early departure with a heavy heart.

A week later Mary was whirling along to Limeton, wondering what Tom’s relations would be like, and whether they were like him— unpolished diamonds. Could he think so much of them if they were not very nice? And although the people she knew from Limeton except Tom, had been suggestive of smoke and petroleum to her, they surely would be exceptions.

Mary’s heart sank within her as the train neared the depot; such miserable shanties formed the outskirts, such gloom hung in the air, that she shuddered at the thought of having to stay even a week in such a place. Her spirits did not revive when she saw Mrs. Cowell and Louise, who were waiting to receive her, and welcomed her with much cordiality.

As they rode home in the dusty ‘carry-all,’ Mrs. Cowell was evidently studying Mary’s elegant and expensive travelling-dress, from her Russia leather satchel to

her dainty boots and gloves, while Mary had taken in at a glance the terribly dowdy appearance of Louise and her mother—the old lady's black alpaca suit, made evidently at home and Louise's Scotch plaid dress, and dyed, and too scant silk overekirt; and yet, with such toilets, it was a relief to her to find they were not coarse.

As they passed through the town Mrs. Cowell and Louise pointed out some of the attractions, which they considered must astonish their visitor, and were evidently disappointed at the equanimity with which she regarded them. Mary, however, could be very sweet; and, although an idea was forming in her mind that Mrs. and Miss Cowell could never become relatives of hers, she exerted herself to charm them, and succeeded. The old lady thought she was a giddy young thing, quite unused to travelling, or she would never wear a dress beautiful enough for gala day attire on the cars, but that when she became toned down by Louise's example all would come right; but at the same time she determined herself to give her a few hints on extravagance, especially on the folly of wearing an Irish poplin dress to travel in.

The Cowells lived in a large, comfortable house, with fine old trees around it, and Mary began to hope, when she saw the wealth of sylvan beauty, that her visit might not be so unbearable as she had feared.

The interior was not so promising; it was Mrs. Cowell and Louise over again—plain, sensible, thrifty, but perfectly unendurable to luxurious Mary, who was accustomed to elegance and loved it.

She sighed as she sat on the hard, hair-cloth easy-chair, and trying the harder sofa, found it utterly impossible to adapt her round little figure to its angles.

No wonder Louise was so prim if she had been brought up amid such furniture! And then her thoughts turned to Tom. He was not prim. But even in that short time she had come to the conclusion that he was not like the rest of his family. Then why, oh! why, did he quote them so often? Could it be possible that he would expect her to live in a similar fashion? Perhaps that was why he had told her she could learn housekeeping from Louise.

Whatever Tom's idea on the subject may have been, it was evident that his mother meant to make her visit an apprenticeship to the future life she expected her son to lead.

Conversation had not been very brisk hitherto, and when tea was announced, Mary, determined to make talk, praised the biscuit, the cake, and the delicious butter.

‘Yes, my dear, Louise’s butter is excellent, although I say it. I suppose you know how to make butter? But I could take a hint myself from Louise, and it will do you no harm to learn some of her housekeeping wrinkles. Tom has always been accustomed to fine butter, and I hear in Mapleton they churn up the milk with the cream.’

‘I am sure I know nothing about it,’ said Mary, forgetting her resolve to be amiable.

However, Mrs. Cowell seemed almost pleased to know that Louise’s instructions would be given where they were most needed.

‘Never mind, my dear; you are quick, I’ll be bound, and we’ll soon make a good housekeeper of you. There’s one thing to begin on: if you travel in your handsome dresses you will never have anything decent to wear. Get yourself a nice, neat black alpaca, that will never show dirt, and last for years.’

Mary listened for a moment in speechless indignation, and then said:

‘But I wish to be as well dressed when I travel as at home; any lady must do so.’

‘Ah! you will soon lose that notion when you are married. Limeton ladies are much more sensible.’

Mary was prudently silent. It was evidently useless to argue with the old lady. After tea Mrs. Cowell went to sleep in her chair, and Louise took her visitor to Tom’s own room, showed her his wonderful juvenile achievements in drawing and calligraphy, and seeing Mary was somewhat silent, said suddenly:

‘You most not mind what mamma says, dear Mary; she is old-fashioned in her ideas, and I have been brought up to be something-like her, but we can’t expect every one to be cut out after our own pattern. Tom is not’

The intention was, no doubt, very kind, but the tone seemed to Mary one of tolerance. She fancied Louise meant to patronize her, making allowance for her short-comings, and she could not brook that in her present mood, so she

answered, somewhat tartly:

‘I am afraid I should not meet the expectations of any of you, not having been cut out by any pattern at all, that I know of.’

‘There, you are offended, and I am sorry. But mamma meant well, and so do I,’ she added, after a pause.

Now, Mary prided herself upon being exceedingly reasonable, and so she reflected that Mrs. Cowell and Louise had acted according to their lights. It was not to be expected that they should understand her, so she graciously said:

‘Don’t speak of it any more. We see things from such different points of view that it is scarcely likely we could agree on such a subject I can see that you are very kind, Louise,’ she added, putting forth her little white hand, which Louise clasped in her shapely brown ones; and then they joined Mrs. Cowell, who had just awakened from her nap.

During the next few days Mary learned to appreciate the character of Louise, without being in the least desirous of emulating her housewifely virtues. Limeton did not meet with her approval. She could scarcely repress her disgust as she walked the grimy streets, saw the pretentious, over-dressed people, who thus flaunted their wealth in the faces of their less fortunate neighbours, and then thought It might have been her home. To change clean, beautiful Mapleton for Limeton!

Tom had told her he would like their home Limeton, but had said that if she would be happier in Mapleton he would forego his wish. His business permitted him to live in either place. Not to be outdone in generosity, Mary had declared her happiness was to be with him, no matter where. The subject had not been renewed, but Mary had now quite decided that Limeton *could never* be her home. She had, indeed, balanced whether Mrs. Cowell could ever be her mother-in-law, but as she thought of Tom, she felt that infliction could be borne— away from Limeton.

Tom was to come the following Saturday, and spend a few days at home before she went back to Mapleton, and she awaited his coming with eagerness. She wanted to let him know that she could never make her home in Limeton, before he could make any plans with his mother.

When Saturday came, she told Louise she thought of going to the depot to meet Tom; and Louise, with more delicacy than Mary had given her credit for, said:

‘Oh! that is just the thing. I have so many things to see to that I would rather not go, and yet we could not let him arrive without some of us going.’

She also managed to keep Mrs. Cowell at home, feeling sure that Tom would enjoy Mary’s company alone better than with them.

Mary almost forgot all about Mrs. Cowell in the pleasure of meeting Tom, but after he had asked her a dozen questions, about herself, he said:

‘And how do you like Limeton, Mary?’

‘Oh, perfectly detestable! I cannot think how anybody can live there.’

‘Ah! I see you have still those Mapleton ideas, Mary. Now, I hate Mapleton, and am always glad to get out of it, the people are such snobs. You are the only pleasant person I ever met there. Limeton people are substantial, true-hearted, and—and, in short, Mary, I am much disappointed that you don’t like the finest city in the State.’

‘Finest city in the State, indeed!’ says Mary, stung by his disparagement of her native city. ‘It is a most unpleasant place, smoky, grimy, and unhealthy, and the people, as far as I have met them, may be substantial enough, but they are dreadfully tiresome and uninteresting. I don’t mean you, Tom,’ she adds, seeing him glare down upon her in angry astonishment.

‘I am much obliged, I am sure, that you make an exception in my favour, but I cannot take credit myself at the expense of my mother and Louise.’

‘Oh! I like Louise.’

‘And not my mother, I infer?

‘No.’

Mary had not intended to tell him this point-blank, but he had taken such a line with her for not liking Limeton that she felt indignant, and not inclined to mince the facts at all. The result was what may have been expected: Tom stalked on in

solemn silence, while she, all of resentment, held her little head very much in the air.

When they arrived at the house, Louise saw, notwithstanding Mary's unusual animation, that something had gone wrong between them, but chose the wise part of silence. Mrs. Cowell saw nothing but that her son was not much in love, as she feared he would be, with Mary. She had not found the latter as tractable as she had hoped in the way of imitating Louise, and had discovered that she had not that admiration of frugality and thrift, that befitted the future wife of her son; therefore she was contented to see that son's cool politeness to Mary, which she took as a proof that he was not likely to be led away by her caprices.

The next morning Tom joined Mary in the garden, and said:

'Under the impression that you would like Limeton, I had written about a place here I wanted to buy, but from what you said last night I conclude that any plan of that sort is useless.'

'Quite useless,' said Mary decidedly; 'and I really think, Tom, that you had better decide your future without reference to me. I—that is —there are several things that would, I think, prevent our being happy together.'

'In short, you are tired of our engagement?'

'If you take it that way, yes.'

'Oh, you women, you women!' said Tom, bitterly; 'but Mary had walked off, and he did not follow her.

Later that day Mary said she thought her presence was required at home. Louise looked sad, but no one made any remark on her sudden leave-taking. Only Tom, when he drove her to the depot, talking painfully small talk as they went, to avoid past and gone topics, wringing her hands as the train moved off, said:

'Heaven bless you, Mary; I hope one of your Mapleton fellows will make you as good a husband as I should have wished to be.'

'Thank you; I must take my chance,' says Mary, forcing back her tears till he is gone; then, dropping her veil, she cries her way home.

*

A year later Mary is alone in the world. She has lost her father, and as she sits in her mourning dress she thinks of the past, and is not afraid to tell herself now, that but for her own folly she might have had good, true-hearted Tom Cowell to help her in her trouble; that, grieved as she would have been at her father's loss, she could never have been alone in the world as long as Tom had lived; and now she would be alone for ever, for, disguise it from herself as she had tried to do, she knew she loved Tom still; all other men seemed poor, weak things to her, and for Tom's sake even Mapleton did not seem such a very superior place as it had done, and in consequence, Limeton was not so horrible. She knew in her heart she had been somewhat prejudiced, and told herself that the unpleasantness of it should have counted as nothing compared with Tom's love, All this she had seen long before she confessed it even to herself; probably, but for the grief that had lowered her pride, she never would have so confessed.

She sat musing in the firelight as she had done a year ago, when a card was brought to her.

'Mrs. Henry Carlton! I know no one of that name. Show the lady in.'

A lady, dressed handsomely, but with Quaker-like simplicity, then entered, and Mary recognised Louise Cowell.

After the first embarrassment of meeting had passed, Louise told Mary of her marriage with one of the 'dearest men in the world,' that they had just returned from their wedding trip, and had so timed their arrival as to meet Tom on his return from Europe.

'It was only last night we heard of your father's death, and then, dear Mary, I could not refrain from coming to tell you how sorry I am.'

'Tears filled Mary's eyes at the mention of her father.

'I am very much obliged to you, Louise, and heartily glad to see you. Are you going to stay here long?'

‘Yes, we shall pass the winter in Mapleton, and being a stranger here, I shall often inflict my company on you if you will have me.’

‘The oftener the better, dear Louise,’ replied Mary, sincerely.

She liked Louise. At the same time, she thought with some trepidation that these visits from Louise must result in her meeting Tom again, which she felt very reluctant to do; but pride came to her aid, and she asked herself why she could not meet a man with indifference, who could so meet her?

And so she resolved to avoid neither Louise nor him.

Perhaps Louise had a little project of her own. At all events, she appeared to have much satisfaction when she found Mary did not shrink from the mention of Tom’s name, and accordingly he became her chief topic of conversation. She even hinted at his unhappiness, and her fears that his disappointment would be a life-long sorrow.

‘Ah! you dear, innocent Louise. Shakespeare knew men better than you, and he says:

“Men have died from time to time, And worms have eaten them, but not for love.”’

Mary said, with forced gaiety.

At last Tom and Mary did meet, and then Mary found all her fortitude necessary, for Tom evidently had no intention of carrying matters off with dignity, but rather showed her in every word and look that she was the one woman in the world for him.

Can’t everyone guess the end? That Tom took an early opportunity of calling himself a fool and begging Mary’s forgiveness, and Mary contradicted him, and with many tears shed on his vest declared herself an unreasonable little vixen, not worth his love, and that she was willing to live in the very heart of Limeton if necessary.

‘Too late, my dear,’ says Tom, merrily, ‘for I have my eye on a lovely little nest in Mapleton, and I am not going to have my plans upset a second time.’

Then Louise came into the room.

‘Blessed are the peace-makers,’ said Tom, going to his sister and kissing her.

THE END.

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