A MOUNTAIN EXILE

THE STORY OF A KENTUCKY FEUD

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CONTENTS.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Chapter I.

The Exile Comes Home.

THE sun had sunk behind the western range, and down a certain steep and savage slope of the Cumberlands the shadows began to gloom about two incongruous companions. One was a tow-headed, freckle-faced, mountain youth, with abnormally long legs; but his short body deprived him of the unusual height which was rightly his by virtue of his elongated limbs. If physical characteristics ever indicated the mental and moral traits of their possessor, then these most prominent features of his anatomy, together with his alert look, might have been taken to indicate that the distinguishing characteristic of Tom Hatfield, or "Legs," as he was commonly called, was his paramount ability to create sudden remoteness between himself and any immediate danger that might threaten. He was in that adolescent state between boyhood and manhood, or, as he himself expressed it, "had sprouted his beard, and was beginning to strut and gobble."

The other was a young man whose whole appearance, from his patent-leather shoes and neat, new, canvas leggings, to his pale face above its high collar, betrayed that he was city-bred, and foreign to the scenes about him. He sat listlessly on a log against which his gun rested, and looked down through the gathering shadows into the peaceful valley far below. Young in years, if not in the ways of the world—ways, however, which leave their imprint no less strongly marked than the hand of time—there was beneath the long lashes which shaded his dark eyes a darker shadow, as if the night, which would soon steal out from the coves, had already touched his face in passing with its pensive presentiments.

All day he had been wandering over the mountains shooting pheasants, guided by the mountaineer. It had been a disappointing day. Few of his days, it seemed to him, were otherwise. The boy had professed not only to know the mountains, but right where to go for the birds—"could n't help finding 'em." But somehow they succeeded admirably in accomplishing that impossible thing, and when the birds did turn up it was when least expected. The pheasant flushes from its form among the brown leaves, which it so closely assimilates in color, with a roaring whirr calculated to startle one whose nerves are not of steel. Once flushed, they have an inconvenient little habit of alighting in trees, where they are doubly hard to find again, or, when found, to kill. There are many fast things in Kentucky, from a race-horse to an unfounded rumor, which has long legs; but for precipitate haste the pheasant that gets a good start out of a tree-top can dis-

THE "PHEASANT"—RUFFED GROUSE.

tance them all. He startles, exhilarates, and leaves you. The hunter steals stealthily along with every sense on the alert, pausing to scan some suspicious knot on a tree, and, having satisfied himself, moves on, when that very knot starts into sudden life, and flashes away, filling the woods, like some titanic bumble-bee, with a heavy boom, and presenting to the hunter's startled vision the optical illusion of a straight streak of pheasant stretching away through the tree-tops.

He had climbed up hill, and rolled down over slippery, leaf-strewn, moss-grown ledges of rock, had crawled through thicket and briar patch, ever and anon sending a charge of number eight shot through the saplings in the direction of that booming sound that betrayed the pheasant's flight. And at rare intervals peering through the smoke of the discharge, a shower of cut twigs and feathers floating in the air had told that he had killed with the eye of faith.

It was distracting while it lasted, and furnished ocupation for his thoughts; but now for the first time, as he sat in the solemn hush broken by no sound save that of Blue Lick Creek rushing through its rocky channel far below, and seeming to strike from the shores of another world, Gilbert Garrett realized the whole impassable gulf between his club life in the city, and the future that lay before him. He felt all the loneliness and isolation of an inhabitant of another world. The night with its pensive presentiments brought with it a feeling new to him who had fathomed the depths of boredom.

His boyhood had been a wild, reckless one, and after a scrape, from which he narrowly escaped with-

out disgrace, he had been banished here by his father, who was a "self-made man," and whose bitterest cross it was that his son should display such aversion to business, and such little inclination to anything useful in life. Gilbert had inherited this property through his maternal grandfather, Joshua Gilbert, who had emigrated over the mountains from Virginia in pioneer days, and settled in the beautiful Blue Lick cove with an army of negro slaves, and lived and died here in patriarchal magnificence. But the tide of development had passed far away from the cove shut in by its mountains, and the property, which had finally reverted to Gilbert's mother, whose only heir he was, was practically worthless. It was the only thing, as Gilbert said, that his father ever touched that did not turn to gold; but he had cheerfully resigned all his marital rights in it to Gilbert, assuring him it was all he should ever get from his estate, unless the leopard changed its spots. The old Gilbert patents comprised many thousand acres of worthless land in the mountains, and a comparatively small tract of arable land in the Blue Lick Valley. The mountains were clothed with hardwood forests, but the inaccessibility to market made them valueless.

But a few days before, he had come here with rather an erroneous impression of what was before him. It was plain enough now. Banished from all those pleasures that had grown so essential to his existence, to become a mere clod at the bottom of this hole in the ground, called a cove. To-day like yesterday, to-morrow a repetition of to-day. It was an awful bore, and he was dreadfully susceptible to boredom. But it was all his own fault.

He reflected bitterly upon the years he had wasted. He had brought it upon himself; but that realization did not make his lot any easier to bear. There was no use trying to stand it any longer. He would go back to town, and go to work. But what could he do?

"I can read and write," he groaned in spirit; "but that 's about my limit. Bluffs do n't go in that game. You 've got to show your cards, and I am not deuce high!"

For some moments his companion regarded him uneasily, if not sympathetically, and then producing a flask of pure white mountain whisky, his panacea for all earthly woes, exclaimed for the hundredth time that day, "Take a ho'n!"

Gilbert shook his head rather testily.

Undeterred by the oft reiterated refusal, the other said, "This yere 's straight goods. I cotch hit myself this mawnin' right outer the still wum. Ain't no pizen in hit, nor liniments; nuthin' but that ar burnt bit o' dried peach to gin hit flavor."

But Gilbert was proof against even this recommendation, and the mountaineer regarded him with unmistakable sympathy. "I reckon these yere well-poles o' mine has been most too much for ye," he said ,gazing at his long legs proudly. "I reckon they kin make less tracks to the mile and more to the minute than any other par o' laigs in these yere mountings. Whenever I gits in triberlashun, or takes aboard o' me a big skeer, I jes puts one of 'em out so, and tother past hit 'bout ten feet, and jest keep 'em a passin' each other untwell I gits comfort. The tallest travelin' I ever done was down this yere mounting two year ago, come Chrismus. Hit were

'bout a mile from here whar hit's a heap breshier. I was sneakin' along wid dad's ole gun loaded with tuckey shot, lookin' for a ole gobbler that used roun' thar when I run plumb onto a big bar. I was so flustered I jes whanged away with both bar'ls as he riz up out'n a tree-top that had root-wadded. The shot must a stung him most powerful, for he fotch a loud, rusty beller that mought a been hearn a mile, an I begin a backin'. A crawfish with a hongry coon a-reachin' for him were jis nowhar. I backed into a tree, and as he reached for me I busted the gun all to flinders over his head. I got away from the tree, an' kept on a-backin', snatchin' bresh from the trees fust one side an' then tother, an' a-wearin' of 'em out on that bar. I never knowed the right use o' bresh afore that day. I reckon I were the busiest human in the mountings 'bout that time. I bet that bar thought I had a dozen hands the way that bresh was thrashed over his face. What with the shot an' the bresh he would charge in blind, an' I would git out'n his way. But I seen he was gittin' madder all the time, an' a losin' all respect for my bresh-mill, an' the next time I dodged him I jes turned an' mizzled. I got a dozen jumps on him afore he rightly seen what I was up to an' could gather himself together. Then he come down that mounting like a snowslide, a settin' to me as clost as a poor cow does to her hide in March. But I knowed ef ever that bar got in reach of me again I 'd be flattened out as thin as a step-child's bread an' butter. You oughter hearn him beller—hit were nuff to skeer a saw-mill clean off'n the crick, an' I jest went down that mounting like a lizzard with a tuckey hen arter him, an' beat my

shadder forty yards in the fust half mile. The bar gin hit up—he had to," and the speaker gazed proudly at the unabbreviated portions of his anatomy that had served him in such good stead.

"I guess them 's the longest par o' laigs ever hung to any carcus, 'ceptin' a grandaddy spider, an' I kin beat him usin' of 'em as bad as a feather-bed kin beat a bag o' walnut shells fer sleepin' on. Well, here 's how! I 'm as dry as a hoss-fly arter a spider has done got through with him," and the bottom of the flask flashed in the fading light.

"Emptied hit at one run," he exclaimed, ruefully regarding the depleted bottle. "Waal, I reckon hit 'll be most night agin we git down off'n the mounting."

Arising from the log, Gilbert followed his fidus Achates of the hunting field down the steep slope; but had not proceeded far when, suddenly, with a startling whirr a pheasant sprang from the brown leaves, and darted away through the engulfing network of limbs and bushes along the mountain side. Instinctively the gun came up to his shoulder, and the barrels spouted their jets of flame. The mountaineer dropped the game he carried, and darted away to where the bird had fallen.

"Did I kill him?"

"Kill him!" the youth exclaimed triumphantly, holding it up. "The critter 's deader 'n a door-nail, deader 'n Lazarus wus afore he was resurrected."

"Where did you learn about Lazarus?" Gilbert asked, surprised at the quaint simile. Gilbert had seen enough to know that the dwellers upon Blue Lick were as far removed from the benefits of even the crudest education as any in all the Cumberlands.

A day's search among them would have failed to find one that could read or write. For reply the other stooped and peered, and then stepped back and peered again down into the valley below them.

"Kin ye see that house 'way over yander 'cross ther crick—jest kin make out ther roof—thar at the eend o' that pint arunnin' down from the bald o' ther mounting; that 's hit. Thar 's where we has Sunday-school. I 've hearn pap tell as how that cabin was built by a mighty bad man. They called him out one night an' shot him when he come to the doah, an' they ain't never nobody lived thar sence. Some folks 'lowed it was hanted, but Miss Ruth Colbert 'lowed she would drive out the evil sperrets with good ones, an' keeps Sunday-school thar now, an' I go most every Sunday. She 's Mister Joe Bob Colbert's wife. I reckon you 've hearn tell o' Mister Joe Bob? No! Well, he 's a survigrous man, every inch of him. Thar ain't no weevil in his wheat, mighty small chance o' water in his whisky, and narey a drap o' streakid blood in his body. Ain't a-feared o' nothin' on this yearth—'ceptin', may be, his wife. I reckon a man 's got to have a mighty big melt not to be a-feared o' his wife. An' squar! He 's the squarest white man you ever sot eyes on—divide all he 's got with you down to his last half pint—and that 's jes a hon you know. Talkin' 'bout half pints 'minds me of a new suckit rider come through here right fresh from the settlemint, with stoah clothes like you 've got on, an' put up at dad's over night. Next mawnin' he took me off to one side, an' drew a little tin bottle on me—had a cork o' the same material that you screwed off an' onto its neck, like I seen you windin' up that

timecounter o' yo's a while ago. "Son," sezzee, "I have a ailin' in ma innards—kin you buy me a half-pint o' liquor?" Think o' it! Half a pint foh a thirsty man ailin' for hit! Sounded like a man freezin' to death, an' askin' foh a inch o' cord-wood. Miss Ruth Colbert's powerful smart; kin read anything, print or writin'," he rambled on with the garrulity of youth, which for the first time finds a receptive auditor, and makes the most of the occasion.

"She 's got funny notions 'bout some things," he continued. "I reckon she got 'em in her head whar she was eddicated. They 's a place out towards the settlemint they calls ther 'mishyun,' whar they 's wimmen folks as calls 'emselves 'sistern,' 'at teaches ther gals all sorts er things. They ain no sich place fer boys—least-ways not as I 've hearn on," he said, with evident gratitude. "But everybody likes Miss Ruth ennyways. I tell you she 's jest the top o' the pot, an' the pot a-bilin'. An'," he added, triumphantly, his eyes glistening with the anticipation, "she 'lows to giv us a Chrismus-tree. It 's goin' to be somethin' scrumptious, I kin tell ye."

"That must be a noble woman," thought Gilbert. What would he not give, in looking back over his misspent life, to have done the good with his unlimited opportunities that this poor woman had in her humble sphere; to have called into a single human face the bright look of hope and expectancy that illuminated the freckle face before him at the prospect of that poor Christmas-tree in that deserted cabin. There was no one to miss him from his accustomed haunts, none to feel the worse for his passing. The waiter who attended him at the

club might wonder vaguely what had become of him, and his particular chums might ask one another, "Have you heard the news—Gil's left town;" but ere this they had all doubtless forgotten his very existence. It was a shallow, heartless, unsatisfying existence. If there was anything to do here he was not so sure but that he might in time grow accustomed to his exile, as the prisoner to his chains. But that "if," the dreadful monotony of nothing to do! It had been the bane of his life in town with all its distractions; here the prospect was too hopeless to contemplate.

"Yander's yo' house, way over yander at tother end o' the cove. Jes kin make out the red bricks agin the mounting side," exclaimed the mountaineer, pausing as they came to a point in the descent, from which it was visible. "Powerful lot o' house for jes one lone man body to live in. They ain't another in the mountings nowhar kin tech one side of hit," he concluded, with the pardonable pride that all the covites shared in this architectural triumph. To their untutored minds it was a perfect palace.

Gilbert nodded assent, for the old house with its ancient style of architecture possessed a quaint charm for him. "If it was only anywhere else on earth," he sighed.

"Huh! What 's the matter with its sitiwation?" grunted the mountaineer. "Ain't never heard nobody find fault with that afore. Hit 'd suit me mighty well—long as hit ain't none too fur from a still 'ouse, nor too nigh a chuch or jail."

Gilbert smiled at the other's eccentric idea of the essential requisites of a desirable location. "Why, I thought you were such a regular attendant at

Sunday-school," he said, with a quizzical look, "such an apt Biblical scholar, boasting a personal acquaintance with Lazarus and other lamented gentlemen of Scriptural memory, and here you couple a church and jail in the same category!"

'Well, I doan know much about chuches, 'ceptin' they 're agin drinkin' biled drinks, an dancin', an' fightin', an' other sorcial 'musements. But Sunday-schools air alright ef they have the proper trimmings; Christmus-trees an' sorcials in the winter time, an' basket picnics in the summer, with plenty of purty gals all the time. Them 's the fetchingest argyments ever I seed. All the ole preachers an' ugly wimmen ever chucked inside a chuch door jes ain't nowhar side of 'em for leadin' a feller in the way of righteousness. An' Miss Ruth sorter mixes in a little sorcial 'musement of a morril natur, like a keerful man salts his cattle—barely 'nuff to bring 'em back to the lick-log. I been 'tendin' that lick-log regular as the ole bell-cow. Ole man Abram Crenshaw's middle darter, Adelaide, is Miss Ruth's prize scholar, an' I tell you what, she 's 'nuff to take a feller away from a free fight at the still-house any Sunday. When she sings, 'Onward, Christian Soldier, marchin' as to war,' I feel like I could lick all them 'heathen bands' with both hands tied behind me, jes as fast as ole Satan could trot 'em out."

"Must possess very taking ways," said Gilbert, with an amused smile. "Is she handsome?"

"Handsome! That ain't the word; sounds sorter like callin' good whisky strong water when ye air ten miles from a still-'ouse, an' your bottle broke. She 's purty as a speckled fawn, an' got more takin' ways than a fawn has spots in July. She 's sixteen

"LET'S TAKE A DRINK."

hands high, sound, an' without a blemish. All she wants is a cob-web shiff and butterfly wings to make her a angel. She 's jes like a bumble-bee's nests, full of honey an' stings. 'Nuff ter drive a feller plumb crazy. Give yer a rale, red-hot fever one minute, an' then the ager the next. O! durn sich gals—why ain't they all like Suke Bosler, ugly as a skinned hoss?—an' then a feller would n't be everlastin' gittin' in trouble over 'em. Less take a drink!" in his mental perturbation forgetting that the bottle was empty.

The discovery of this unfortunate condition of affairs hastened his homeward steps, and the descent of the mountain side was concluded at a gait that put Gilbert to his best pace to follow. Striking the main road that wound through the little valley, and no longer requiring the services of his youthful guide, Gilbert dismissed him with a brace of pheasants, and some small change that convinced that worthy that he had found the road to sudden wealth.

Gilbert had pursued his journey homeward but a short distance, when a sudden turn in the winding road revealed the figure of another traveler but a few paces ahead of him. Although the back was turned to him, he recognized with some surprise that the other, like himself, was foreign to the mountains. He was attired in a suit of black broadcloth of clerical cut, covered with stains of travel. The figure, although that of a man advanced in life, was erect and vigorous, and the lack of spring in his step evidenced the weariness of travel rather than the weakness of age.

"Some psalm-singing parson," thought Gilbert, "going about with staff and script. Very worthy,

no doubt; but none the less a bore, as most oppressively good things unfortunately seem to be. Strange how uninteresting all good people are. Wonder how far he is going? 'Fraid I 'll have to overtake him at the gait he is hitting."

But the other, hearing foosteps behind him, suddenly turned, and the two men for a moment gazed at each other in mutual surprise. It was an impressive countenance that confronted Gilbert, with fine, strong features, whose prevailing expression was one of benignity. The glow of youthful health and vigor was upon it, contrasting strangely with the silvery, snow-white hair of age. He was the first to speak, and his most careless manner was the natural manner of courtly grace.

"Good evening. I am very glad to find I am to have the unexpected pleasure of company. Can you direct me to the home of the Colberts, which is, I believe, somewhere near?" he asked, as they walked along together.

"No," replied Gilbert. "I am sorry to say I can not. I, too, am a stranger here."

"Well, I can not agree that I am a stranger" said the other, smilingly disputing the implication in the young man's words, "although I am denied the pleasure of visiting my people here as often as I would wish." Gilbert smiled furtively, as if the idea of calling it a pleasure were exceedingly droll. "I notice, at least, that I am not so denominated by my covite parishioners, to whom all new-comers are uniformly 'stranger,' regardless of how often their names may be proclaimed. But I am called 'the Parson' by them," he concluded, as if Gilbert should be able to identify him by that designation.

"And I am called 'the exile' by my late chums in town," answered Gilbert, very seriously, but in the confidence that the reverend gentleman would perceive the humor of it, and understand that it was equally as definitive as the designation he had given himself.

"We are all exiles here below; but unfortunately there is but one poor parson for my poor mountain parishioners—my name is Quintard," was the ready reply.

"My name is Gilbert Garrett. We may be all exiles in the sense you mean, Doctor, but I never discovered myself in that rôle until I came here, and your parishioners have not discovered their exiled condition at all. And in their case at least ignorance is bliss. I must insist, I am the only conscious exile here. Your parishioners are as much at home here as they would be in exile anywhere else. I imagine a future state would not be alluring to them which did not contemplate the charms of their primeval life, their diverting feuds, their moonshining ways, their pleasant pastime of potting each other from ambush," and in his droll manner he satirized the mountaineers mercilessly, but, noting the look of pain upon the other's face, paused rather abruptly.

"True, too true," he sighed. "The Master's work languishes here. The harvest is great, but the laborers wanting, and the precious grain goes ungarnered. But," he exclaimed, brightening up again with the warm enthusiasm which was plainly characteristic of him, "they are not criminals; they are not perverted by preference like the criminal class of our great cities; they possess barbaric virtues, as well as barbaric vices. The blow follows quickly

upon the word of wrath, and revenge is perhaps the dominant passion of their hearts; but they are not thieves. They are simply victims of their environment. Their lives unlovely, into which no spring-time ever comes, and the summer is a feverish drouth, with the winter of old age cheerless and unillumined by the bright sun of Christian hope, that shines for us above the dark sea of death. They are exiles, my young friend, from everything that should be theirs by sacred right of inheritance in the great brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God."

There was an earnestness in his voice and manner, and a modulation of the tones, that betrayed the man of eloquence. He seemed to possess a peculiar magnetic power to impress others with his own convictions, and Gilbert gazed at him in amaze to think that he should find such a man in this isolated region, engaged in a fruitless labor, when he might have been a veritable Moses among men who could appreciate him. He felt out of patience with the mistaken zeal that led to the sacrifice of such splendid gifts.

"I have just left a cabin about a mile back," the old man went on. "You should visit it. It will make you better contented with your lot. Inside it I found the winter-time of the mountaineer's life—sickness, and want, and wretchedness. About the door was the spring-time—fair, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired mountain children. But I do not know which was the most pathetic sight—the winter within, or the blighted spring without. No toys such as charmed your infantile fancy have ever gladdened their little hearts, or awoke their dormant imagina-

tions. I tried to get them to make believe the bits of wood and bark were playthings, as I used to do myself when a child, but the impenetrable ignorance which shrouds them seems to have stifled their fancy," and the old man shook his head sorrowfully.

"I can not believe with you that ignorance is bliss. I would rather believe that they are simply unfortunate exiles for a time. I would rather hope that there is a home somewhere in the great beyond, where no little child will stand shivering in cold and hunger. And some day, through God's mercy, may you be there, and see the radiant face of one of these little ones, and know that through the Divine love, and your erring help, the child of ignorance was led from darkness into light."

He paused at a diverging path, and exclaimed, "I see a light yonder; it must be the house I seek;" and he extended his hand graciously in farewell greeting.

It seemed strangely incongruous to think of this noble old man of evident culture and refinement seeking the hospitality of an ignorant mountaineer's cabin, and Gilbert earnestly urged him to favor himself with his company for the night, but was gratefully declined.

"A pleasure awaits me yonder that I am not unselfish enough to forego. It is a great comfort to know that in this sterile waste there blooms one fair flower of purest Christian charity, of noblest womanhood. Another time I will gladly accept your hospitality—you are one of my parishioners now, you know."

"Are you related, or do you know Bishop Quin-

tard, Doctor?" asked Gilbert, suddenly struck with the similarity of the names.

"Sometimes I think I do, and sometimes I am afraid I do not," replied the old man, with a strange, far-away look in his clear eyes. And then, noting the look of surprise in his questioner's gaze, added, smiling, "Here they call me 'the Parson,' but in the 'settlements' they call me the 'Bishop.'"

Gilbert gazed in dumb amaze after his retreating figure sturdily striding along the path leading to the mountaineer's cabin—the figure of the famous prelate of whom he had so often heard. Then, turning, he pursued his own way homeward in an altered frame of mind. Keeping on down the creek that brawled over its rocky bed to the left of the road, he came to broad and fertile fields, all around which the mountains arose in rugged, brawny masses. At the base of the great mountain, overlooking the valley, stood an old house built in the colonial style. The great iron gate opening into the yard was rusted and hanging by one hinge, the stone-flagged walk was rough and uneven, and mosses grew in the interstices between the stones. Azaleas, hollyhocks, and other shrubbery rioted in profusion over the once well-kept lawn, and encroached upon the house; the whole place wore an aspect the most mournful in houses as in men—an air of departed greatness. But it was his home—the home of his ancestors, who, beneath their grass-grown mounds, sleep in the old stone-walled graveyard in a quiet corner of the orchard. Home! What a word was there! Richer than Golconda in reflections. For the first time he realized all the sweet significance it

holds for the heart of man. A mere chance meeting with an old man upon a mountain road had opened his eyes to what he had been so blind to before. But, he remembered, that old man had exercised this same strange power over all with whom he came in contact, from the humblest mountaineer in his squalid home to the great generals in battle, over five hundred of whom, including the commander-in-chief of the Confederate army, he had baptized in the faith while surrounded by all the distracting horrors of war.

As he gazed about him in the gloaming, the scene was etched upon his consciousness with a rigorous distinctness of detail that seemed to partake of the significance of a crisis in his life—the old house, the disordered grounds, and in the background the graveyard with its modest headstones outlined against the fading sky, and reminding him of the strength of chiaroscuro in Doré's drawings. He an exile! He had simply come home!

Through all the changing years, while time ran on in sun and shade, that old house had been the scene of all the acts that lie between the morn of laughter and the night of tears in the tragedy of life; had heard the cradle song drowning the drowsy prattle of a babe when, "with lips upon life's drifted font, blue-veined and fair," the heir of all the ages had come upon the stage to play its little part; had heard the old, old story told again when the one of all the world was wooed and won, and brought here a happy bride; had seen all those dear ones fall asleep, and upon their weary eyes death softly set its seal of rest. And now, as he stood in the gather-

ing shadows of the coming night, so prophetic of that longer space of null and dark futurity, it was his fondest hope that when his time came to journey on toward that horizon where the dusk is waiting for the dark, beyond the gates of the golden west, he might fall asleep, while the last embers changed from red to gray by the holy hearthstone of home.

Chapter II.

Where Time Sleeps.

GILBERT GARRETT was following his hounds across country one bright winter morning about a month after his coming to Blue Lick Cove. If there was one occupation for which he was pre-eminently fitted this was it, as many of the members of the Hillside Hunt will testify. His hard-riding cronies of that swell country club, now that he is in exile, admit over their after-dinner cups that his place as leader of the most reckless set has not been and is not likely to be filled. He had found that this was the one diversion of his old past that he could enjoy in a modified measure in his new sphere, and had procured a small but workmanlike pack of hounds to which he himself filled the various offices of Master, Huntsman, Whipper-in, Kennelman, and Stud-groom. There were foxes in abundance in Blue Lick, and an occasional deer to lend diversity.

This morning he had struck a stiff-necked old red fox, who had led him a merry chase up one side the valley, and down the other. Although there was little fencing, the going had been of the roughest character, and his hounds had gained a long lead upon him. Bursting from the brush he saw a field before him with a low stone wall on the far side, over which the hounds were just flicking their tails at him. Determined to take advantage of the open field to gain upon them, he gave his horse the spur.

Across it he sped oblivious to all, save that his gallant mount had responded gamely to the call, and was gaining upon the flying pack before him, which was closing upon the fast-tiring fox. Swept on by the fierce music of the hounds, thrilling through with the frenzy of the chase, he was oblivious to all else, oblivious to the fact he should have noticed, that the hounds disappearing completely for a moment after popping over the wall denoted that it ran along the edge of a ravine; oblivious to the young woman who stood in the narrow lane beyond, and seeing his peril called to him in warning. With her simple but bright-hued dress, which contrasted well with the sober foliage of the winter woods in the background, she presented a picturesque figure. If there was one weakness among his many that was essentially characteristic of this erratic youth, it was a weakness for pretty women; and that he should have been oblivious to the presence of such a pretty one attests the all-absorbing nature of the sport of hunting. He had eyes and ears only for the vanishing hounds. Too late he saw the ravine, as his horse cleared the wall, and, hunching his shoulders for the fall, he threw himself clear as he saw the animal was bound to come down into it.

He was considerably jarred up by the fall, and before he could recover himself and spring to his feet, his horse had scrambled up out of the gully, and made off as hard as ever it could. Chagrined and exasperated, he stood looking after the fleeing animal that is popularly supposed to be loved by the Kentuckian with a love passing the love of women. But the language he used could hardly have been justified by even the most flagrant violation of that

outraged sentiment. Softly but feelingly he stood cursing the aggravating perverseness of his horse until it disappeared into the woods in the wake of the pack. Then turning and looking about him, for the first time he became aware of the presence of the young woman. His sudden confusion and penitence after his late fury seemed to amuse her, and involuntarily she smiled at his profuse apologies; but her face instantly assumed a sincere and sympathetic expression as he endeavored to raise his hand to his hat, but let it fall helplessly, while his face blanched and twitched with pain.

"You have injured yourself," she exclaimed. "I was frightened when I saw you fall, and really felt relieved when you sprang up, and—and abused your horse so heartily; but I am afraid you have hurt yourself, after all. Can I help you?"

"It 's nothing," answered Gilbert. "Only broken the collar-bone, I believe. It might help matters to tie up this arm,—seems to pull it apart by hanging down. Here 's my handkerchief—if you will be so kind. That 's it—the very thing. Grateful and comforting; should be in every household," and he smiled at his own joke; but noting no response in the eyes that seemed interested solely in their owner's task, he said, when her deft fingers had completed the operation: "A trained nurse could not have done it better, and I thank you kindly. You have surely had some experience in such matters."

"Not a great deal; but I have always had the knack of it, and at one time thought of studying to be a trained nurse."

"Why did n't you?" he asked, with no excuse for the question save curiosity about the girl, who

was of a type foreign to the mountains. In the face which looked up to his there was something that he thought he had never seen in a woman's face before, and that challenged his reverence rather than his admiration—a nameless something which we are accustomed to entrench behind that word of no meaning, that vast latitude of sound, expression. It was not alone the deep blue of her eyes, the delicate mold of her features, the soft wave of her auburn hair, so different to his conception of the mountain women that enchained his attention; but that nameless something which beatified all her features, and seemed to look out most plainly through those windows of the soul, the eyes—something infinitely beautiful, intangible, indescribable.

"Well, you know marriage alters one's plans materially," she laughed. "Now, if you will come up to the house—I live right up there—I will get some bandages, and fix it more comfortably for you."

He was surprised at the answer, for he had not thought of this fresh girlish young woman as being married. He knew in a moment that there was but one person in the Cove who possessed the education betrayed by her language at such variance with the idiomatic mountaineers, the wife of Joe Bob Colbert, whose madonna-like face as a child, years before, had attracted the attention of Bishop Quintard, who after much difficulty had induced her parents to let him take her to be educated by the sisters at the mission of St. Mary's-on-the-Mount. Gilbert was annoyed, as well as surprised, at the discovery. He was surprised, because he had formed quite a different conception of the philanthropic woman of whom he had heard as a ministering angel to the

afflicted, and a self-constituted missionary among the mountaineers,—a conception which would not have been at all flattering to the handsome and youthful woman before him. He had not been prepared by his previous experience of women "with a mission in life." He was annoyed, he did not know why.

"I am very glad to meet you," she said, sincerely, upon making himself known, "as I want to thank you for myself and the children for that wonderful box you sent to the Christmas-tree. If you could have seen their amaze and delight, you would have felt well repaid. It would have been a poor affair but for your noble generosity, and I shall always feel deeply indebted for your kind and unexpected assistance. I had unwittingly excited their expectations to a high pitch—like foolish children, they seem to think nothing impossible to me—and I was in despair, feeling that they were doomed to disappointment. But, thanks to you, it was the most eventful Christmas in their lives. I would never have given a man credit for such thoughtfulness and taste. You must surely have a great love for children."

"No," protested Gilbert, smiling. "I 'm afraid I have n't. That is, I have n't discovered it if I have. Now, I know I love dogs like a girl loves candy—with a consuming, all-devouring passion. Would n't have come that nasty cropper over the wall but for running after them. But I have never discovered myself falling over anything in pursuit of a pack of children. I have somehow had little opportunity of experimenting with the tender passion you refer to. The young ladies whom I visited kept their little

brothers in the background. They were very popular young ladies; but I do n't say that was the cause."

Gilbert did not think it necessary to add that when he went to town to get some things he had found he needed in his new sphere, the bishop's words went with him; the pathetic picture painted by the noble old man with a few master strokes, of the blighted spring-time, the poor pale mountain children, whose dormant fancy failed to find food for the awakening imagination in the bits of bark and wood used for playthings.

She laughed at his quaint humor, which was all the more droll for his apparent seriousness. But she would not consent to his making light of the gift, and insisted that his choice of the things betrayed his interest and affection.

"Now, you are making fun of me—of course, you know I never selected those things. I don't mind confessing," he said, wth an engaging air of making a special exemption of herself from his usual, unconfiding indifference, "that, however vague my sentiments may be as to youth in the abstract, when you differentiate it as to sex—boys and girls—I can answer for the latter. I have always had a fondness for the girls—pretty girls, of course—and it was a very pretty girl who presided over the toy department of the store I happened into. The thanks are due her. I suppose I would have been there yet if an impatient customer had n't come along. Prejudiced and evil-minded observers might have accused me of flirting with her, but I am gratified to think it was merely the influence of that commendable sentiment you have discovered in me."

"I see you are determined not to accept my grati-

tude," she laughed, as she opened the gate, and led the way up the trim walk to her humble home, which they had reached.

The home of Joe Bob Colbert was, in its way, picturesque. America has many varied and distinct types of architecture, all her own, unique and peculiar, and this was one of them, instinct with the spirit of the landscape about it. Our people build with unconscious truth to the nature around them, which, although instinctive, is the highest art. In the far southwest the ranchman who makes his home in the midst of a monotonous trance of sky and plain that is utterly devoid of detail, scrapes up the mud around him, and piles it up in blank-walled adobes. He builds long and low as befits a fortress perpetually beleaguered by sun and wind, and does not cut up his wall space with windows. It is blank and bare of detail; but the result is the simplicity of architecture, conveying the idea of concentrated living, a squalid suggestion of the scene, and as characteristic of the landscape as the Mexican sitting in its shade, wrapped in his dingy serape, silent and indifferent to all about him.

The mountaineer, too, builds from the materials at hand, in the great hardwood forests, and the result is equally characteristic; two pens made of logs laid one upon the other, and between the two a wide, open entry, with a high-peaked roof over the whole, and wide, projecting eaves. How incongruous would such a structure seem upon the treeless plains; how fitting here! With the stumps still standing all about it, from which were felled the forest monarchs to make this home, surely upon the spring-time zephyrs comes some vague, dim sense of swelling

buds, and singing birds blindly thrilling through its frame; else how account for those strange sounds and mysterious movements of the great logs to the detriment of the dead, merely material "chinkin" between them!

Amid the mighty mountain ranges rising all around it, with their never-dying grandeur imposing upon the mind a sense of immutability, the home of Joe Bob Colbert, despite the great timbers of which it was constructed, seemed as transitory and trivial as the tents of the Nomadic tribe of Reuben in the land of Gilead. It was a fitting home for that human life which, beside the eternal mountains, seemed to come and go with the fluctuating ineffectiveness of the silent mists vagrant in the valleys. Perhaps, too, in this may be found the psychological explanation of that peculiar phase of the mountaineer's character which holds human life so cheap, exacting it at the slightest provocation, and handing down deadly feuds from generation to generation.

The room into which Gilbert was ushered betrayed in the neat and tasteful arrangement of its details, simple as they were, the hand of its mistress, while its furnishings, although primitive enough, displayed the same refinement of taste, and proclaimed furthermore that its owner was a man of means from the mountaineer's standpoint. He came in just as his wife had, with her woman's natural instinct, deftly bandaged Gilbert's injury, fixing it as well as any surgeon could have done. He looked surprised at seeing the young man sitting there with his arm triced up in a sling, and shamefacedly set down the gun he carried in a corner.

Joe Bob Colbert was a splendid type of the Ken-

tucky mountaineer, tall and lithe, but muscular, fair-haired, and gray-eyed, with a strong and determined cast of features. No wilder, more adventurous, or daring youth had ever been known in Blue Lick Cove. He had been a terror to the staid and respectable residents with his wild pranks, and his simple presence at a dance or other merry-making was assurance sufficient that there would be trouble before it was over. He was well-known in all the adjacent coves as a wild, young blade, and whenever a rising aspirant for the reputation of being a "bad man" thirsted for more worlds to conquer, after outgrowing his natal nest, his first flight was plumed for Blue Lick Cove, under the instigation of the peaceably disposed, who possessed a sublime confidence in Joe Bob Colbert's ability to effect a change in the spirit of his dream. But his recent marriage had effected a wonderful change in Joe Bob Colbert. He had settled down, and a more staid, respectable citizen was not to be found on Blue Lick.

"I 'lowed suthin' had happened ye," he said, upon being informed of the accident. "I heered the houns, and was waitin' on the runway to git a shot at whatever 't was they was arter; but they crossed up above me, an' next thing I seen your hoss lopin' arter 'em 'th out ye, an' I 'lowed ye had got a spill."

He did not think it necessary to inform Gilbert that he would have been more apt to take a shot at the hounds than their quarry. The still hunter looks upon the hound as his natural enemy, driving as it does the deer out of the country. But seeing the master of the pack sitting there under his roof, the claims of hospitality gave his recent designs upon

the dogs quite another aspect. A few moments before he was fired with righteous wrath against the presumptuous new-comer, who had violated this unwritten law of the mountains; but now the stranger beneath his roof stood exonerated.

"To shoot a fox ahead of the hounds is a penitentiary offense where I came from," said Gilbert, sententiously, as well pleased with the information as if he had known the whole truth, and the danger which had menaced his dogs.

The other looked at him in surprise, and then conceiving it to be a witticism whose point was obscure to him, smiled good-naturedly, and said inquiringly, "Yes?"

"Fact! It 's only a misdemeanor to kill a fox at any other time; but to shoot one ahead of hounds is a felony."

"Waal, I 'll be dinged!" ejaculated the mountaineer, convinced by Gilbert's open-hearted air of sincerity. "Powerful cur'ous notions they got in the settlemints. I ain't got no right to misdoubt yo' word 'bout that when they do the same to er man for makin' a little liquor, jest as if he ain't got as much right to drink his corn or his apples, as to eat 'em. But for Gawd's sake, stranger, what do they use foxes in your kentry for that they air so powerful precious?"

"For sport. To run them with the hounds."

"An' fall off 'n your hoss, an' bust a collar-bone! It do beat anything what quare notions some folks has. I 'lowed to Bill Elder yistiday that ye was runnin' foxes a puppus, 'cause I seen ye was n't tryin' to stop yo dogs when ye had a chanct; but Bill 'lowed ye did n't know they was arter a fox.

I reckon now ye would jest as lief run a fox as a deer?"

"Rather, much rather. Fact is, I would n't let them run a deer if I could help it—liable to run into the next county, and lose my dogs. I lost two of the best in the pack last week after a deer."

"You are right 'bout that, stranger," exclaimed the mountaineer, enthusiastically. "The boys has been layin' for them dogs of yourn 'cause they did n't want 'em runnin' what few deer was left in here out of the kentry. But if them 's your idees, I 'll make 'em leave you uns dogs alone."

Taken completely by surprise at this frank avowal, Gilbert snorted, "Waylay my dogs, eh! Well, that 's about the coolest piece of effrontery I ever heard of. I guess I will run my own dogs on my own land after anything I have a mind to, and I would like to see any one keep me from it!"

The other shook his head regretfully, and said confidingly, "I believe ye said it were a penitentiary offense to shoot a fox in your kentry. Well hit's wus—hit's capital punishment for to houn' deer in the mountings. And, stranger, YE AIR IN THE MOUNTINGS."

The sardonic humor of it suddenly struck Gilbert, and he laughed heartily, good-naturedly. "And I believe your laws are as immutable as the Medes and Persians, as unchanged and unchangeable as you are yourselves. Well, I am one of you now, and I suppose the best proof of my naturalization is to uphold the laws of the land; so, if you will quit calling me "Stranger," and let my dogs alone, I will see that they do n't run the deer. I do n't want to lose my dogs, or stop a stray bullet myself."

"Old Father Time seems to have folded his wings and gone to sleep here," mused Gilbert, as he basked in the genial warmth of the great wood fire, and gazed with dreamy, half-closed eyes about him at the primitive interior, the spinning-wheel and pair of winding-blades in the corner, the physical type of Anglo-Saxon manhood before him, and then back into the bed of coals before the back-log, which might have been a yule-log in some old English castle, from its size. The mountaineer's words had taken him back to the days of the old Forest laws, the days of the picturesque, when the life of a man was of less account than the life of a deer, when no dog could enter the forest that was not small enough to pass through King William Rufus' stirrup. Simple, sylvan days, when the red deer strayed along all the dells of Merrie England, the outlaw bent his bow beneath the beech tree's dappled shade, and the king and courtiers rode their careless chase. They had called up to his romantic fancy the shade of Gurth, the swineherd, scarce elevated above his grunting charge; the bells of folly jingled in the breeze, and "motley's the only wear." They had invoked the Past—steel-clad and barbed with iron, floating with plumes and knightly bannerettes, streaming with gay baldrics, and flashing with helmet crests—the past of chivalry and romance. In the coals, aflame with that color that never was on sea or land, he saw the Gothic castle with its bristling barbacans and mighty arches; the bold baron and the rude retainer, the pride of nobles and the pain of serfs, the glory and the grief of feudal life. How far away Romance had seemed to his prosaic, unpicturesque life about town but a few days before, and here he

was in the very midst of it. What had wrought this wondrous transformation—what magic power had suddenly revealed this new world to him? The words of the mountaineer surely. A fair form, and fairer face, a glance of those strangely beatified and beautiful orbs had naught to do with it. Words, mere words, had been the sesame. Since Ali Baba's time surely greater witchery had never been unwittingly wrought with verbal incantation.

He was roused from this pleasing reverie by a hail from the outside that he recognized. Zeb, the old family servant, who was really the master of the farm, having had exclusive management of it for years, had been alarmed by the return of the riderless horse, and taken its back track. Gilbert arose to go, but his host hospitably urged him to stay until his injury, which simply required quiet, had healed; but he laughingly made light of it, saying that it was already healed by the magic laying on of hands. But he could not decline the invitation to stay to dinner, after seeing, as he did, everything connected with her, the busy preparations she had been making for the guest, fairly scorching her cheeks in her anxiety to prepare a pleasing repast. But after it was over there was no further excuse to remain, or to keep Zeb waiting longer, and he somewhat regretfully took his departure. She followed him to the porch, arranging his coat and bandages so that he would not take cold, and bidding him good-bye, again thanked him for his gift to her little proteges. He paused on the step, and, looking up into her sweet, pure face, said with more sincerity in his expression and words than had often found place in either:

"You have only yourself to thank. It is I who am under obligations to you, not only for your tender ministrations to-day, but for the lesson you have taught me by your noble and unselfish example. I have fancied myself quite a philosopher—of the epicurean school. It was the only school of philosophy whose precepts I had ever seen practiced, and philosophy is nothing if not reducing precept to practice. But I had to come to the mountains to find a greater philosopher of a nobler school, and I hope to enroll myself as a disciple of one that can produce so fresh, so sweet, so strong, a nature."

And he was gone, leaving her standing there in wonder at the strange speech of this very strange young "stranger" in Blue Lick Cove.

Chapter III.

The Office Seeks the Man.

FOR some time Gilbert jogged in silence along the rough road that followed the banks of the creek, the mountain side sloping steeply up on one side, the stream brawling over its troubled course on the other. In equal silence Zeb jogged at his heels upon his mule. Gilbert suddenly became aware that the old darkey's dogged silence, in such contrast to his usual volubility, portended his displeasure about something, and said:

"What 's the matter, old man? Cheer up! You ride along here like you were going to your own funeral. You have 'nt told me how the chase ended."

"No, sah! I was jest a studyin' 'bout how times is changed. Dat 's de fust time ebber I knowed a Gilbert to 'sociate wid dese poah white trash. Yo' grandpap nebber wor hongry 'nough to break dere bread—nor yet Marse Abner!" he exclaimed, shaking his head ruefully over the degeneracy of their descendant. Always respectful toward the mountaineers, the old darkey, true to Negro characteristics, held himself aloof, looking down upon them as "pore white trash," infinitely below the noble family he served in the social scale. To see his young master, to whom he had become attached with the dog-like affection of the old-time negro, so recreant to the traditions of his ancestors, so void of family

pride, was a great shock to Zeb. He himself had respectfully declined the mountaineer's hospitable invitation to have his dinner after his master was through, but had stood obsequiously holding his horse at the gate, treasuring up his resentment until he was like to burst. However treasonable it might be, he was compelled to unburden his mind. But he was completely unprepared by even the unparalleled conduct of his young master for what followed.

Fulminating upon him a glance and an objurgation that was truly Gilbertian, worthy of his hot-tempered old grandsire, the young man berated him soundly for his disrespect to his betters. For even an irresponsible negro to idly speak of her so, to not recognize the nobility of her nature, excited his uncontrollable wrath: "Why, you poor old fool, do n't you know 'quality' when you see it? You are not fit to wipe her feet upon,—any more than I am myself," he concluded, bitterly.

The old negro, astounded at this outburst, held up both hands deprecatingly, as if to ward off his young master's wrath, and exclaimed:

"Dar now,—how you do teck on,—jes lack Marse Abner,—de ole nigger cahn't open he mouf widout gettin' into trouble. Ob course I knows Miss Ruth ain't nothin' but quality all ober, but she demean herself mightily by marryin' dat Joe Bob Colbert," here the old negro lowered his voice, and looked cautiously around. "Not dat Misser Joe Bob ain't a heap better man dan he useter wus, but he 's got er heap o' enmies, an' fust thing you know you gwine git mixed up in one o' dese yere feuds. Heaps o' good cotton stalks gits chopped up fum 'sociatin wid de weeds. Better teck de ole nigger's

'vice, an' keep away from dem lak all yo' folks done afore youse."

Gilbert smiled as he remembered a letter that he had found among a lot of old papers in the escretoire of his uncle, Abner Gilbert, who, upon a visit he had paid to the outer world and civilization, had been commissioned by old Jim Strong, a famous leader in one of the historical feuds, to purchase a gun for him. It was a long time ago, before the days of repeaters, and the weapon Abner Gilbert had brought back was the first double-barrel gun in the mountains. Divested of its uncouth spelling and phraseology, the letter ran about as follows:

"Dear Squire.—The two-shooter came all right and this is the first chance I have had to send you word and thank you for it. It is bully. I tried it the day it came on Bill Tom Little. I seen him layin' behind the fence as I went to mill, and I fired one barrel just to fool him. He riz right straight up, thinking he had me. He won't rise up no more till jedgment-day. At first the boys 'lowed I wus toting two guns; but Jim Sizemore got away with more shot than ever I seed one man pack, and told 'em 'bout it afore he died. It beats all how plagued tough some fellows is. I can't fool 'em no more; but that gun is better 'n ary two of their 'n any day. There 's goin' to be a camp-meetin' next week, and the Littles allow to be there. I know a lovely place in Pigeon-roost hollow to lay for 'em. If you 'll come over I 'll let you shoot the two-shooter.

"Your humble servant, Jim Strong."

Gilbert had wondered at the time if his uncle had accepted this generous and hospitable invitation,

but gathered from Zeb's strictures that he must have put the tempting offer from him.

"I do n't know that the prospect of getting into a feud is one of unmixed evil. A nice, hot, able-bodied feud might liven things up a little,—it 's deuced slow here."

Gilbert's heart was strong with youth, and health, and the mountain air. He could afford to jest. But the old negro replied appealingly: "Don't do hit! For Gawd's sake do n't hab nothin' to do wid dese—dese covites," he hastily corrected himself, not caring to again incur his master's wrath by using the prohibited designation. "Dey doan come out far and squar lack gemmen. Dey doan fight dooels lack yo ole grandpap did wid dat gemmen back in ole Faginia 'bout yo grandmamy. Dey bushwhacks one anudder lack Injuns. Dey nebber was a Gilbert gifted fo' dem onhuman feuds."

"That certainly is an objection," admitted Gilbert, regretfully, as if he seriously contemplated embarking in one of these innocent diversions of the mountains.

"Den fo' Hebben's sake doan hab nothin' to do wid dese people. 'De man dat pets a libe cat-fish ain' crowded wid brains,' as de sayin' is. Ef Miss Ruth is quality, which in course she is, dat's de moh reason why you should leab 'em alone."

Gilbert suddenly turned upon his dusky Mentor a darkened brow, but the next minute his face relaxed in a smile, and he laughed: "Well, now, I wonder what you are driving at—I wonder if my reputation has preceded me; if you, too, think a good woman is not safe with me!"

But the old darkey, having unburdened his mind,

and perhaps not exactly understanding Gilbert's question, as he only meant that his young master's sympathies would more easily lead him to take up the gage for one with whom he was connected by ties of station and friendship, changed a subject that was disagreeable to him by saying: "Dem houns cotch dat ole fox in de clover-field. I wus gwine arter some firewood, an' met 'em in de woods jes de udder side o' hit, an 'turned de fox. He tried to cross de field, but dey cotch sight on him, an' walked right up on him den. Yo' hoss was follerin' arter 'em, an' I 'lowed he 'd got away from 'yo somehow er nuther, so I jes cotch him, an' took ma mule out er de waggin' an' come on up here. Dey 's a couple ben awaitin' fo' you ebber sence arily dis mawnin'," he added, as an afterthought of minor importance.

"A couple of what?"

"Ob dese poah—dese Covites."

"What do they want of me?"

"To mahry 'em, ob course. You 'se de squiah now, you know. Dey ain' been no squiah in de Cove sence Marse Abner died, an' dey been habbin' to go way ober on Yaller Crick to Squiah Tatum to git spliced."

Gilbert laughed at the old darkey's primitive idea of official dignity, which he seemed to believe descended like the land to its heir—an idea which the mountaineers shared, and which he soon learned it would be futile for him to combat.

"Wus n't Marse Abner de squiah untwell he died?" asked Zeb, when Gilbert had denied the soft impeachment.

"I believe he was."

"An' wusn't ole marster de squiah afore him?" persisted his dusky interlocutor.

"I judge so from the records," assented Gilbert.

"In course he were. Dey ain't nobody been no squiah but a Gilbert. I notices dey ain nobody set up fer squiah arter Marse Abner died. Dey jes hab to wait untwell yo' come into yo' propity. Dat pesterin' Lishe Travers dat brung dat suit agin' old man Hat Harner 'bout some hawgs jes afore Marse Abner died wus up heah de odder day, an' wanter know when you gwine to heah he case. I tole him to go long—you too busy huntin' now. I 'lowed to call it to yo' 'tention soon's yo' did n't hab nothin' else to do. Ef you ain de squiah, I 'd lack to know who is. Whar dey gwine to git one? Whar dey gwine to find any one else to spound de law, or read dem dockments locked up in dat desk?" the old Negro concluded, with convincing logic.

Abandoning the attempt to convince him otherwise, Gilbert, upon reaching home, directed him to usher in the candidates for matrimony, who were awaiting his return in the kitchen. But having disposed of the horses, old Zeb first came into the room, and ostentatiously placed the old Bible upon the center-table, with pen, ink, and paper, and the other books he was accustomed to see his former master use in his magisterial functions.

A few minutes later he returned with the culprits—had they come to be convicted of some high crime, they could not have shambled more shamefacedly into his presence. Jim Renfro was a tall youth of an ungainly, lathy figure, with sandy hair shading a weather-beaten visage lit up by bright hazel eyes. He was chewing tobacco nervously, and

the juice simmered down the deeply-indented furrows of his chin. Sarah Crenshaw, his prospective bride, was a buxom but bashful mountain lass, attired in a strange mixture of smart-colored, but ill-fitting clothes.

To put them at their ease, Gilbert greeted them cheerfully, and bade Zeb to "get the lady and gentleman chairs," which they seemed at a loss what to do with when procured. "I understand you have come to be married. I am very sorry, but I can not accommodate you; I am not a squire."

The mountaineer looked accusingly at Zeb. "He told us you was it," he said, regretfully. "Whar is ther squiar?"

"The fact is," replied Gilbert, while Zeb stood looking up at the ceiling in mute but eloquent resignation, "there is no squire since my uncle, Abner Gilbert, died. Another will have to be appointed by the Governor, or an election held to fill the vacancy. I am very sorry I can not gratify the wish of your hearts."

Disappointment was plainly depicted upon both faces, as they looked from one to another. "I reckon pap 's done sent him word," said the girl to her fiancee, softly in despair.

Surprised out of his restraint by the suggestion, the youth said eagerly: "Squiah, ye hadn't oughter listen to nothin' old man Abram Crenshaw sez. We 're both on us of age, an' got a right to marry ef we 're a mind to. An' I 'll be durned ef the ole cuss is goin' to keep us from hit any longer!"

The girl evinced no concern at the disrespect shown her parent, but abetted the words with an appealing look at Gilbert.

"You 're entirely mistaken. If I had the power nothing would give me greater pleasure," truthfully answered the young man, who had never found it in his heart to refuse any request. "It is just as I tell you. I am not a magistrate, and any ceremony I would perform would not make the marriage valid. You will have to go to Squire Tatum. I am very sorry you have been kept waiting here so long, but you can take two of my horses, which I will be very glad to lend you, to make up for the time lost by this unfortunate mistake."

"That would n't do no good," exclaimed the youth in despair, convinced of Gilbert's good-will by the proffer. "We 'd have to go right by the old man's house, an' I guess he 's missed Sarey by this time, an' more 'n likely is on the road here."

"Could n't you elude him in some way?"

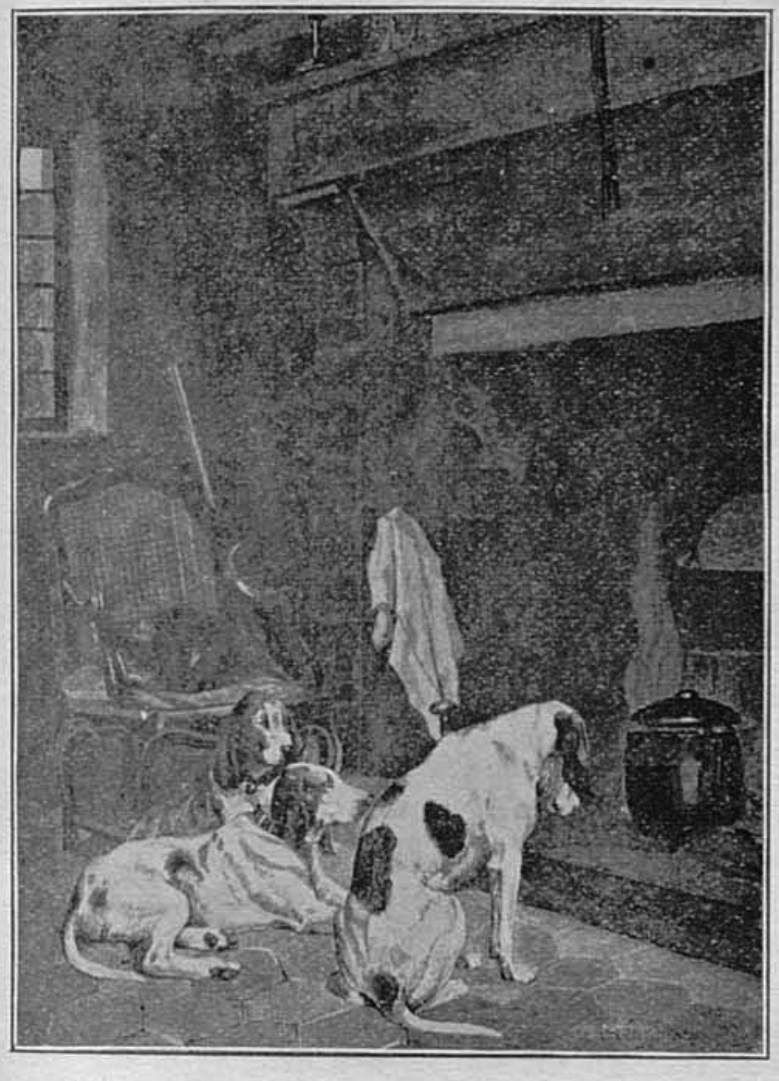
"O, I would n't mind him, but somebody 's goin' to git hurt whenever me an' the old man comes together, an' Sarey here is mightily sot agin' hit," he explained, with palpable inability to comprehend, although yielding to the lady's unaccountable predilections in the matter.

And then together they besought Gilbert to tie the knot, evincing a confidence in its validity that he was unable to shake. All the world loves a lover, and Gilbert was no exception to the universal rule. It was apparent to him that the simple performance of a mock ceremony would not only change misery into happiness for two people, but might prevent bloodshed, and his scruples overcome by this consideration, and their pathetic confidence in him, he finally said resignedly:

"All right, if you are willing to furnish the victims, I suppose I will have to provide the other ingredients. I believe it will be good as a common-law marriage, and, besides, I can marry you over again as soon as I can get the appointment in legal form for the purpose. But what you want to commit matrimony for," he exclaimed, looking quizzically at the lank, long-legged, woe-begone youth, "is more than I can understand—unless," he concluded, with sudden inspiration, "you have discovered that you have more poverty than one person is entitled to, and wish to endow this deserving young woman with a part. If I could stand flat-footed, and confront the future with the equanimity of you mountaineers, I'd flatter myself that I had fathomed the profoundest depths of philosophy."

He performed the mock ceremony to their entire and inexpressible satisfaction, not omitting to kiss the bride, and repeating the time-honored words with the solmenity of a judge pronouncing sentence, concluding with, "And may God have mercy on your simple souls!" Then he drew up a marriage contract according to the common law form he found in an old book of legal forms left by his predecessor, and made them make their marks, Zeb making his as attesting witness, and gave each of them a copy.

There was really something pathetic about the whole affair. The simple trust and confidence of these poor fellow-creatures, entering upon this most momentous era of their lives with perfect faith in his mysterious ability to make them one, would have affected him had he not preferred to be blind to the pathos of it.



"HIS THREE FAVORITE HOUNDS."

"I am in for it now," he ruminated when they were gone, drawing his chair up into the only corner of the great open fireplace that was left vacant by his three favorite hounds, who basked in the genial blaze upon the hearth. "I expect this is the only case on record of the office seeking the man. Well, I 'll have to write to Frankfort, and get that appointment now, as it appears no one else will have it. Wonder what my old chums would say if they knew I had been called to sit upon the woolsack. One never knows where a step in life is going to land them—here I am at one stride in Shakespeare's fifth age, having skipped from the lover, sighing like furnace, to the justice,

> 'In fair round belly, with good capon lined,
> With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws and modern instances.'

I 'll have to play the part, cultivate a beard, and get full—of wise saws, of course—grow familiar with the empty docket, the shy assault and battery, the petit larceny, the elusive homicide, the plain drunk, the evanescent malice-prepense, the skittish manslaughter,—I 'm afraid my conversation will soon become so interlarded with legal terms, that I will require an interpreter when I want to talk with ordinary mortals. But seriously it is a great responsibility to be thus raised up by the people to lead them through the doubts and dangers of the coming years. I feel quite overwhelmed with it. It is almost equal to the actual contemplation of work. I 'm very much afraid I have gotten myself into it by marrying those young idiots—that is a bad be-

ginning for a conservator of the peace, I must say. But, then, I can try them for any breach of the peace they commit—that is some consolation. Let the evil-doer beware! The next unfortunate that gives way to his thirst for the native-grown wines that ripen by moonlight in these mountains, and starts out as a painter and decorator of this quiet Cove, will find that a Daniel has come to judgment when Gilbert Garrett, J. P., extends the strong arm of the law, and issues the ukase."

In the select social club to which he belonged in the city his keen wit had won him high regard from those who dreaded its sting. In his exile, having no one else to exercise it upon, he did not spare himself. It was productive of one good result. It led to a habit of introspection, and he learned to know himself as he would never have done amid the distracting whirl in which his city life had been passed.

Chapter IV.

Blessed are the Peacemakers.

AN hour after the lately united pair of turtle-doves had flown, Zeb knocked upon the door, and poking his head into the room, said, "Dar 's a severe man outside wanter know ef he kin see de squiah," with the accent upon the last two words. This time he was not going to take any chances of contradiction, but wanted to be sure of just where his erratic young master was upon the important question, whether "to be or not to be" the squire.

"Tell him to come in," answered Gilbert, promptly and decisively.

There was a heavy-booted tread in the nall, a moment's parley between Zeb and the visitor at the door, and then a thud as if a gun were being set down and left there. The next moment the "severe" man defiantly swaggered into the room, his hands thrust into the pockets of his tattered trousers, which were stuck into the drooping tops of heavy mud-stained boots. He wore no coat, as if he had suddenly departed from home without thinking of that garment. The heat he was plainly in possibly prevented his noticing its absence. A big pistol was strapped ostentatiously in front of him, and his slouch hat was defiantly pulled down upon his head. From beneath its broad brim he scowled at the dogs which started bristlingly up, as if in instinctive resentment of the new-comer's air of exasperating

THE "SEVERE" MAN.

defiance, and who lay down again growling at Gilbert's chiding them.

"Be ye the squiar?" he asked, in a tone worthy of the hounds.

"I believe I am so considered," responded the young man, and Zeb in the background assumed an expression of relief.

"Do ye marry folks here?" was the next question.

"To a limited extent," and then perceiving the humor of the reply was lost upon his saturnine visitor, Gilbert added, "the law won't permit me to marry you to more than one woman at a time."

"I ain't wantin' to marry no women," was the scornful rejoinder. "What I wants to know is, hev ye married any one here to-day?"

Gilbert knitted his eyebrows as if in fruitless effort to remember. "Let me see!" he exclaimed, tilting his chair back and studying the ceiling as if it were a panorama of the passing events of the day, while the other fidgetted nervously, consumed with impatience. "I believe I did," he finally said. "I rarely burden my mind with such immaterial matters, but it seems to me I have an indistinct recollection of marrying a good-looking young woman to a tall, sandy-haired young fellow—was it to-day, Zeb, or last week?"

The tortured mountaineer shifted his eyes furtively to the face of the old darkey, and narrowly escaped detecting the smile of amusement that had been provoked by his young master's adroit punishment of the mountaineer's ill manners.

"Yas sah, hit were to-day, sah! De young lady was Miss Crenshaw, an' de young gemmen—"

"Durn his sneakin' soul! I knowed he 'd done

hit when I met him an' her acomin' along the road—he never took to the bushes nor nothin'. Just stood there aholdin' of her hand an' grinnin' like a 'possum. I knowed he 'd got ahead of me, but I thought I 'd come on up an' see for sure. I reckon I 'm too late, eh?"

"I reckon," was the cheerful response.

The mountaineer gritted his teeth with impotent rage. "Durn him," he said, "Ain't nothin' I can do now, eh?"

"Yes, you can take off your hat when you come into a gentleman's house. Zeb, hang up the gentleman's hat until he is ready to go."

The old darkey took a step toward him, and the mountaineer clapped his hand on his hat as if he expected to be forcibly deprived of that ancient heirloom. But Zeb stood politely holding out his hand, and scowling from beneath his bushy eyebrows at Gilbert, the mountaineer read no relenting there, and yielding in spite of himself to the authority of the young squire, resigned his hat to the hand of the old Negro.

"Handle it carefully, Zeb, it is a relic of the pliocene age," said Gilbert, without a trace of triumph or humor in his voice. "Now evict that cat from that chair, and give it to the gentleman. What is your name, and to what am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit?" he inquired when the mountaineer had deposited his powerful frame upon the edge of the chair, and leaning forward with his hands upon his knees, sat staring in the fire.

"Crenshaw—Abram Crenshaw," he replied, spitting a stream of tobacco-juice into the fire, and ignoring the latter part of the question.

"Well, Mr. Crenshaw, I gather the impression that you are not altogether pleased with your new son-in-law. What objection, may I ask, have you got to him?"

"Him! He 's a durned skunk!" was the brief but comprehensive answer.

"I do n't dispute your word, but at the same time I am constrained to say my olfractory powers failed to discover it in my brief acquaintance with him," replied Gilbert, smiling, but feeling in some sort bound to defend the absent one thus aspersed.

"What has he done to incur your enmity?"

"Him! He 's jis natchelly an ornery, sneakin' reptile, that 's what he is. He belongs to them low-down Renfro's of Paradise Cove. Why, it were his cousin, Buck Renfro, that shot Steve Crenshaw last Chrismus was a year."

"O! it was, was it? Then I suppose that is the head and front of the young man's offending. Now, Mr. Crenshaw, you are older than I am, but in my brief experience I have discovered that it is hard enough on a fellow to hold him responsible for his own shortcomings, without visiting upon him the misdeeds of all his relations. Now, has your son-in-law himself ever done anything to offend you?"

"N—n-o," the other responded regretfully; "but he is—"

"Yes, I know he is allied to that animal of offensive odor; but, waiving that question, I think that now he is your son-in-law, and the probable parent of your future grandchildren, you had better forget his relationship to the bird of Paradise who had the little misunderstanding with the late Steve Crenshaw. That was not his fault. A man can not

choose the family he would be born into. He *can* choose the one he prefers to marry into. Now, Jim having chosen the ancient house of Crenshaw, should be entitled to some forgiveness upon that account. He has done all he could to repair the error of his birth."

"'T aint only Steve Crenshaw I 'm thinking 'bout," replied the unforgiving old mountaineer. The firelight falling full upon his face, revealed it set and hard, the eyes which stared into the coals glowing with a fierce light. "It 's easy for ye to talk 'bout forgivin', but hit's onnatural. One winter night when I was a little bit of a fellow aparchin corn afore a fire like this, an' listenin' to my father tellin' 'bout a buck he killed that day way up the crick, an' beggin' him to lemme go with him arter it in the mawnin', somebody hollered outside. It was bitter cold, an' snowin', an' he 'lowed it were some one lost their way. He jumped up, an' threw open the door, an' axed 'em in to the fire. I follered him to the door, an' wus lookin' out atween his legs. I seen a rifle flash out there in the dark, an' my father fell back dead. But I never forgot the face I seen by the flash of that rifle. Hit were Aaron Renfro. He were killed by my uncle, Joe Bob Colbert's father, afore I was big enough to shoot."

For some time the old man sat staring in the fire, absorbed in the fearful retrospect, and silently Gilbert regarded him, beginning to divine the unfathomable depths of hatred transmitted by the mountaineers from sire to son. When he spoke again he had wholly abandoned his half-satirical tone. With an earnestness and vigor that surprised himself, he told the fierce old man that the hatred he harbored

for his son-in-law would be reflected upon his own flesh and blood; that he was simply laying up poignant treasures of regret for his own declining days. Vividly he depicted the inevitable time when, with keener eyes, he should see behind the mask of hatred that hid the unsatisfying mirage of revenge when, with his daughter's babes upon his knees, the white hair mingling with the gold, he would learn at last the worthlessness of all else, and hold high above all other things, high as hope's great throbbing star above the dark sea of death, his children's uncalculating love.

For a long time the old man sat staring into the coals, his eyes growing gray as the ashes. "That 's so!" he said at last, with the air of a determined character who, having once arrived at a conclusion, adopts it unalterably, and disturbs his mind with no farther doubts. "Jim ain't nothin' but a cousin of their 'n nohow, and if he 'll cut loose from that devil's brood of old Aaron Renfro, I 'll have nothin' agin him." And then, after a pause, he added, conciliatingly, "I know whar they 's a bustin' big gobbler been a usin', Squiar. I hearn as how ye air a mighty hunter, an' I 'lowed to mention it to ye 'bout that turkey. Any time ye have a mind to go arter him, I' ll go long an' show ye whar he 's usin."

It was the amende honorable, and it was accepted in the spirit in which it was made.

Chapter V.

"Love's Labor Lost."

'MAWNIN', Squiah, 'mawnin' to ye!" was the greeting Gilbert received when he came out upon the porch in response to a lusty hail one raw, misty morning in early spring. Hanging over the front gate was the form of young Hatfield, the long-legged mountaineer who had been his guide on his first shooting expedition. In response to Gilbert's invitation to come in, that worthy responded:

"I'm tolerably bleeged to ye, Squiah; but I reckon I 'll stay right here—there 's 'most too many hound dogs a hanging round yo'h house, an' I feel considerable comfortabler this side o' the gate."

"O! they won't bite you—whoever heard of a hound biting anybody?"

"Well, they mought n't, an' then agin they mought. They are onaccountable critters. That big white an' yaller he hound yander 's got a way o' walkin' that I don't put no trust in; come's down here a meetin' of me, sorter slow an' solemn, like a feller at camp-meetin' with his store clothes on a' steppin' up to his gal—agwine pigeon-toed, an' sorter sidling 'long, with his bristles sot up like a black pearche's top fin. That 's why I yelled kinder loud fer ye. I did n't wanter have to stretch these here laigs this mawnin'. I ain't in very peart fix for a foot-race. I'm mighty sore yit. Say, Squiah, what

kinder breed air them dogs, anyhow? Ain' more 'n half hound, is they?"

"Half hound!" snorted Gilbert, indignantly. "Why, you long-legged ignoramus, they are the best bred hounds in Kentucky."

"I never seen no hounds like them afore—shingled with white har. I thought hounds as wus hounds wus black an' tan, an' had years; them hounds o' yourn ain' got years half enough. That 's the fust time, too, that ever I seen hounds with whiskers on their tails an' laigs."

"These are modern foxhounds, and I hope they are different from the ones you are familiar with—the old style, lop-eared, rat-tailed hounds of our ancestors. You are only a hundred years behind the times," Gilbert answered, encouragingly; "but if you will stretch your legs and follow me, you may catch up yet."

The mountaineer gazed at his long legs as if not altogether desirous of entering them in this contest against time, and said: "I never had but one hound dog, an' I doan never want no more."

"Why? What became of him?"

"Took to the woods, an' turned wolf. Took up the trade of sheep killin' for a livin', an' the whole Cove turned out arter his skelp. Durn a hound dog, anyhow. I never seen one as was any good 'ceptin' to keep bread from mouldin', an' meat from spilin', an' skeer all the deer out'n the kentry. You can't set 'em arter anything you wanter, an' you can't call 'em off'n anything they once gits arter. Durndest, contrariest, brute critters in all creation. An' steal! Whew-w-w!"

Severe as were these strictures upon his favorites,

"ONE RAW, MISTY MORNING IN EARLY SPRING."

Gilbert could not help smiling at the other's quaint earnestness. "Well, did you call me out here just to criticise my dogs?" he asked.

"No! no! Squiah," he protested. "That big white an' yaller one jest skeered me plumb out 'n the notion of what I come for. I seen some wild ducks drap down in a hole of water as I come along, an' I 'lowed I would jes' stop an' tell ye 'bout hit. Ef ye've a mind to go arter 'em, I'll show you whar I seen 'em light."

"Just wait until I get my gun," replied Gilbert, diving back into the house. The visits of wild fowl to the Cove were like the proverbial ones of angels, few and far between. This flock must have been blown out of its course by the storm that had swooped down from the north the night before, and sprinkled the earth with a light powder of snow, bringing death on its chilling breath to the swelling buds and tender plants that had put forth their delicate shoots under the seductive touch of the sun, which now hid its face as if in contrition behind a leaden mask of clouds.

In a moment Gilbert had reappeared with his gun, and they struck off together, young Hatfield looking back over his shoulder with the caution which was his pre-eminent characteristic, to see that none of the hounds waylaid him in the rear.

"So you are still sore, are you?" said Gilbert, catching at the remark his companion had let fall among his first words. "Tell me all about it."

"Who told you?" was the quick response, as he stopped and gazed in surprise at Gilbert. "I 'lowed she were n't goin' to say nothin' 'bout hit."

"Why, you told me yourself."

"I 'll be dad binged if I did—I wonder now if I did," he hastily corrected himself. "I was so busy watchin' that big yaller an' white one that I wus n't thinkin' o' what I was sayin'. Powerful survigrous hound dog that!"

"Yes, but how did it happen; you have n't told me that?"

"It did n't happen at all; it wus did a puppus. Ef you 'll promise not never to say nothin' to nobody 'bout hit, I 'll tell ye."

Gilbert promised, and he continued, apparently gratified at the other's interest and the opportunity to relieve himself of a burden upon his mind: "Hit were at Missis Jackson's quiltin' the other day—mighty diffrunt day from this. Still, soft, sunshiny; roosters a crowin', hens a cacklin', birds a singin', tuckeys a gobblin',—jes' the day for a quiltin'. You know how a feller feels them lazy spring days. Arfter dinner I jes knocked off plowin', an' 'lowed I 'd go long down thar 'fore the other fellers begin to drap in, an' sorter git the bulge on 'em. When I got thar I seed I was the only man body 'bout the place—nothin' but women folks an' quilts. They was stretched in the sun on plow lines an' clothes-lines in the yard, all 'round the house—"

"The women?" interrupted Gilbert, who had very vague notions of a 'quiltin' bee."

"No, you durn fool, the quilts in course. Never seed the like o' bed kivers—Ocean Wave, Kentucky Beauty, Nine Dimunt, Checker-board, an' every other kinder quilts—an' the gals a gabblin', an' a gigglin, an' a makin' the needles fly. I sidled roun' through the woods an' hid out. Hit were kinder skeery for one lone man to tackle that infair, an' I

jes 'lowed I 'd better wait till long towards sundown, when some er the other fellers would come, an' kinder break the ice. There warn't even a sign o' ole man Coon Jackson—I reckon he 'd gone to the still-'ouse for the sperrits. Sperrits? In course they 's always plenty o' limber-leg at a quiltin' bee—that 's what 's they 's fur, mostly. Doan' think the gals go thar jest to shove needles, do ye? Hits what comes arter that fetches 'em—the men folks, an' fiddlin', an' dancin'. An' the men folks comes 'count o' ther gals, an' the eatin', an' drinkin', an' courtin' an' fightin'. Well, as I was sayin', I hung 'round a keepin' a eye on things in gineral, an' more pertickler awatchin' of Ad Crenshaw. My! but that gal did look temptin'. I jes' laid thar in the thicket a watchin' of her kinder wistful like, as a dog watches a meat skin when you holds hit too high fer him to grab. I jes' tell ye, Squiah, a man jis' ain't natchelly 'sponsible fer what he does under sich sarcumstances. I've jes' felt it in my bones that I would do murder over that gal yit—"

"Yes! yes!" exclaimed Gilbert, whose interest was excited, "what happened? Did you get into a fight?"

"I 'm a coming to that right now. Toards sundown some o' the men folks begin to drap in, some a ridin' an' some a walkin', sorter slow like, not keerin' to be the fust. I wus jes' a makin' up my mind to git out in the big road, lettin' on I hed jes' come, when I see Jim Renfro a talkin' to Ad Crenshaw, an' then toreckly she took the bucket an' started down toards the spring in the wood lot. I might a 'spicioned something if I hed n't been a natral born durn fool. But I dident. I 'd walk inter

a trap that would n't ketch a sedge field sheep. But this here one wus baited with enough sweetness to fotch all the honey-bees in the Cove to that spring. Soon 's I seed she was headed fer the spring, I jes' begun a snakin' through that thicket fer hit, afeared she would fill her bucket, an' git away afore I could git thar. But, Lord! I need n't a been in no hurry. I mought a 'spicioned sumthin' when I seed her throw mighty nigh a whole bucket-full out of that bucket, an' hit fresh. When I broke through the bresh she were there alright, a settin' on the log over the spring lookin' kinder flustered like. But I grinned like a basket o' chips, a thinkin' she wer blushin' on account o' bein' so pleased ter see me. You 've seen a young rooster giv his head a couple o' short shakes, let down one o' his wings a-trailin', an' sidle toards a pullit, with a twist in his neck, steppin' sidewise, an' a sayin', 'To-cook-a-took, too," and he imitated the sound and motion for Gilbert with diverting accuracy.

"Well, that 's about the way I wus a feelin' as I strutted up to that little she-torment a settin' on that log. She wus a-blushin' like fury, an' a lookin' way off with her head thrown back like as if she did n't see me at all. I jes' 'lowed ef she wanted to play like she did n't see me I 'd jes' 'sprise her. I sidled up closer, she redder'n a tuckey cock, an' wus reachin' over ter sprize her, with my lips puckered out a puppus for the 'speriment, a cold chill slidin' down my back, an' then slidin' back up agin red-hot, when all of a suddint somethin' happened."

"Well, what was it?" eagerly asked Gilbert, who was wrought up to a high pitch by the narrator's

quaint earnestness, his impatience intensified by the mountaineer's peculiar drawl.

"I do n't know as I kin tell ye," was the comforting reply. "Hev ye ever had a mad bull butt into ye unbeknownst, been blowed up by powder, or anything of that sort?"

"I do n't know that I have."

"Then ye can't 'preciate what come to me unbeknownst, an' sudden like. Fust thing I thought lightning struck me, a hittin' contrairy to custom from the groun' upwards, and in course smitin' the spot that fits a saddle. Fust thing I knowed I wus flyin' through the air like a leather-wing bat, with my arms spread out, an' my laigs a trailin' behind. Fust thing I hearn wus: "Take that, you damn long-legged Shanghai."

I lit on my hands an' feet half-way to the orchard fence, an' I kept on plumb to it in a four-footed gallop afore I could straighten up. I had got so good a start I thought I would n't spile it, so I jes' jumped the fence without tetchin' the top-rail, an' kept on through the orchard. I 'lowed the hereafter was n't mor 'n ten steps behint me, an' I wus n't goin' to giv it no chance to catch up. Half-way across the orchard I looked over my shoulder to see ef it was gainin' on me, an' I jes' caught a glimpse o' that gal still a settin' on that log, nigh dead fer laughin', an' behind it a feller I never seed in my life afore, most as big as a hoss. Then it come to me, Squiar, as how I 'd been kicked, an' I jes' loped on home hard as I could fer my gun. Hit were a kick, Squiar, as a four-year-old mule 'd been powerful proud of."

"THAT LITTLE SHE-TORMENT A-SETTIN' ON THAT LOG."

Gilbert managed somehow to hide the mirth that was choking him long enough to articulate:

"Did you—did you—go back after him?"

"Hell, no! My flesh went fast asleep from my brisket to my knees. Sich a shock, at sich a time, an' on sich a place—hit feels numb right now," and he ruefully caressed the injured portion of his anatomy. "But I 'll git him, Squiar, I 'll git the onderhanded, sneakin' reptile that hid behind that log, an' riz up agin me unbeknownst, jes' es I was 'bout to gether in the harvest of luv. I always knowed that gal would be the cause o' me hurtin' somebody. I 'm bound to put up that hog's meat on sight, without regard to good killin' weather. You do n't know nobody named 'Buck,' do you?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"'Cause that 's his name. I heered Ad call it kinder skeered like as I was a goin' away frum thar hoss-fashion on four feet. He 's a plumb stranger yere, an' they tole me they was n't no stranger at the quiltin', so I 'lowed he knowed I wus gone for my gun, an' kept away arter he come. I can't find out who it were. I ain't heard of nobody named Buck anywhere 'round these parts, 'ceptin' Buck Renfro, who killed Steve Crenshaw, an' in course it could n't a been him. Right over yander in that pool is where I seen them ducks 'light. You stay here, an' I 'll crawl down to the branch an' take a squint up it to see whar they 're at. Have a ho'n? No! Well, I reckon I 'd better throw a drap or two inside my teef. My gullet feels as dry as a tuckey-hen's arter she 's gobbled down a toad-frog."

He took a pull at the bottle, restored it to one

THE WOOD-DUCK.

of his capacious pockets, and then crept down to the bank of the creek, cautiously peered out from among the rocks, and, hastily withdrawing his head, returned to Gilbert with dilated eyes.

"The creek 's jes' a workin' with 'em, Squiar," he exclaimed, excitedly. "See that leanin' beech up yander, 'bout a hundred steps? Thar 's whar they 're at. Jes' sneak up behind it, an' you 've got 'em."

With infinite caution Gilbert crept up behind the tree indicated. Slowly the stalker slipped his gun before him, and peered cautiously out from behind the tree. The little pool lay before him untenanted, save by a solitary old must-rat, who splashed about upon its still surface, and seen from below, among the sticks and stones that dotted the surface of the rocky riffle, had effected the optical illusion, and tricked the mountaineer's usually accurate vision. Starting forward from his place of concealment, Gilbert gave himself up to uncontrollable mirth over the mountaineer's chagrin, while the old muskrat promptly dived and disappeared as if he were in great demand, and doubtless felicitated himself upon his narrow escape. For a moment the mountaineer gazed after his vanishing wake, while Gilbert leaned against the tree in uncontrollable enjoyment of his chagrin, and then, without a word, he turned upon his heel, and strode rapidly away along the bank of the stream. There was a sudden and startling splash as he strode hastily along oblivious to all in his mortification, and the flock that he had passed by in the abstraction of his conversation with Gilbert as they came up the creek, sprang from the pool upon which it had been feeding, and labored

upward with harsh, grating, and insistent quacking. Loath to leave the watercourse, they plumed their flight past Gilbert's hiding-place. Stepping from behind the tree as the keen swish of their wings cleaved the still air, he glanced along the barrels at the glossy, green head of a mallard drake who led the triangular flock. At the crack of the gun the fast flyer reefed his sails, and his followers bunched up for a moment as they winnowed the air with hissing wings, and endeavored to climb upwards out of this unexpected danger. The bottom seemed to drop out of the flock at the report of the second barrel, two ducks falling into the water, and two more, wing-tipped, crashing down through the bare branches of the trees.

"Got 'em, did n't we," exclaimed Hatfield, grinning from ear to ear, as he ran hastily back towards Gilbert. "You did that fust rate, Squiah, couldn't a done hit better myself. I knowed whar them ducks was all the time, but I jes' wanted to see if ye could pull 'em down on the fly—anybody could a kilt 'em a settin'. Powerful sarchin' gun ye 've got thar."

Chapter VI.

A Wild-Turkey Chase.

THE musical piping of the bluebird was abroad in the land, the yellow buds were bursting upon the waterside willows along Blue Lick, and the vernal frogs had burrowed out of their deep, subterranean dormitories, and attuned their pipes to the song which old Aristophanes interpreted in the dawn of time,—which is neither Greek nor English, but which is a Saurian Pæan to Spring, and whose burthen runs in words, "Brekek, Kekek, Koax, Koak." Meaningless to the uninitiate, the angler translates them to mean that the spring rise is in the brooks, and the trout are rising, too; an admonition to "fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." But as ardent angler as Gilbert Garrett was, he turned a deaf ear to the syren-like song of Blue Lick Creek dashing down its rapids, as he stood upon its banks one bright morning in early spring, with his gun upon his shoulder.

His companion, who was unarmed with either rod or gun, was a young man little older than himself; but his face was graved with serious lines of thought and care, that were conspicuous by their absence from the careless expression of this utterly careless Gilbert Garrett. And when he spoke it was with thoughtful deliberation that was equally at variance with Gilbert's free and easy way. It would be hard to find two young men of similar age with more

widely dissimilar tastes and characteristics. Following close behind them was an old Negro carrying a spade and axe.

"Here 's where I leave you, Griscom," exclaimed Gilbert, halting. "You will have to climb the mountain side here, while I keep on up the creek. There 's no use of my going with you,—Zeb will take you to the coal deposit as well as I could, and you 'll find the iron cropping out everywhere along the mountain side. I know where an old gobbler has been using, and I am going to try and get him this morning before he changes his run."

The other looked up with an expression of surprise, or what was as near surprise as his phlegmatic countenance ever assumed. "I thought you were going with me to make the examination," he said. "Do n't you think you had better be present, and be sure that no mistake is made. You are more familiar with the boundary lines of this tract."

"O, never fear about that; you won't get off my land in a day's walk."

"But surely," the other insisted, "the result of this investigation is of more importance to you than killing a wild turkey."

"I do n't know about that. I 've wasted a heap of time on that old gobbler, and I think I 've got him located at last."

The other looked at him with an expression that plainly said if it were consistent for one with such weighty cares upon his mind to relax it with amusement, he would certainly be amused at the whimsical conceit of his companion. But he answered this sally seriously enough.

"Of course, you understand my report will be

based upon what I find. I have to return to-morrow, and I may not be as successful in my search to-day as your letters to your father have led him to believe. Do be serious for once, Gilbert."

"I am, I assure you—never more serious in my life. But, my dear Griscom, you make the mistake of considering every pursuit outside of mere money-getting to be frivolous, and lacking in seriousness. Now, just at present I am consumed with an absorbing determination,—every impulse of my being is centered in one purpose,—never was more serious in my life. I suppose it is a case of atavism,—influence of heredity, you know, the recurrence of some dormant instinct derived from my pioneer ancestors, who hunted here all their days,—I've no doubt but it was an equally serious matter with them. The occasional uncertainty under which they labored, as to whether they were hunters or hunted, must have lent a charming diversity to the pursuit. Unfilial as it may sound, I am constrained to confess that I am filled with resentment when I think of my ancestors' improvidence, their disregard of any close season, and their indifference to the pleasures of posterity, which, as a natural consequence of shooting them in season and out, led to the extinction of that noble species of game, the Indian. Just think how I am going to feel when I am gathered to my fathers of former sporting proclivities, and am obliged to confess that I never killed a biped bigger than a bird. But as long as this is denied me, I have to satiate my assassin instincts with the best substitute possible; and, if you will excuse me, I will go after that old gobbler," and waving his hand airily in adieu, he struck off upon the path that ran along the creek, humming the words of an old ballad:

"They had rigid manners and buckskin breeches,
In the good old times;
They hunted Indians and hung up witches,
In the good old times;
They were in the woods from sun to sun,
They had lots of sport and lots of fun,
When they went to meetin' armed with a gun,
In the good old times."

Those are halcyon days,—those first days of awakening life in the Cumberlands. What glorious mornings those mountains know! What fair, foam-flecked skies! What mists rising from the creek! What scenery! As wild and as redolent of sprites and goblins as the stamping-ground of that first love of American fiction, who has many prototypes here, lazy, liquor-loving, simple-minded Rip Van Winkle. Gilbert strode along the bank of the stream by little shingly bays where the woodduck stood preening her plumage and the drake floated upon the surface like a brilliant blue vapor; by tumbling rapids and deep, rocky pools where, in water as limpid as liquid crystal, he could watch the bass, and felt tempted to pursue them as did a brother angler,—the Kingfisher. At last his stride shortened, and coming into a broader, better-beaten foot-path, he loitered along as if wooed to forgetfulness of his mission by the syren song of the stream, which here dashed down its rocky course in an agony of froth and foam. In many an unremembered nation's literature it may have been the Castalian fount, for piles of flint chippings, and broken spear- and arrow-heads are still to be found upon its banks—mute memorials of a vanished race. This long, slender, deftly-fashioned flint that lies at his

feet unearthed from its long resting-place by the wash of winter rains was once a fish spear. Upon the day that Joshua forded Jordan some dusky denizen of the forest may have poised it with unerring aim above the remote progenitor of that big pike, whose bronze back but a moment ago disturbed the still surface of the pool. And the banks and braes of Blue Lick Creek are as primeval looking now as then. Talk of antiquity! Nature alone is antique, and the oldest art, even this fish spear, this relic of the stone age, is a mere mushroom!

He looked up from his musing at the sound of a light footfall ,and stepping back into the path raised his hat gracefully in greeting to a young woman, who was hastening along it with a small basket on her arm. It was a fair, fresh face that greeted him beneath the pink sunbonnet; but the first expression of pleased surprise was followed fleetly by a chilled and perplexed look.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me here again," he said complacently, divining the source of that changed expression. "Same cause, same old turkey, same old hope,—it springs eternal in the human breast, you know. But this time I 've got him located, and I 'll be mighty badly fooled if I do n't get him!"

"And I should think you would be equally disappointed if you do. It would deprive you of an occupation, would n't it? It seems to me you have done nothing else but look for that turkey lately," she laughed.

"That 's right," he quickly assented. "I had n't thought of that. But then perhaps I could find some other excuse to bring me up here." She pre-

tended not to notice the meaning or the look that accompanied the words, and cheerfully wishing him success, started on again.

"Oh, but I am going that way myself this morning!" he replied confidently, and shouldering his gun walked beside her, gallantly offering to carry her little basket, an offer which she declined. He could not see her face for the sunbonnet, as it was averted from him; but the abstracted way in which she replied to his sallies showed that for the first time his company was not welcome to her. Something was amiss; what, he was at a loss to understand.

"I hear you have company," she said finally, after a pause.

"Well, now, that is strange," he replied, in unfeigned surprise. "It surpasses my comprehension how news gets around in these mountains; it beats telegraph, telephone, and postal service combined. Here I have a guest drop in on me in the middle of the night as suddenly and unexpectedly as if he had fallen from the moon, and the next morning the very first person I meet on a lonely mountain side knows all about it. I dare say now you know what we had for breakfast," he said, quizzically.

"Was the gentleman a friend of yours?" she asked, eagerly catching at the designation he had given the newcomer.

"Yes," he replied, at a loss to understand her apparent interest in one she could never have seen, or even heard of before. "How did you hear of his arrival?"

"Oh! it is very easy to account for; he inquired the way at Stampers, and Jim Stampers oldest boy

came over to borrow a singletree last night, and mentioned it."

"And I suppose the arrival of any one from the outside world is an interesting event in Blue Lick. It does seem worthy of note to find a rational being who would take such a rash step," he replied, good-humoredly. "Well, I did think to keep it to myself, but I suppose every one in the Cove will know about it now, and as his mission is at present a secret, I do n't mind telling it to you. It always did weigh upon my conscience to keep a secret, and I suppose the best way to unburden it will be to confide in a woman—it won't remain a secret long then, I dare say," he laughed.

But his laugh died upon his lips at the white, eager, and excited face she turned upon him, as she stopped and faced him in her anxiety. It was a trait he had never given her credit for, this intense and abnormal curiosity—he was at a loss to understand it.

"Yes, yes, what did he come for?" she inquired, excitedly.

"Upon business, of course; to look into the coal and mineral deposits here—why, what did you think?" he asked in amaze as she turned away, and started on again, either in relief or disappointment he could not say which, as her face was concealed by the sunbonnet. "You surely did not think that any one would invade this terra incognita simply for the pleasure of it, or to see me,—I would hate to put my best friend to that proof. Now, I do n't mind telling you, since it is a secret, that he is an expert, and comes in the interest of capitalists. If his report is favorable, as I have no doubt it will be,

this place will not much longer remain the out-of-the-way corner of existence that it is. I think you will hear the shriek of steam whistles, the whirr of machinery, and the rumble of railroad trains before the snow flies again."

It was a sublime flight of the imagination. Perhaps she was unequal to it. Perhaps she did not take him seriously. He knew at what variance she was with the life around her, that coming as he did from the world she had left, she had found a grateful delight in his society upon their casual meetings. That she had no part in the peculiar aboriginal life about her, that the realization of his great expectations would be most welcome to her. Since she could not return to civilization, to bring it to her was a consummation to be most devoutly wished. And yet she expressed neither joy nor hope, but walked on silently for a few moments, then stopping, said:

"I know I am taking you away from your hunt. It is very kind of you to give me your company; but I can not think of permitting you to do it.—I will bid you good-bye here, and good luck go with you."

She turned, and started on; but the next moment halted, as he stood before her.

"Ruth," he said, impulsively, peering beneath the sunbonnet with that look of audacious self-confidence which was the characteristic expression of his handsome face. "What is the matter? You are in trouble. Won't you tell me what it is, won't you let me help you? You know I am your friend; you can rely upon me."

"No, no," she exclaimed, starting back affrighted; "it is nothing; it is not so; you are mistaken, I assure you."

"Then I have offended you," was his unexpected reply, as he stood aside to let her pass, "and rather than that I would have given my right arm."

She turned again, and upon the face revealed to him was a look of anguish, in the eyes a haunted, worried light. "If you mean that," she said, "if you wish to befriend me,—and I believe it,—please do not follow me farther; please do not come here again; it is for your own good I ask this favor."

He laughed lightly, carelessly. "If I have only myself to fear for, no danger will keep me away; but," he added, soberly, "if you ask it for yourself, if you really wish me to see you no more, then I sorrowfully yield to your desire."

"No, no, not that; but not here, not now, do not come here again, and do not follow me," and as if unwilling to trust herself farther, she turned her head away. "You had better go after that gobbler now," came from the averted pink sunbonnet.

"Damn that gobbler!" he muttered, and wheeling, strode rapidly away, with an impression that he could have comfortably dispensed with, that the ways of a woman are less easy of solution than those of the wily game that had so persistently baffled his attempt to bring it to bag.

And the wild turkey is the wildest of all wild game; the most difficult to approach, and when approached the quickest to take alarm. For though a deer, when you come suddenly upon him, will almost always tempt fate by staring for an instant at the unusual sight like a rustic in a city, the turkey stands not upon the order of his going; but at the first alarm the flock scatters, and slips off through the brush with such celerity and silence that they seem to have vanished into thin air, and the hunter,

were it not for the indubitable evidence of his senses, might believe himself the victim of an optical illusion—that he had pursued a fiction of his fancy.

The wildness and wariness of the game, and the thick cover which it haunts, and which renders the hunter's progress so slow and noisy, and the range of his vision so limited, makes it almost impossible to hunt it with success in the fall.

But some bright spring morning, as the muffled roll of the pheasant drumming on his hollow log proclaims the approach of day, the singular gobbling notes of the wild turkey waver along the listening stillness of the wilderness. Then, too, is heard the coy yelp of the hen's response, and mayhap the clash of arms where the right to some fair one's affections is being settled by—

> "The good old rule, the simple plan,
> That they may take who have the power,
> And they may keep who can."

And as in every flock there are two or three gobblers, more than the peace of the present, or the welfare of the future, requires, the hunter does his best to remove them. The hens, occupied with the approaching cares of maternity, are not molested; but the gobblers are prime and fit.

Chapter VII.

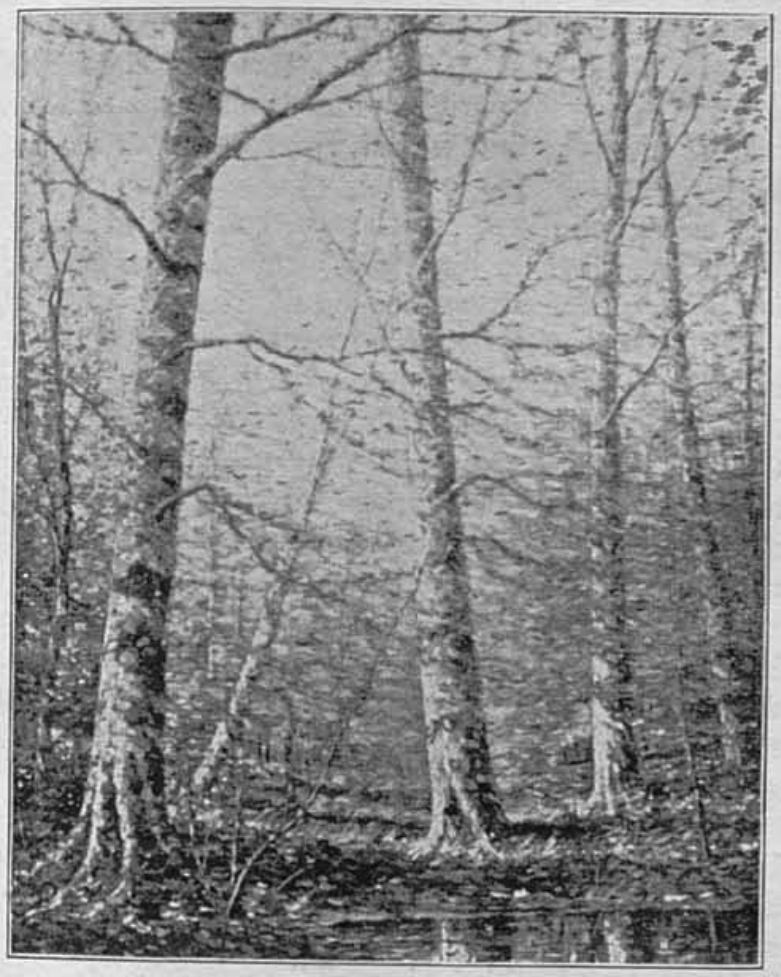
Gilbert Goes Into Business.

RETRACING his steps for some distance along the creek, Gilbert left it, and scaled the steep, timbered slope. But he hunted in a half-hearted way, and failing to find any trace of his game soon abandoned the search, and reaching the crest of the ridge struck off toward the coal-fields, where he expected to find the newcomer, whose advent he could not help believing was connected in some inexplicable way with the strange conduct of his fair friend, Ruth Colbert. He was walking along listlessly through the woods, and had almost reached the mountain-side where he expected to find him, when he was suddenly moved to stop as if shot, and assume an intent listening attitude. The next moment the sound that had arrested him came again, clear and unmistakable—the longed-for "gobble." With the trained ear of the hunter, he had located it accurately. Bitter experience of the last few days had taught him that the sound possessed a peculiar ventriloquial power not to be easily estimated, and he had waited for the second call to verify the first with certainty. It came from the head of a deep, tangled hollow below him, and he stealthily stole down the mountain side, entertaining no doubt but that it was the wily old gobbler upon whose destruction he had been so long bent. He recognized every note in the well-known call. He could imagine him

as he had often seen him, but always out of range, as he strutted from side to side, his long beard touching the ground, crested with white and ruffled with scarlet, a moving sphere of velvety brown, bronze, or gold, upon which the colors dawned, and faded like hues in heated steel. He determined that no failure on his part should lose the game this time, and with infinite caution he crept down through the engulfing network of trees and bushes, until at last he crawled out of the thicket, and peered cautiously across the head of the hollow.

The bare face of the rock was before him, from which gushed forth the spring that had worn this deep hollow like a groove in the mountain-side. Immediately below him great logs, fallen from the mountain-sde above, had lodged, forming a natural roof to the chasm below, into which the water fell in a little stream, and disappeared from view. The old gobbler was nowhere visible. He was doubtless within the shelter of the brush upon the opposite side of the hollow. It was impossible to approach closer, and Gilbert had no idea of awaiting the uncertain volition of the game when a call could be issued that would decoy him to his fate, and had just placed his caller to his mouth to imitate the coy yelp of the hen, when his quick eye caught a glimpse of a bit of color between the logs below him, and the next moment a movement of a pink sunbonnet. He drew back into the concealing thicket in surprise, and for a moment watched its wearer ascending a leaf-strewn path, which he now noticed for the first time. The path ran up out of the hollow past the thicket where he was concealed, a mere hog-path that he now re-

membered having noted often before, as he also had the deep, steep-sided hollow, and into which he had supposed it to have been made by the wild hogs and other wild animals going down for water. But a little distance beyond the head of the hollow was the coal deposit which he had discovered, and to which he had sent the expert. He hoped that no unkind fate would lead Griscom to extend his researches into that hollow. It was all clear to him now. The gobble with which he had been so easily deluded was but the signal of the moonshiners to each other, perhaps heralding the approach of Ruth Colbert. He knew now where she was going each morning he had met her with her basket, doubtless taking her husband his dinner. Her strange conduct was all explained now; her interest in the stranger's arrival. They had taken him for a revenue officer, and were doubtless watching him. His present proximity to the still must be exceedingly aggravating, to say the least. He almost laughed out loud at the thought of the consternation of the innocent cause of all this concern, could he know what a volcanic crater he was treading around. But he did not laugh when he looked up again, and saw Ruth Colbert coming along the path that ran close to his place of concealment. It was difficult for him to reconcile that fair, sweet face with the indubitable fact before him, to think of her teaching the Word of God to those poor, benighted little heathens in that deserted cabin, and see her here coming from this illicit den in which she had been consorting with a lot of unconvicted felons—it seemed like some hideous, phantasmagoric nightmare, too horribly incongruous and impossible to be true. It was another ideal shattered,



FOREST IN THE CUMBERLANDS.

and but few ideals had been left to this pessimistic young man in his brief iconoclastic career. He had found in her such a contrast to the *jeunesse dorée*, the society girls of the city, that she seemed among these poor, ignorant mountaineers an angel in disguise, and he was the better for mere contact with the atmosphere of purity and goodness exhaled about her. The awakening was as bitter as the dream had been sweet.

As he lay there in the thicket a bird flitted into a bush beside him, and began to sing, trilling forth a perfect stream of liquid melody. Gilbert thought he had never heard sweeter notes fall from vocal pipe than ran in quivering ecstacy from the tuneful throat of this feathery Blondel. Then suddenly it tilted its saucy head and tail, and in the midst of a hilarious rhapsody, as if in mockery of all tuneful spells, it snarled and mewed like a cat, and flew away.

He parted the bushes, and stepping forth from his place of concealment, stood before her. She dropped the basket she carried, and started back in sudden affright.

"You here!" she gasped.

"Yes, I have been lying here listening to a catbird. For some time I have been foolishly lost in admiration, thinking I listened to a skylark.—The song has at last ended, and I find that my skylark is but a poor catbird after all."

She either did not comprehend or care for his words. Her face was a picture of uncontrollable distress. "Why did you come; why did n't you keep your promise?" she moaned. "You will be killed."

"Oh, no!" he replied, his characteristic self-confi-

dence in no whit lessened; "no danger of that. And I can conscientiously say I did keep my promise. I never even looked after you once. I was lured here by the calls of—of your friends—who imitated a wild turkey with damnable truth; either lured by them or by fate—an unkind fate for me. I would rather have remained under the delusion that my catbird was a skylark."

"And I," she exclaimed, passionately, "I have given up my happiness, my whole life, everything. I have sacrificed my self-respect in hope of averting this hour—everything but your friendship and good opinion; and now that, too, is taken from me. I have lived in this dread, ages—no one can know what I have suffered, or how I have prayed for light and help. I have tried to do my duty. I have labored, Oh, so hard, to make him think as we do, and upon my knees I have begged him to give it up, and—and—at the very last, when he had promised me to sell out—it seems too cruel." Sobs choked her voice, and turning, she walked rapidly away along the narrow path.

For a few moments Gilbert looked after her, as if undecided whether or not to follow her, and then, respecting her desire to be alone, he turned, and strode rapidly to the edge of the deep descent into the hollow. He had left his gun in the thicket. He knew that his every movement was watched now, if his presence had not been discovered before, and without a moment's hesitation he descended the narrow, steep, and slippery path. The place was admirably adapted by nature to the purpose for which it had been utilized by the moonshiner.

Difficult as was the descent, he realized how immeasurably more difficult and problematical was the ascent. A single rifleman, hidden among the rocks or in the bushes, held in his hand the lives of any number of men who ventured into that savage gorge. For aught he knew he might be descending into his grave; but not one line of care or caution was deepened upon his face, and the hand with which he clung to the bushes and projecting rocks beside the almost perpendicular path was innocent of a single nervous tremor. He had passed through more trying ordeals amid scenes of smiling safety, with the lights shining upon fair women and suave demeanored men, and the audacious self-confidence which had hitherto borne him through did not desert him now.

"What do ye want here!" was the gruff and ungracious welcome he received when he plunged down the last declivity and brought up with a jerk at the mouth of the well-sheltered cavern. A rude door protected its entrance, but it was ajar, and from within came the voice, menacing and almost inarticulate with passion.

Fresh from the bright sunlight above, his unaccustomed eyes in the semi-darkness that reigned perpetually here descried but dimly within the portal the figure of Joe Bob Colbert. Behind him were the vague outlines of the copper worm and still, and from out the obscurity came the gurgle of water where the stream ran into the mash-tubs.

Gilbert gave a low whistle of surprise, and exclaimed, "Well, now, that is a nice question to ask of a man upon his own property. What, may I ask, are you doing here?"

The other stared in speechless reply at the unexpected retort, and looked on with equally speechless amazement at the cool audacity of his visitor, who stooped, and brushing by him, entered the cavern. With eyes accustomed to the darkness now, Gilbert saw that it was quite a spacious chamber, admirably adapted for the purpose of the illicit still.

"By jove!" he exclaimed, in unmistakable gratification, "I had no idea I had fallen heir to such a cozy little property," and he gazed about him with the satisfied air of ownership. "Here I've been blundering about here for weeks, and never once suspected its existence. Why didn't you put me on to it?"

Joe Bob Colbert was not without a sense of the ridiculous, but it had all been horribly devoid of humor to him. The sudden arrival of the suspicious stranger, and his equally suspicious movements that morning, were fraught with peril to him. Every movement of Griscom had been watched by keen eyes from the moment he had started out in the morning, and now as he explored the mountain-side investigating the extent of the mineral deposits the spies were dogging his footsteps, mystified by his peculiar movements. They had lost sight of Gilbert, whom indeed they exonerated from any complicity in the schemes of the supposed revenue officer, further than harboring him, and his sudden appearance now was an unexpected shock to Joe Bob Colbert. He had seen Gilbert when he first emerged from the thicket, and with a horrible dawning suspicion saw him confer with his wife, then come straight on to the still without a moment's pause or hesitation.

Ruth Colbert had been strangely affected upon finding out her husband's connection with the still after their marriage, and time, instead of overcoming her unaccountable scruples, as he had hoped, had but added to her insistence, and strangely he had of late been affected with a vague comprehension of her objections to it, and an ill-defined feeling of unrest. Overcome at last, he had yielded to her, and had promised to sell it. But he had been unprepared for this—could it be possible that she was in the conspiracy against him?

With a maddening rush the remembrance of her friendship with Gilbert, their frequent meetings, and all the horrible suspicions of a suspicious mind thronged thick upon him. In a whirl of conflicting emotions, dazed by the violence and suddenness of the blow which had fallen upon him, Joe Bob Colbert saw Gilbert descend the steep declivity like one in a nightmare divested of power to act. It was well that Gilbert had not paused, or turned back; his promptness and decisiveness of action alone saved him. Never before had he been so near to death. Now the mountaineer stood and stared like one under a hypnotic spell, incapable of volition. But Gilbert's next words dissolved the incantation.

"No," he said complacently, "I never would have found it but for the merest accident in the world. I was hunting that old gobbler I 've been after for the last week, and I heard a turkey call here in this hollow, and tried to slip up on him. I was lying in that thicket when your wife started away from here; what in the world made her treat me as she did? Looked at me as if I had been a ghost. If I 've been anything but a friend to you all, I do n't know it."

"You lie!" cried the mountaineer, starting towards him with his drawn weapon in his hand, and even in the semi-obscurity Gilbert saw that his face was white with passion, and distorted with rage. But he did not move a muscle, continuing sitting in an easy, careless attitude upon an empty, overturned barrel, and regarded the infuriated mountaineer with a quizzical, wondering look. It was a superb exhibition of nerve, and all Joe Bob Colbert's fierce determination oozed out at his finger-tips. He could not murder an unarmed man, who did not deign to raise a hand in defense, and slowly he let the extended pistol fall by his side, endeavoring to cover his defeat by blurting out, "Don't ye think ye kin fool us with yer tales to wimmen folks 'bout lookin' fer iron and coal round here."

For a few moments the other continued to regard him with an easy, indifferent, wondering aspect. Then he spoke with quiet but forcible authority, and with a glance that enforced his words. "You can put that thing up now," pointing to the pistol. And by that potent glance, made to feel the infamy of threatening with it an unarmed man, who had fearlessly and unsuspectingly walked into his power with nothing but fair words, Joe Bob Colbert, his heat subsiding, returned the pistol shamefacedly to its holster upon his hip.

"Sit down and calm yourself. You are a little excited. I 'm afraid you are not very well adapted to this business. It has been most too much for your nerves. Do n't you think you had better sell out and quit? What will you take for the outfit as it stands?"

Joe Bob Colbert sat down and stared, at a loss to

comprehend this utterly incomprehensible young man. But it was apparent that he was serious, as he poked around taking an inventory, and appraising the miscellaneous effects with a running fire of comments, such as, "Two tubs of mash, sour mash—two tubs of too sour mash I should have said—spoiled, I suppose, by lack of attention which has been bestowed where, I fear, it has not been appreciated—upon my unconscious friend, Griscom; you won't profit much by the next run. That still is pretty badly battered, has had some hard knocks in its time—dodging revenue officers, I suppose? That worm bears a decided family resemblance to the proverbial one; it seems to have been crushed and turned. The whole might be classified as ' a lot of warious,' as Mr. Venus would say. Come, what will you take for the lot?"

The owner of the "lot of warious" did not dispute this disparagement of his property, but sat eyeing the prospective purchaser intently. As has been said, he was not without a sense of the ridiculous, and this mood of his eccentric visitor appealed to him as probably a piece of facetia.

"What on airth do ye want with hit?" he very naturally inquired.

"Oh! I am thinking of surprising and gratifying my respected paternal ancestor by going into business—my disinclination for which has hitherto caused him so much pain. I can imagine the old gentleman's shock when he hears of it—the genuine treat it will be for him will alone be worth the price. It is about the only business that I have ever been brought into contact with that I have felt an inclination to. I feel that I would be eminently successful

in it. I have always had a kindly yearning toward the knavish faculty, the antic cunning, the adroit wisdom that lives upon the outskirts of life, and having altogether shirked what legislators call the social compact, having from the very cradle protested against the impression of a tacit consent to the dull forms of foolish men, bids defiance to the laws which their fears and vanities have made. Yes, I am convinced that I am pre-eminently fitted for this ancient and honorable calling; it is the very one I have been looking for. Come, will you sell out, or not?"

How much of this speech was pure raillery Joe Bob Colbert would not have undertaken to say. But the reiterated demand for his price was equally serious, as it was plain to his comprehension, and passing the preamble over, he replied bluntly: "Ef ye have a mind to buy, I have to sell. I 've done with hit all, and I 've been wantin' to sell for some time. I promised Ruth to let hit go for whatever I could get fer hit; 'pears like I ain't goin' to have no peace until I git shet of hit. I hain't had nuthing but bad luck since she hes been so sot agin hit. Hits wuth a hundred dollars, they 's mighty nigh thet much ole copper in hit; but I 'll take fifty cash, ef you know anybody as 'll give that for hit."

"I do. I know a personal friend who will take it off your hands. He has n't got that much with him," he exclaimed, ruefully, thrusting his hands into his empty pockets, "as he had no idea when he started turkey-hunting of buying a business plant; but if you will wait here he will be back in an hour to pay your price, and go into business for himself."

He was back within the hour, and he became the

absolute owner of the battered still, the business, and good-will of its late proprietor. He declined all proffers of assistance, or information as to its workings, cheerfully insisting that he had never taken any advice in his life, and it was useless to waste such a valuable commodity upon him, and at last he saw the mountaineer depart down the mountain side with relief.

"Now to business," he mused. "Gilbert Garrett & Co.—no, that won't do for such an extensive enterprise—it must be incorporated, or I will be denied the chief pleasure in business—watering stock. How would the Garrett Moonshine Company, Limited, do? Gad! But I would like to see the old man's face when he opens my next billet doux, and sees the letter-head, "Garrett Moonshine Company—Gilbert Garrett President, Secretary, Treasurer, and General Manager. I think I will have some gilt-edged stock certificates printed, and sell him a few thousand shares. Wonder if my tailor won't accept ten or fifteen thousand dollars worth in liquidation of that little bill. The possibilities of this enterprise are inexhaustible—had no idea I possessed such a head for business. "Garrett Moonshine Company." Wonderfully appropriate title; so significant of its promoter," and, chuckling to himself in high, good humor, he began business in a way that would have convinced the late owner of the plant of what he had already suspicioned—that its President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc., was crazy. Two negroes armed with axes had accompanied him on his return, and they were set to work chopping upon the supports which held in place the mass of logs and driftwood over the still. The hand of man had more to do with

fashioning this natural-looking protection than dame nature, as he had found by examining it, and soon, the supports chopped away, it fell in with a crash upon the still. Upon the mountain side above were numerous dead logs scattered about, and as long as they could see to work these were rolled down into the hollow, and added to the pile accumulated over the still.

Chapter VIII.

The Light of Revelation.

RUTH COLBERT washed up the dishes after supper, and then went down to the spring upon the bank of the creek for a bucket of fresh water. The night was dark and still, the air soft and balmy.

She noted in an abstracted way as she walked along that the moon was rising—a faint nebulous glow was growing high in the darkness to the East. But she did not remember that there should have been no moon that night. It was the dark of the moon. She was thinking of other things. The day had been an eventful one for her. A great load had been lifted from her heart when Joe Bob Colbert came home with the news of the sale. But another trial awaited her, though no cross could be so heavy and hard to bear as that had been. He had been moody and misanthropic all evening. Never had he seemed so cold, if not absolutely cruel to her. Her joy had been short-lived in the realization of his regret. It was perhaps too much to expect a man to disfranchise himself at one blow from the life, the customs, and habits in which he had been so long entrenched. He would find in other healthier, less dangerous, and more honest pursuits forgetfulness and happiness. And then she thought of Gilbert, and wondered how he could look upon this illicit occupation as the mountain people did—in everything else his ideas and ideals had been her own;

but she had erred grievously in judging man from woman's standpoint. A woman's standard of morality was surely higher than man's, and the old saying, "In Rome do as Romans do," had been given a new significance to her. She was disappointed in him.

As she approached the creek the stillness gave place to a threnody that pulsated through the night, and seemed to fill all space—the multitudinous croaking of hylodes, the spring frogs. Suddenly the stream burst upon her sight, and she stood in surprise and bewilderment. In the darkness before her the pool was a pool of flame, and upon the riffle it ran in waves of liquid fire, and every rock that jutted above the surface was outlined in that strange light, while the shores were compassed about by inky blackness, gaining no light from that mysterious illumination. For a moment she gazed in uncomprehending amaze and awe, and then suddenly she remembered that brilliant glow upon the mountain side she had seen upon starting from the house, and wheeling, gazed behind her. High upon the dark mountain side, seemingly suspended between heaven and earth, was a great mass of tossing flames, a pillar of fire, as if the black cloud curtain of night had been rent, revealing the dazzling brilliancy which it cloaked.

"O Joe! O Joe!" she cried, excitedly, and in a moment he came running toward her, thinking she was in peril. "Look!" she cried. "What on earth can it be!"

He turned, and immediately gave vent to a startled exclamation of surprise:

"Durned ef that fool ain't gone and sot that drift

pile afire some way. It beats all how keerless some folks is. I 've run that still there for more 'n five year, and never hed es much es a spark git out, and here he comes and sets the whole thing off the very first time he fires up. I 'll go up, and see if I kin help him to save ennything."

"I—I—I do n't think you will be able to—to do any good there, Joe," she said, softly, subdued, and seeing with clearer vision now, by that pillar of fire in the heavens, what she had been so strangely blind to before.

Chapter IX.

The Hunter, and the Hunted.

THE slanting rays of the setting sun glinting through the broad, palmated leaves of a mulberry tree, tinged with brighter carmine the long, pendent berries, which, smitten by the luminous splendor, gleamed like rubies amid the mass of verdure. From afar the vivid spots of color amid the prevailing greenery attracted the eye of the hunter, and stealthily he stole toward them, shielding his approach behind the sheltering tree trunks. The pheasant, followed by her dusky brood, instead of taking wing scarcely scuttled out of his path, and brave, brown Bob White, perched upon the old rail fence, defiantly called across the fields, secure in their present immunity. Their arch-enemy was looking higher than the old rail fence, higher than ever quail or pheasant soared—high up into the leafy wildernesses of the treetops, where that imp of the woods in hodden gray, the squirrel, held high carnival in defiance of the laws of gravitation.

When within thirty yards of the mulberry, the hunter peered cautiously out from behind a giant poplar. His keen eye swept up the smooth, gray trunk, closely scanning every crotch, and striving to pierce the tangled, leafy screen amid which gleamed the berries, black and red. Slowly the moments passed, and still the hunter maintained his attitude of alert intentness. At last his vigil was re-

warded. A bough, shaken by something still concealed amid the leaves, conveyed electrically the intelligence to its uttermost tips. Light as had been his footfall, the little rodent banqueting upon the berries had taken the alarm; but it was unable to resist the temptation longer, and covertly stealing from its place of concealment, snatched one of the luscious morsels. When the squirrel leaves the large trees in which it habitually dwells for the smaller mulberry, its natural wariness is enhanced in proportion to the greater risk, and it is at no time more difficult to stalk. But were the danger double, it would dare it.

Grown bolder with immunity, the squirrel in the mulberry-tree balanced farther out upon the bough. The moment the hunter had waited for had come. The leaves parted, and the lithe, little, gray form was revealed, with the long plume curled superciliously over its back. The rifle cracked, and the plume streamed earthward, the little "twenty-two" bullet having gone through the squirrel's head.

In the same instant the hunter saw a man who was riding along a woodland path near-by, spring from his horse, and dodge behind a tree. Presently he peered cautiously from behind it, his rifle advanced at full cock. After a few moments, evidently reassured by his survey, he came from behind his tree, and said:

"Hello, stranger, I did n't see ye, an' yo' gun goin' off so sudden, an' close like, gimme a start!"

"Hello, stranger, yourself—I think you are more a stranger to these parts than I am," was the retort of the hunter, who was evidently not prepossessed by the strange nervousness of this stranger, who fre-

"THE LITHE, LITTLE GREY FORM WAS REVEALED."

quented rarely used footpaths in his travels. There was about him an air of excessive timidity as he glanced nervously about him, and, slowly uncocking his weapon, he replied, in a conciliatory tone:

"Mebbe so, but I reckon I knows you uns anyhow. I reckon now ye be the young Squiah, haint ye?"

Gilbert admitted the soft impeachment, and picking up his squirrel regarded the effect of the shot critically.

"Shot plumb through the eye!" exclaimed the mountaineer, in real or affected admiration; Gilbert chose to believe the latter. "Yes, this is the fust time I been on Blue Lick since ye come; but I hearn tell 'bout ye, an' 'lowed it was ye the moment I sot eyes on ye. I jes' come over to visit some er my kin folks, an' I reckon I better be movin' if I want to git thar in time to put my name in the pot. Well, good evenin', Squiar," and he rode off, peering cautiously about him as he went.

Gilbert stood looking after him with instinctive dislike; he could hardly have said why. But he soon forgot all about this rencontre in his absorption in the business before him. It was one pursuit to which he brought all the energy of his lethargic nature. Of all the devious forms of sport, the chase, the battue, the blind, the wing-shooting over trained dogs, this still hunting the gray squirrel is the most primeval, approximating most nearly the ancient method of our nomadic forefathers, who lived thus all their days. To noiselessly wend through the woodland ways, to pit your skill fairly against the cunning of the game, and, single-handed, to succeed or fail, without the help of canine instinct, this is

hunting in its original sense. And a rare little animal is the quarry. Hundreds of feet above the earth he balances from bough to bough, bridging abysmal distances, swinging from swaying limb to frailest twig, and scampering head-first down the mossy bole of some forest monarch as recklessly as if Sir Isaac Newton had never discovered the laws of gravitation—that scientific enunciation of the children's old saw, "Whatever goes up, must come down."

The sun had set, and the clouds roofed the valley as with rust of gold, when Gilbert came out of the big beech woods at the head of the gorge, his hunt ended, and stood looking down the valley. It was a dream of beauty bounded by the rugged mountain ranges, whose slopes were now a dark green, with here and there patches of color where thickets of red-bud or rhododendron bloomed, or the dogwood flaunted its snowy blossoms along the mountain side. Below him lay the little creek, stretching away into the elusive blue distance, like a pale green thread reflecting its own clear space of tranquil sky.

The still evening air was odorous with bursting blooms, and fresh with the feel of the falling dew. From afar was wafted the melancholy tones of the brassy, tinkling cowbells, as the cattle loitered along upon their homeward paths. As he stood there loath to lose the sweet serenity of the scene, the quiet tones of the afterglow spread over the mountains, softening down the rugged outlines of the serried ridges, and adding one more charm of peace to the profound peace of the world around him.

From some nook on the far-off mountain side the distant report of a rifle reached his ears, followed fleetly by others in rapid succession. "Some fellow

is even more persistent than I am," he thought. But even the sound of a hunter's gun had a profane ring to it in that twilight hour. The soft sound of the angelus would have been more fitting. It was impossible to associate the serenity of that peaceful scene with the deadly hates and murderous passions of men, and without giving the sound of the shots a thought, lost in the pensive reflections elicited by the fast-fading landscape, Gilbert pursued his peaceful way homeward.

Soft as a veil the darkness settled down upon Blue Lick, and the still surface of the pools palpitated with a life unknown of sunlight as the fluttering caddis-flies emerged from their crystal shrouds to pass in nocturnal revelry their one short, sunless day of life. Upon the mountain side the Whip-poor-wills began to call to each other through the gloom, and were answered back from the banks of the creek by the deep, sepulchral boom of the bullfrogs sounding in the distance like some phantom pack of hounds in full cry upon some far-off shore. One by one the stars peeped forth from their canopy of softest blue, and a late mocking-bird from his perch in an old apple-tree beside the Colbert cabin poured forth that low, liquid melody that is only heard from this king of feathered songsters at night.

Ruth Colbert, unable to longer see the shuttle in the fading light, abandoned the loom with its web of half-finished cloth that stood upon the back porch, and walking to its edge she stood leaning against one of the rough columns, giving herself up to idle dreams as she listened to the soft, sweet notes flowing like a liquid stream of melody from the old apple-tree. In one of the pauses when, the mocking-

bird having shamed the whip-poor-will into silence, not a sound was to be heard, she caught the quick thud of hoof-strokes upon the road leading up to the cabin. They rapidly approached, and in a moment halted at the gate, which was flung open, and before she could call to her husband, who was inside the room cleaning his pipe by the light of the lamp, the unceremonious visitor had rushed up the walk, and springing upon the porch almost dashed against her.

She sprang back, pushing open the door, which was ajar, and the light from within streamed upon him as he stood panting upon the portal. Joe Bob Colbert sprang up from his seat at the sound, and together he and his wife stood staring dumbfounded at old Abram Crenshaw. In one hand he held by the muzzle his gun, which trailed at his side; with the other he leaned against the jamb of the open doorway. His chest heaved with excitement and exertion, his breath coming in gasps. He was bareheaded, and his grizzled hair fell over his eyes, which gleamed fiercely from beneath their tangled mat, giving his face with its beaklike nose the aspect of some fierce bird of prey. In the intense silence, no one speaking as the fierce old man struggled to regain his breath, Ruth watched with fascinated horror a tiny drop of blood course down his nose, and there hang for a moment before gathering weight sufficient to fall.

"Get your—get your gun, Joe. Buck Renfro 's in the Cove," were his first hurried, run-together words.

"You are hurt," exclaimed Ruth, starting toward him, her eyes riveted upon the gash in his head,

from which the tiny stream of blood trickled, and which the matted hair failed to wholly hide from her keenly sympathetic eyes. "Let me dress it for you."

"He came to my house this evening," the old man ran on hurriedly, not noticing, or apparently even hearing her. "Jim and Sarey were gone visiting Stampers. I never knowed his voice when he hollered Hello! outside, and I went to the door. I do n't know why he did n't shoot then. I jumped back and grabbed my gun, and when he see I was fixed for him he jumped for his hoss like the blamed coward of a Renfro that he is. It was most night, and I missed him, but skeered the hoss, and hit took around the corner of the lot with him arter hit. I jumped over the fence, and thought I had him; but he stumbled over a stump jes' as I fired, and hit went over his head. Then he begun shootin', and we emptied our guns, him a tryin' to git to his hoss. He got hit up in a corner, but before he could git on I got to him, and cut at him over the saddle. He fetched me one clip in the head; but I got hold of the rein, and he broke and run for the woods, and got away from me in the dark. Take his hoss—hit's at the gate—and tell the others. He can't git away unless he steals some o' their hosses, and I misdoubt hit then. He 's cut to the hollow," and the fierce old man gazed triumphantly at the bloody knife he held.

Without a word Joe Bob Colbert strode across the room, and took his weapon down from the deer-head rack upon which it rested, and buckled his cartridge-belt about him, while Ruth stood gazing from one to the other in fascinated horror. But the next moment he turned to go, and the fearful spell broken, she flung herself upon him.

"Do n't, Joe! Do n't! For God's sake do n't go and leave me—it will kill me. You must not! You shall not! 'Revenge, saith the Lord, is mine, and I will repay!' This man is nothing to you, Joe, and I—am I not more to you than the poor satisfaction of hounding down this hunted wretch; let him go, Joe, but do not imbue your hands with blood—"

"Remember Steve Crenshaw! Remember your kinsmen!" sounded the strong voice of the fierce old man, like an avenging nemesis pronouncing the decrees of fate.

But it needed no such tragic counsel to prompt Joe Bob Colbert to action now. He was a mountaineer, and every instinct of the mountaineer's being, every tradition of his ancestors imbued him with the savage desire to revenge upon the hated enemy the blood of his slaughtered kinsmen.

At another time he might have listened to her appeal, and to the promptings of Christian charity and forgiveness; but with that fierce incarnation of the mountaineer's code beckoning on, and fired by the sight of the blood upon his brow, Joe Bob Colbert was oblivious to all else. His pulses were athrill with the stirring of old, primeval instincts; of that old savage craving as old as man, which demands retribution—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. He felt himself but the instrument of a just and avenging Providence, and pushing her roughly aside, he strode out into the night, and was gone.

Crushed and bruised at heart, she fell upon the floor where he had flung her, a prey to blank, unyielding despair, that divested her of power to think or act. She could but suffer.

Chapter X.

A Friend in Need.

HOW long Ruth Colbert lay there in a whirl of violent emotion she did not know; but gradually there first appeared to her consciousness the vague, indefinable, formless outlines of hope, as to the shipwrecked man appears the first outlines of a far-off shore. And the hand that was held out beckoningly toward her was the hand of Gilbert Garrett. It was the drowning wretch clutching at straws. She knew that what he could he would do to avert the dire disaster that threatened her, to prevent her husband returning to her with the mark of Cain upon his brow, or sacrificing himself in the unholy thirst for revenge. It was his duty as a conservator of the peace. Although none of his predecessors had ever taken that Quixotic view of these feuds of the mountaineers, that did not abate her confidence in his doing so. When she opened her eyes the rising moon was shining into the room, the pale beams falling full upon her face. It recalled her to the lapse of time. Without a thought for herself she hurried out into the night, and sped along upon the well-known path by the banks of the brawling stream.

She paused as a turn in the path showed her a tiny point of flame twinkling at the base of the mountain across the valley like a star. It was a light in the home of Jim Renfro. Although, through Gil-

bert's good offices, reconciled from the first to the inevitable, it was but a few days before that old Abram Crenshaw had come to live with his son-in-law. His wife had long been dead, and his only other child, Adelaide, had gone to live with her sister, upon the latter's marriage to Jim Renfro. For some time the old man, moody and misanthropic, continued to live alone in his deserted cabin; but had at last consented to come and live with his daughter, too. He had said that Jim Renfro and his wife were away visiting. The light seemed to indicate that they had returned, and turning into the first cross-path, she hastened toward it. She could at least get Jim to accompany her to Mr. Garrett. The first heat of resolution over, she recognized the impropriety of intruding alone upon the young gentleman at that hour. When she reached the Renfro cabin she knocked at the door, and receiving no answer tried the latch, and found it barred from within. But detecting a slight sound in the room, she called: "Is that you, Addie? Let me in."

"Who 's that?" came in a frightened whisper.

'It is I, Ruth Colbert. Do n't you know me?"

"Law, Miss Ruth! Ye gimme sich a start. I was feared it was that Buck Renfro come back."

At sight of the pale face, with the wide, frightened eyes, that greeted her when the heavy wooden bar was lifted, Ruth was glad she had come out of her way for the mere comfort her presence seemed to bring here.

"Put on your shawl, child, and come with me quick," she commanded. Although little younger than herself, she felt so much superior to the cowering girl before her, that she unconsciously gave her the designation.

Obeying the imperious tones, the girl caught up her shawl, and followed as far as the threshold, where, gazing timorously out into the dark night, she hesitated, and asked with a querulous little tone of complaint, "Whar ye goin', Miss Ruth; ain't ye afeared—"

"No," interrupted Ruth, "there is nothing to be afraid of. Come on, unless you wish to be left here alone. I have no time to lose."

And then she regretted her impatience as the other hurried after, evidently welcoming any alternative rather than that lonely, deserted cabin after what she had gone through.

"Poor child!" Ruth exclaimed, drawing the trembling hand through her arm, and clasping it in her own firm, determined fingers. "You have had enough to unnerve you. I thought you were away with Jim and Sarah. So you were here when it happened!"

"Law yes, they fit awful. I heered Buck when he hollered Hello, an' it so upsot me I could n't do a thing. Pap went to the door, an' was most as surprised as Buck were. The next moment he grabbed his gun, an' Buck run; but pap's shot skeered his hoss, an' then they just fit with guns an' knives—turrible. I was all of a trimble, an' could n't abear to see hit. I do n't know what happened untwell Buck got away, an' pap lit out on Buck's hoss. I 'lowed he were goin' arter some one."

Ruth stopped, and asked eagerly, "Did n't he come there to kill your father?"

"Law no, Miss Ruth; in course, not. He did n't know pap had moved up here. Jim 'lowed to send him word the fust chance he got."

"I am glad of that. Your father thought he came there to kill him. Why did n't you tell him better?"

"Law, Miss Ruth, it would n't a done no good—he mought as well thought that as knowed why he come for sure."

Ruth stopped and confronted her companion, but in the obscurity could not see the color that mantled the girl's face at her next question. At night all cats are gray. "Did he come to see you, Adelaide?"

"Law, Miss Ruth, but men are sich fools," she answered, with a simper. "Jim 's told him more 'n a dozen times he 'd better keep away, an' I 'm sure I never guv him no 'ncouragement."

Ruth hoped that the thoughtless girl would be able to truthfully lay that unction to her soul in the trying times she feared were to come. But she grievously doubted it.

Adelaide Crenshaw was a born coquette, utterly frivolous at heart. She had a fair face, and a plump, pleasing figure that found much favor in the eyes of the mountain youth. Perhaps the only one she sincerely admired and respected—if she did not, as she believed, truly love—was Ruth Colbert, whom she endeavored in her insincere way to pattern herself after. Ruth could not help being conscious of it, and with her sincere and unselfish affection towards all around her, she evinced a most profound interest in the shallow-hearted little mountain beauty, whom she endeavored to impress with a higher sense of the duties and responsibilities of life. She was relieved at discovering that Buck Renfro had not come, as she had thought, with murder in his heart, but animated by quite another motive. A mission, in fact, which promised, if successful, to heal an old

wound perhaps, and end a deadly feud. At the same time the knowledge of that fact would make all the more poignant her own affliction if aught befell him at the hands of her husband. His conduct in the fight was all clear enough to her now. His apparent cowardice was really noblest bravery. He had risked death, rather than injure the man who was the father of the woman he loved. How blind they had all been!

The two women were so busy with their own thoughts, that they did not notice their near approach to their journey's end, until suddenly a great blaze of light from the old house burst upon their gaze. All the lower part was lit up, and the unexampled profligacy of illumination, surpassing anything in her personal experience, although poor enough in its way, calling for a mere half-dozen lamps, could be explained upon but one hypothesis by the unsophisticated little mountain beauty. "Must have company," Adelaide exclaimed, as she paused breathless at the beautiful spectacle.

A somewhat similar exclamation had fallen from the lips of Gilbert himself, when returning later than usual from his hunt a couple of hours before. A visitor was such a rarity in the old house, that Zeb, with an overweening sense of the importance of the occasion, put in requisition every lamp upon the place. The time was to come when this primeval state would no longer exist, and men might come and go in multitudes without exciting such attention.

It was perhaps meet that the herald of that new era should be received with such a flourish of lights. Griscom had returned to the Cove that evening with

a party of surveyors and great news. His report and the specimens of ore he had taken with him to the city had surpassed the most sanguine expectations of the elder Garrett and the capitalists interested with him, and work was to begin at once. Little wonder, then, that there should be an air of unusual festivity about the old house. Even the phlegmatic Griscom himself had thawed out under the influence of his impressionable and volatile host, who was unsurpassed as an entertainer, and in exceptionally rare form that night. He had not had many opportunities of late to exploit his powers of camaraderie. Under this genial influence, and the no less beneficent effect of a mint-julep distilled from the first tender shoots of the indigenous little plant, and in the concoction of which old Zeb did not yield the palm to even a tide-water Virginian, Griscom had laid aside the weight of care and self-importance which ordinarily oppressed him, and was as gay as it was possible for his calculating disposition to ever permit him to be, while the others gave themselves up to unrestrained hilarity. "Bud" Thornton, one of the surveyors, had attended the same college that Gilbert had, and together they sang rollicking college songs to Gilbert's accompaniment upon the guitar, everybody joining in the chorus as best they could. The two women coming up the uneven, stone-flagged walk, halted at the strange sounds of revelry that greeted them. A momentary silence followed the chorus, and then they heard a burst of merriment following some humorous conceit of Gilbert's, in which Griscom's restrained mirth mingled with the light-hearted laughter of his companions, and the hearty haw-haw

of the old darkey, who stood holding the tray upon which freshly-concocted juleps awaited the young gentlemen's pleasure.

The door was open, and the windows were up, admitting the balmy, scent-laden atmosphere of the soft, spring night. From where they stood Ruth could see into the room, and she hesitated. What right had she to intrude upon such happiness with her misfortunes! Inside all was bright and pleasant. Around her was the dark night, as if enshrouding her in a black mantle of woe. Should she enter but to take it with her, and encompass him in its dark folds! Before her was life, and light, and happiness. Behind her was night, and despair, and death. What right had she to tear him from all that was pleasant, and take him out into this!

There was a sudden silence following the light-hearted laughter, in which she heard only her own heart beating, and the melancholy call of the whip-poor-wills far away on the mountain side. And then her whole tense being vibrated to the chords of a low, passionate threnody that floated through the open window.

In all trivial accomplishments he was proficient, as his father had often said—if one-tenth the ability he displayed in such idle, worthless fads had been devoted to one single, practical, useful purpose, he might not have been here now—an exile. For a moment his hand lightly swept the strings until the very soul of the instrument responded to the music that was in his own. And then the rich baritone notes welled up, and wavered along the listening stillness of the night, full of sentient pathos. Never before had Ruth known the power of the

human voice to express feeling. Every fiber of her nature thrilled in harmony to it. Whether it was the high nervous condition to which she had been wrought up, the anomaly of her present position, or what, she knew not; but for the first time she felt her own indomitable will fail her, her soul flooded with unshed tears, her own futile incapability apparent to her, and she turned to him with the selfish, unconsidering despair of the drowning wretch grasping at any hand, however weak, outstretched to save her, and recking not whether it, too, might be dragged down into the engulfing depths. It was plainly an improvization—the theme as old as man, aye, as singing birds who carolled in Eden before man had learned the universal motif—love. As she listened she heard the catbird singing to its mate among the sweet-scented rhododendrons, that old sweet song of love and life, the tremulous, eager wooing, the plaintive notes of entreaty, the fervent desire to do and dare all for the one only and supremely beloved, the blissful rhapsody of realization; and then suddenly, startlingly, the song was ended. In the very midst of the rhapsody, without a transition that would let his auditors lightly down to earth again, the song suddenly ceased with a sweep of the sentient strings, whose twang imitated with abominable accuracy the catbird's mocking snarl.

"And that is love," he exclaimed, with a light, sardonic laugh, throwing down the instrument, and catching up his julep. "Here 's to the catbird, the philosophic songster of all time."

But the next moment, after taking a single sip, this erratic youth, whose moods were as variable as an April day, set down his glass as if it, too, were disappointing.

"Too bad, Zeb! You will have to make us another. A julep is like woman's love. If you crush and bruise the mint, it only brings out its delicate aroma—you get the true flavor doubly enhanced. But desert it for another, and sodden with the sweetness in which it is stepped it grows bitter and repugnant—there is no fury like a woman scorned."

Hastening to the spring for fresh mint, Zeb paused upon the threshold, and exclaimed, "Who dar?"

At sound of her voice in answer, Gilbert paused in the midst of a sentence, and springing up without a word of leave or apology, left his guests in amaze at his strange conduct, and hastened out upon the porch.

"What in the world does this mean; what has happened?" he exclaimed.

Briefly, in broken sentences, she told him, offering no excuse or apology for afflicting him with her troubles. It would have seemed purest affectation in the face of his evident sympathy, his absorbing interest. "I determined to come straight to you," she concluded, simply.

"I am so glad you did," he said, sincerely, affected by her unspoken trust and confidence. "I hope that I will be able to justify your faith in me. But we must act at once. Time is of the utmost importance. Do you think your husband will return home, or have you any idea where I will find either him or Abram Crenshaw?"

She shook her head sadly. "It would do no good for you to see them; you must try to get Buck Renfro out of the Cove before they find him," she said, convinced that nothing he could say or do

would swerve them from their fierce, bloodthirsty purpose. She had not told him what she had suffered at her husband's hands in that attempt. But Gilbert saw in that sad gesture and the tone of the words more than she would have had him know.

"Perhaps not," he said, but there was more of concealed scorn than resignation in the tone. His lip curled. They would find they were not dealing with a weak woman when he confronted them.

"Where is Jim Renfro?" he suddenly asked, turning, and for the first time looking into the face of the girl.

Adelaide had listened with almost painful intensity while he sang. Standing there in the outer darkness in a perfect intoxication of the senses, a fascinated trance, she had gazed into that brilliantly lighted room with dilated eyes, and it seemed as if a whole, new, unknown world had opened to her. A strange, tremulous, uncertain feeling set her pulses throbbing and her young heart beating, filling her with a curious consciousness of herself, as though the singer was singing only to her. When he came out and stood talking to Ruth Colbert, without apparently noticing her presence, she listened with fascinated interest to his quick, impulsive, easy way of talking, and the rich tones of his voice, so unlike any other she had known. She had never imagined a creature so fascinating.

The face into which Gilbert now looked was as white as marble, and the wide, dilated eyes shone all the more brightly by the contrast in the light streaming from the open windows. But all her accustomed fluency in the society of the mountain beaux was gone. Taken aback by the suddenness of

his address, she could only stammer an inarticulate reply, and Ruth saved her from utter confusion by replying that Jim Renfro had gone to visit the Stampers over on Clear Creek, and would not return until next day.

Attracted by the sound of their voices, Griscom sauntered out upon the porch, and Gilbert introduced them with the grace of a Bayard. Had they been great ladies, Adelaide thought, he could not have compassed more deference in the action. The next moment, without giving Griscom an opportunity to more than acknowledge the introduction, he said: "I will accompany you home. Zeb, hand me my hat. Kindly excuse me to the others, Griscom. Good-night! Zeb will show you your rooms. Do not wait for me, as I go upon business, and may be late returning."

It was all like a dream of fairyland to the little mountain maid. The rough pathway along the bank of the creek seemed to slip by them as swiftly and smoothly as the water racing down the long reaches where the channel was deep. She forgot all her forebodings in the joyous content of listening to the charm of his voice as he rattled on, beguiling Ruth Colbert's fears, merrily making light of her foolish fancies, and overcoming them with his own insuperable self-confidence, until when he bid them goodbye at Ruth's door she laughed light-heartedly at his parting jest.

How short the way had seemed! It could not have seemed much shorter had he really had in operation that strange telephone line he endeavored to make plain to Adelaide's comprehension, insisting that her rare conversational powers—she had n't

opened her mouth—would make her an invaluable "Hello-girl." And how light-hearted he was. He did not seem to have a care in all the world, as he went merrily on down the creek making the woods vocal with a plea to Mr. Johnson to be turned loose. Adelaide stood outside, and listened until the last sound of his voice died away down the valley in mellow, fragmentary, echoing cadences. The awakened mocking-bird in the old apple-tree piped up in rivalry; but the door closed, and the auditor was gone.

"I wisht I could talk like you uns," exclaimed Adelaide, with a sigh, as she stood abstractedly braiding her long hair, preparatory to getting into bed, a far-away look in her blue eyes.

Ruth seemed lost in her own thoughts, and did not heed the pathetic yearning in the plaintive voice.

"I wisht ye would larn me to talk like you uns, Ruth," she said, after a pause. She did not call her "Miss" Ruth now. Those last few hours had done what days and weeks of association had failed to do toward advancing her unformed girlish mind to a plane of equality with the woman so little her senior in years, but so far superior in everything else. "I wisht ye would tell me when I ain't sayin' what 's right."

Surprised at this sudden desire for improvement upon the part of the hitherto heedless and giddy little coquette, Ruth exclaimed, "Why, whatever put that notion into your head, Adelaide?"

"I felt so—so like a fool, to hear ye an' Mr. Gilbert talkin', an' I da'se'nt even answer his questions, I was so skeert he would laugh at me."

"Of course, I will be delighted to help you. I

have tried so long, dear, to get you to improve yourself in every way. I am glad you have seen the benefit of my preachings at last. But you need not be afraid of Mr. Gilbert's laughing at you. He is too much of a gentleman for that. He would not do anything to hurt any one's feelings. That is true gentility, and he is one of the truest, noblest gentlemen you will ever know."

"Is n't he just grand!" was the unexpected and fervent assent. And then, after a moment's silence, she announced: "I ain't goin' home no more, Ruth. Pap doan' need me no more, now he 's gone to live with Jim and Sarey, an' I wanter stay here with ye, an' larn yo' ways."

. . . . . .

"It 's a hard road to travel from here to Paradise," mused Gilbert, as he ceased his singing, and looked up at the dark, forbidding mass of mountains which imposed its bulwark between that haven for the hunted man and the Cove he was in. "Beyond the Alps lies—Paradise Cove. I am very much afraid the missing bird of Paradise will plume his next flight into the great beyond, unless I can somehow circumvent his enemies. What won't a man do and dare for love!" he exclaimed, recalling the timid, furtive bearing of the man he had met while squirrel-shooting. He was the last man on earth he would have believed to be embarked in such a dangerous, not to say foolhardy, adventure. He appreciated now the adventitious circumstances surrounding the unfortunate lover, coming as he did with his life in his hands among men who thirsted for his blood, and whom to slay in return would be to sacrifice that hope that was doubtless dearer than his life. "For

your bravery, Sir Knight Errant Renfro, you have my admiration. But for the cause in which you have chosen to display it you have my profoundest commiseration. Mr. Buck Renfro, I am constrained to say that I believe you are a fool, a pig-headed fool, or you would n't have come back here a second time for that chit of a girl. She does not care anything for you. I 'll bet she is n't giving you a thought this minute. Of all which you ought to be very glad, Mr. Buck Renfro; but I doubt it. Being a pig-headed fool who does not know enough to be afraid, it is natural to suppose that instead of getting out of this Cove under cover of darkness as fast as you can, as you would if you were wise, you will hang around to-morrow to try and see the girl. By to-morrow night they will have every mountain pass guarded, and you will be caught like a rat in a trap. But there is one saving clause, although it is none of your making. They do not know you are in love with the girl. I am going to set a trap for you, and bait it with her. She has not got sense enough for a decoy, but will do for unconscious bait. They will be looking for you everywhere but where they ought to—at home. You will be hanging around there, looking for a chance to meet the girl. Having the usual sapiency of the natural fool, you will be wary of traps. Well, you won't suspicion this one. Nothing more natural than for Ruth Colbert to commission that empty-headed little doll, who is fit for nothing else, to keep an eye on the cows to-morrow. And even if you should see that lazy, squirrel-hunting young "Squiar" loafing around the woods, you would n't see anything suspicious in that."

Chapter XI.

Fight of the Feudal Mountaineers.

THE weary night wore away, and at last the fair, fresh, spring morning dawned upon the mountains, awakening to the charm of a new life, a new world, and a new day all animate things. The air was redolent with the fragrance of dew-dipped flowers and the gladness of caroling birds. The mists arose from the stream, and wreathed upward along the mountain-side, where for a brief spell they lingered in rarest effects of silver and pearl filigree, as if the wan spirit of the night still trailed her tangled tresses there.

The beleaguering mountains that had seemed to gather close, and impinge their dark, frowning masses upon the Cove in the night, now trooped away in orderly phalanx, the serried ridges stretching away into the wide liberty of endless, luminous vistas of shimmering, azure, sunlit skies. In the valley the stream sang a soft, syren-like song, as if its bosom had never known the swollen wrath of winter torrents. Trillingly it dashed down its sparkling cascades to sleep in the still, pellucid pools bordered by banks of rhododendron. All the mountain-side was musical with the call of the quail, the drumming of the ruffed grouse, and the liquid, melancholy notes of the hermit thrush.

And somewhere in this pleasant scene, amid the primeval beauty of this wild world, one man was

hiding from all mankind. Of all the human beings coming and going about him he knew not one, man or woman, whom he dare let see his face, or find him in his hiding-place. That was the horror of it, the torturing doubt that haunted his mind, and that must be solved ere he again knew peace. Could he but know that she had not betrayed him, that she had not, Delilah-like, lured him on only to deliver him into the hands of his enemies, no disaster could then so blanch his sallow cheek, so weigh down his heavy heart. But if she had—then let the little traitress beware!

With haggard eyes he saw the rose light of the dawn steal over the mountains, and the morning come as he had seen a thousand mornings come to them. But the ineffable loveliness of the new day held no charm to soothe his seared soul. The clear, cold light of the morning came to him accusingly, and brought with it the prospect of discovery. It failed to infuse fresh life into him as it did to all his fellows, and as he arose stiffly from his couch on the bare ground he shivered in the chilly, uninvigorating air of early dawn. His wound was sore, and it hurt him now to move, but that would pass with the exertion of the day that was before him. He was tall and thin, a frame of steel knit with nerves, his face haggard, his lip covered by a scanty, sandy mustache. In his deep-set, gray eyes was the slumbrous spirit of "fight" observable in the eyes of the bloodhound.

High on the mountain-side at the head of the gorge, just under the great cliff towering boldly towards the clouds, was a clump of laurel bushes in full bloom, the opening buds a fine delicate pink,

the wide-open flowers faded to dull white. Amid them his own dull, white face, peering down into the length and breadth of the Blue Lick Valley, was safe from the casual eye that might be cast upward. Long the unseen Ishmaelite, against whom every man's hand was raised, peered through the concealing tangle in silent scrutiny of every moving thing in the Cove below him. He saw the housewives come and go about their dooryards, he watched the geese in snowy, single file march sedately down to the creek, he saw the cattle with clanking bells loiter leisurely along the paths to their pastures, he watched the plow-boy lead his horses to water, and then to the field, where, with faint, far cries of "Gee" and "Haw," the cool loam was turned in fresh furrows. But the serenity of the pastoral scene did not lull him to fancied security. He knew that under that serene surface, as under the smooth surface of some subtropic lake that shows upon its face only pure white lilies, there lurked danger and death, as in the depths of the lake lurked wriggling reptiles and alligators. But here he was safe. Behind him the impracticable cliff, before him the steep mountain-side which he could hold against any number of escalading enemies. He was secure from every danger. Nothing without wings could menace him here. And then he saw a barefooted girl driving a couple of cows along a path that wound into the woods, and took them from his eager gaze. He stepped hastily back out of the bushes, and took two strides along the rocky shelf that ran along the base of the beetling bluff, when he was suddenly halted by a baleful whirr almost at his feet, and sprang quickly back at the sight that met his startled eyes.

"HE SAW A BAREFOOTED GIRL, DRIVING A COUPLE OF COWS."

Stretched at full length, sunning itself upon a rock, was a huge rattlesnake, which slowly slid into a mass of coils, its clicking tail protruding, and its head held slantingly erect. Had it been coiled at first, instead of stretched out sluggishly in the sun, his troubles would have all been over. Lifting a huge stone with both hands high above his head, he hurled it with crushing force upon the reptile as its body straightened out, and its venomous head was darted at him in impotent fury. The missile falling fair upon the serpent crushed it into the stony soil, burying it from his sight. But he could still feel the fixed stare of that cruel eye. It gleamed before his gaze bright and cold as a jewel, but with a sullen, ferocious, and relentless expression produced by the broad, strong, superorbital bones that overhung it. He gazed fearfully about him among the rocks. In this springtime of the year every creature, harmful or harmless, had its mate, every creature but himself. At any moment death in its most dreadful form might dart out upon him from some unseen crevice in the fissured rocks. His sense of security in his hiding-place was gone. He was driven from his refuge. Cautiously, as if he stole away from some sleeping enemy, he left the fateful place. Parting the bushes he glided down the steep and savage slope without a sound through the wild tangle of undergrowth. With him like a haunting shadow went the inexplicable problem of his existence. A thousand times that day, upon the steep mountain-side, in the dark ravine, amid the mighty monarchs of the great beech flat he asked himself if she could be so fair and yet so false?

Although undemonstrative, inclining to the taci-

"SUNNING ITSELF UPON A ROCK, WAS A HUGE RATTLESNAKE."

turn, rarely revealing to the unsympathetic eye of casual acqaintance his true sympathies and inmost ambitions, the mountaineer of the Cumberlands loves and hates with the most consuming passion; with the most violent of loves and the deadliest of hates. A passing acquaintance would never discover the depth of tumultuous passions, the mazy turmoil of nature that lies hid beneath his cold exterior.

Hour after hour that haunting fear seemed to draw nearer and nearer to him; closer and closer it drew, his heartstrings tightening with the tension; a steadily contracting, dream-like terror that, as it drew ever nearer, silently pointed at him its finger of fear, contempt, and death.

All the woodland ways, the unused, unknown, labyrinthine paths by which he had threaded the mazy wilderness to come to her were guarded by his lurking foes. Of this he satisfied himself regardless of the risk. But he knew them so much better than they did. He knew them as the fox knows the trail to its den, as the eagle knows the way to its eyrie when talons are heavy and daylight scant. Who but she, the only one and supremely beloved, could have given them intimation of the way he came and went? There was one; with a start he remembered meeting the young squire the evening before, and his apparent displeasure. Could he have been the cause of his troubles? Could he have carried the news to old Abram Crenshaw? All the vitality of his starveling hope aroused itself—he was so anxious to exonerate her.

Stealthily he threaded the thickets, and dropped down into the concealing ravines, and crept among

the rocks, and stole from tree to tree, gliding along as silently as the shadow of a cloud, every sense upon the qui vive, his eye glancing far ahead from bush to brake, from brake to bosky dell, with keenest penetration, his acute hearing making most subtle analysis of every sound. What was that faint rustle among the leaves? Did a poplar cone fall? Or did it roll a foot too far for an inanimate thing? Perchance it was a ground squirrel that skipped?

Soft as snow on wool his foot fell as he shifted his position, and from a new vantage ground descried the squirrel hunter silently crouching behind a beech-tree intently watching a woodland glade below him, where two cows grazed, and at a little distance reclining upon her elbow was a figure that was dearer than all the world to the outlaw. All unconscious of the eyes upon her, she was poring with pathetic absorption over a poor little infantile primer.

The outlaw believed, as he believed his existence, that he looked upon a plot laid to entrap him. He shrank a step backward into his ambush with the same, sudden, instinctive terror that he had felt at sight of the snake. He noiselessly cocked his gun. He had not resolved to shoot; but a gun is of no use until cocked, and the action was as purely instinctive as the one with which he had drawn back into the bushes. He remembered then that it was empty and useless. He had fired it in the air last night in the attempt to deter old Abram Crenshaw. Why was this man, too, athirst for his blood? Verily he was an Ishmaelite, every man's hand against him. He had done nothing to this man. He was not one of them. Why, then, had he taken up the ven-

detta? It was another unvanquishable problem added to the doubts that tormented him. Not death, not being dead, not God's anger, not eternal burnings, it was no thought of this, or all of these, that tortured him like the doubt of her. It made him gaunt and haggard. And then the perpetual watching! He hardly realized what a strain he was upon to avoid against sudden surprise. Any instant the woods might ring with the whoop of discovery, the blinding flash and crack of the death-dealing rifle. He knew not one single haven of refuge where he could lay himself down free from that haunting fear, and say, "Here at last can I rest."

At last Gilbert arose. He was worn out, and weary with his fruitless vigil. He stretched himself as if cramped with long watching, and silently took his departure. The outlaw believed it to be a ruse, and silently as fate he followed at a distance. From the sheltering forest he watched him cross the open fields in the bottom, and hail some one on the mountain-side beyond and then he shrank farther back into the engulfing woods as he saw some men engaged with a strange-looking instrument. It was only Griscom with the surveyors, projecting the little branch railroad that was to connect Blue Lick Cove with the great trunk line, and the great world beyond. But the outlaw did not doubt that this new enemy had brought some strange, formidable weapon to compass his undoing, to pry into the remotest recesses, and spy upon him. He put all the opaque, impenetrable obstructions possible between himself and that strange, unknown instrument. But an unconquerable impulse, an irresistible fatality took him back to that little glade

about which he stealthily skulked until satisfied that no other enemy lay in wait for him.

As she lay there intent upon her task, in a sort of enchanted stillness amid the yellow sunshine which filtered through the leaves, she might have been a wood nymph, so well she accorded with the scene. Beneath her a tawny carpet superior to the science of looms. Overhead spread the broad, palm-like fronds of the chestnut, close the soft greenery of the beech let the tinted sunshine through, and towering over them all the giant tulip-tree. In the bosky hollow there, where the brown butterfly is fluttering, old Pan himself might be asleep among the fern.

She sprang up with a little startled cry when, hearing a slight noise, she raised her head from the printed page, and saw him standing there white-faced, hollow-eyed, and haggard-looking. All her woman's sympathy went out instantly to this strong man, whose suffering was so plainly depicted in every lineament.

"O! I 'm so sorry to see ye here. We uns was sure ye 'd got away and gone back to hum; why did n't ye?" she exclaimed, in a piteous accent of regret.

"Ad, I come here to see ye, an' ye mought a' knowed I warnt agoin' untwell I did."

"O! but I wisht ye hed. I made sure ye hed. Mister Gilbert lowed ye hed last night, and when I fust looked up and seen ye standin' there, I thought ye was a harnt. Ye gimme sich a start I ain' got over it yit."

"What were you uns doing with Mister Gilbert?" he demanded peremptorily.

Without noticing the suspicion in his voice and expression, she told him. It was sweet to think of her going through the night to enlist the aid of any one in his behalf; he never thought of Ruth at all. But he knew that her expressed confidence in Gilbert had been egregiously misplaced.

"Ad, do ye know who warnt your pap to look for me?"

"Why, Lor, Buck, no one. He was most surprised as ye was. He 's come to live with Jim, and Jim 'lowed to send ye word, fust chanct he got, not to come no more. I do wish ye hed n't," she exclaimed, with sincere and fervent regret.

"Why?" he asked, simply, but yearning to know that her regret was elicited by his own perilous position.

"Why!" she repeated, scornfully. "Any fool ought ter know why. They 's been trouble enough along of it. I 'm sure none of we uns has had any peace sence ye come."

"And me—did ye think of me, Ad? Did ye think what I 've been through for ye, all for ye, Ad?" he asked piteously, coming nearer to her, and then passionately: "But, Ad, I 'd go through ten thousand deaths fer ye. Ye know how I love ye, Ad; do n't put me off no longer, Ad; I 've come to ask you once and for all, will ye be my wife?"

"Why, Lor, Buck, ye know I carnt; how ye do talk! it's onpossible, and ye know it," she exclaimed, seeking refuge in the first expedient that presented itself to escape the confusion that beset her at his impassioned plea.

But the family feud that seemed to her to suffice for an insuperable barrier was wholly without the

"SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A WOOD NYMPH."

calculations of this man, whose fierce spirit had recked nothing of consequences and dared all to win her. "Who is it?" he asked, fiercely, his face which had softened in the tender light of hope, growing again haggard, set, and hard, the fever of hate in his pulsing veins. "Is it the fine gentleman you go to at night a pretendin' to get to holp me?"

She flashed an indignant glance at him in reply; but her indignation could not hide the tell-tale color that flushed her cheeks at a thought she had not dared to even whisper to her own heart.

"Ye air bereft, Buck Renfro. I never sot eyes on him afore last night, when I went thar with Miss Colbert, and I never spoke a word ter him in all my life."

"Then what were he adoin' here all day a star-gazin' at ye unbeknownst from behint a tree up yander?" he asked, bewildered, but grasping at any hope that might take from him this haunting fear.

A miracle could not have made more demands upon her credulity. And yet could she doubt the hasty, unpreconcerted disclosure, the painful, regretful fact, which his jealousy had wrung from him? Gilbert unseen, unknown, watching, perhaps protecting her!

No romantic maiden familiarized by song and story with the chivalrous devotion of the cavalier worshiping from afar at the shrine of his lady fair could have grasped more surely the significance of this disclosure than did this untutored mountain girl. The tell-tale color that flamed into her cheeks was heightened tenfold. A thousand questions, selfish, unthinking questions, thronged thick upon her, oblivious to the pain they might inflict upon him,

to whom her lightest word was fraught with hope or despair. But before she could frame one, before he could read, and rightly divine the meaning of that glad light that leaped into her eyes, which made all the world seem strangely transfigured to her, and gave a deeper blue to their iris, a luminous quality, and a lambert glow to their sapphire depths such as those orbs had never known before, a strange, a startling, and a terrible thing happened to rob them of their suddenly acquired glory.

Joe Bob Colbert, weary and worn with his fruitless exertions through the long night and the arduous day, had at last returned to his home to snatch some hasty sustenance for the redoubled efforts yet to be made. Incited by a foolish hope, in one last despairing attempt to coerce his mercy, Ruth did what she should never have done. She told him why Buck Renfro had taken his life into his hands to come amongst the enemies who thirsted for his blood, not in a spirit of daring, not with hate in his heart, but incited by the noblest, and at the same time the gentlest passion that imbues the breast of man. She was so far from comprehending the mountaineer's nature, the feelings that were the very fiber of his being, the avenging Deity whose dictates he blindly obeyed.

Quietly he pushed his plate away, and taciturn, undemonstrative as ever, revealing upon the surface no trace of the tempestuous passions raging within, he left her, and came straight away in search of the little coquette. To him was apparent in it all the hand of that avenging God of the mountaineer and the ancient Hebrew, who mercilessly demanded the blood atonement, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a

tooth, a life for a life. He felt himself but the blind, obedient instrument of fate, whose decrees he was to fulfill. But he had not hoped to find his foe so soon. He came to wring from the girl, if possible, some confession of her lover's whereabouts.

Silently treading the winding path that led into the little glade from the creek, the unhoped for spectacle suddenly burst upon his sight, and he threw his rifle forward with a warning cry to the girl, whose back was turned toward him, and who was between him and his enemy:

"Stand aside, Ad Crenshaw, or I 'll shoot through ye."

The hunted man, alert to every danger, had caught the first movement of his relentless pursuer. It was too late to attempt flight. Throwing his own weapon forward, he sprang away from the girl, who, glancing around at the warning cry, and seeing Joe Bob Colbert, threw herself again before him, pitieously begging them not to shoot. It is doubtful of what avail her interference would have been; but the next moment, realizing the utter uselessness of his empty rifle which he had instinctively raised, and which had twice fooled him, Renfro, in impotent rage, hurled it from him, and pushing the girl aside stood forth unarmed, but in fierce, unyielding defiance at the mercy of his foe.

Amazed at this unexpected and unaccountable denouement, Joe Bob Colbert for a moment stood tense and rigid, with his unerring rifle aimed at the heart of his defenseless foe, his finger upon the trigger, and then slowly the muzzle sank. For a moment he stood regarding him intently, holding his life in his hand, but the other faced him with folded arms and erect bearing.

"Shoot!" he said, with infinite scorn. "I 've thrown my weapon away, and ye shorely ain't feared o' me now." There was infinite if tragic defiance in his words, as in every lineament of his face, and every line of his erect figure from his boots with their bright spurs to his broadbrimmed slouch hat.

"No, and never was, Buck Renfro. We 'd a met afore to-day ef I 'd a had my way, and on ekal footing, as we will now."

Deliberately Joe Bob Colbert threw his rifle down upon the ground, and unbuckled the belt that held his cartridges, and the pistols in their holsters. Drawing his knife from its sheath, he threw the balance of his armament upon the ground beside his gun. "Foot to foot, hand to hand, and heart to heart we 'll fight hit out. Draw yer knife."

There is in every courageous heart respect for a brave enemy, and despite the strictures of old Abram Crenshaw, Joe Bob Colbert knew that Buck Renfro was no coward. Revenge was too sweet, too long deferred, to have it cloyed with the scorn and contumely of an unarmed man. This would not be revenge, not retribution, but cowardly assassination. The girl had stood dazed, horror-stricken as the men calmly, with a horrible calmness, prepared for the deadly encounter.

"Go!" Joe Bob Colbert said to her sternly. It broke the spell, and she fled from the fateful spot, thinking only of Gilbert Garrett, in whom Ruth Colbert had placed such confidence to avert this disaster. Buck Renfro had told her that he had but lately left this very vicinity. Perhaps she could overtake him in time to tell him what impended. How he could possibly prevent it she never stopped to think.

With firm tread the men advanced, and met half way in that little glade. All around them the peaceful suggestions of spring, with its awakening life, its bursting blooms, and caroling birds, the one so soon to have their snowy petals stained with blood, and trampled under the struggling feet, the other to be stricken into silence by the strange clash of the knives and the harsh grinding of steel on steel, which alone broke the silence of that sylvan scene as the two men with tense and frigid frames weaved back and forth in deadly combat. Buck Renfro found himself fired by a fierce exaltation—the strain under which he had so long labored, the dreadful anticipation, the perpetual watching, was all behind him now—before him a foe whom he could confront.

Taken aback by the suddenness and swiftness of the assault, his adversary projecting himself upon him with the celerity and fury of a springing panther, Joe Bob Colbert parried in vain a savage stab, and striking wildly in return, slashed the empty air, his antagonist having sprung back in time to avoid it. Blind with fury, for the knife had stung him, Joe Bob Colbert rushed upon his agile enemy, striving with his superior strength to crush down the other's guard, but found it fairly matched by the dexterity of his foe, whose arm seemed nerved with steel, and by his own brute force his knife was stricken from his nerveless clasp, his wrist having struck the heavy shaft of the other's knife as the weapons clashed. Joe Bob Colbert threw up his left arm to ward off the fatal blow, but with sudden hope saw Renfro step back out of reach, apparently oblivious to the misfortune that had befallen him, and stepping quickly forward as if in pursuit, but

really to shield from sight the knife which lay upon the ground, Joe Bob Colbert crouched with his right hand behind him as if to spring, and with his eyes riveted upon those of his antagonist, stooped and grasped wildly for his weapon. But like a shot Renfro stepped in, and struck what would have been a fatal blow but for the shielding left arm upon which Colbert caught it. Twice this maneuver was repeated before he could regain his knife, and a warm stream of blood coursed down his rent sleeve, saturating it. But with his knife once more in his hand, oblivious to the lessons this bitter experience should have taught him, Joe Bob Colbert again rushed wildly at his adversary, who faded away before him, and then as he halted baffled, came back like a blinding flash, feinted, and as Colbert threw up his arm struck under it. A rib upon which the blade glanced alone prevented the blow from being fatal.

Colbert was the larger, stronger man, but lacked the elastic muscles which the younger man's sinuous movement betrayed. Nor could he match his skill in this method of mountain warfare. Buck Renfro had learned all its lore in other hard-fought fields. He would shift about, feinting, and drawing Colbert on, until deceived by that puzzling foot-work, and the dazzling feints, and having been fooled into wasting blows at the same shadows, Colbert stood uncertain, then Renfro's deadly hand shot in like a flash with its savage stab. It was impossible for Colbert to get him to stand, and fight as he had expected, foot to foot. Had he done so, the issue would have soon been decided.

But Buck Renfro knew that in his superior

quickness, dexterity, and skill lay his hope of success over his more powerful adversary. A scientist would have explained this unequal contest upon the well-known principle that a fragile body, driven with the force of a projectile against a much harder substance, will penetrate the latter with little or no injury to itself. A tallow candle can be shot through a wooden plank without particular injury to the candle. But the plank would smash the candle into atoms. Buck Renfro knew nothing of scientific theories, but he did know that as long as he was the projectile, the stronger, tougher man sustained all the iniury. Even though he protected himself from being struck in a vital spot, he sustained the shock, and it was fast telling upon him. It showed in the glassy, confused look in his tired eyes. But there was still strength in his rugged frame, dogged determination in his heart, danger in his armed hand. A chance blow might still snatch victory from defeat. Renfro had not escaped unscathed. More than once he had felt the keen edge of that deadly knife, and he knew the disastrous possibilities of a single misstep. Although to a spectator he might have appeared uninjured, his store of strength and energy had been severely taxed. The wounds he had received the night before, his long fast, and the ceaseless strain upon which he had so long been, were telling upon him. A single blow might serve to turn the tide against him. He did not blindly press his advantage, but warily as ever fenced with his foe, who was now upon the defensive, striving to break down his guard, and deliver the fatal blow without danger to himself. He saw the terror grow in Colbert's eyes and the cold sweat stand upon his

blood-stained brow, and he felt at last that his time was come. Back and forth they strained, silent but for their labored breathing, which now came from both in catching gasps as they struggled.

So intent were they with eyes riveted upon each other, that in that intense stillness neither saw nor heard a newcomer, who ran hastily up from the creek upon the winding path that Colbert had so lately trod, and pausing at a sudden turn that revealed the scene to him called upon them loudly to desist. Raising his rifle he called again upon them unheeded, and then as Colbert put forth all his despairing strength in a lunge which was avoided by his enemy, who darted in with uplifted knife to deal the fatal blow, the sharp crack of a rifle rang out, and the knife fell from the pulseless hand of Buck Renfro. Baffled in the very moment of the dearly bought victory, the hunted man turned with despair plainly depicted upon every feature of his hueless face to confront this new enemy, who seemed to have dropped from the clouds, while Joe Bob Colbert staggered back, and stood with trembling limbs all unnerved, now that the fearful ordeal was over, gazing bewildered at Gilbert Garrett.

"Sorry to have been compelled to enforce my request in this theatrical way, but I had no choice," he said, suavely, as if apologizing for intruding upon a drawing-room conversation. "Hope I have n't hurt your hand much. It 's only a twenty-two bullet, and if no bones are broken will quickly heal. I did think to imitate the dime novel hero, whose bullet never varies a hair-breadth's from the mark, and knock the knife unharmed out of your hand, but I found that shooting at a man is different from

perforating a squirrel's eye, and despite all the practice I have had lately the barrel wabbled a bit—glad to see I have done no more harm than I have," looking at Renfro's hand, from which a tiny stream of blood flowed, showing the wound inflicted by the small-bore squirrel rifle.

"Never mind your knife, I will take care of that," he cried, warningly, as Renfro made a motion toward it, but halted at the command, and the menacing way in which the little weapon was thrown forward. Then, stepping over to where Colbert's arms lay, Gilbert possessed himself of them, saying, "If I shoot again, which I hope you will not force me to do, it will be to more purpose. Throw away that knife, Mr. Colbert, and both of you consider yourselves under arrest. To resist, as you see, will be madness. I promise that you both shall have equal and exact justice as far as I can guarantee it. If you are wise, Mr. Renfro, you will surely see that your only hope of safety lies in doing as I tell—thunderation!" he exclaimed, as Buck Renfro staggered forward sick and faint from the loss of blood, and in the revulsion following upon the fierce excitement of the fight, which had buoyed him up, endeavored to sit down, but collapsed completely, and with a long slide fell forward upon his face in the leaves.

Chapter XII.

Abram Crenshaw Sees a "Harnt."

THE darkness crept out of the deep-wooded glens, where it had mustered in secret, and gathered strength to venture out into the open, and the last lingering twilight of the warm May day gave way to the silvery glamor which the rising moon cast over mountain and valley. The voices of the day were hushed. The night-hawk, from its dim, recessional covert in the thicket high on the mountain-side, wheeled aloft, startling the echoes among the rocks with its wild screech, and then frightened the dreaming nestlings in the treetops with its down-swooping twang! The tree-toads attuned their pipes to sibilant vesper strains, and the hylodes trilled upon their throbbing lyres, and all the wary broods of night awoke to fare forth until the warbling matins of another dawn should sound their lullaby.

Moon-whitened, the narrow, straggling, stone-walled lane beside the Colbert cabin stretched down the slope into the valley like some still stream smoothly slipping down the long reaches to the engulfing woods below, which lay like verdurous seas grown still with night.

Adelaide Crenshaw came out upon the porch, and looking down the lane said, "Them calves has shorely sucked enough by now, and I reckon I 'd better fasten 'em up, and drive the cows to pastur, the simples will stand 'roun here all night alistenin' to their young 'uns bawlin'."

"Very well," said Ruth, who was wiping the supper dishes in the kitchen, "I will be through when you come back, and will go over to your sister's with you,—unless you would rather wait for other company," she added, mischievously.

"For goodness' sake let 's go 'fore that pesterin' 'Laigs' Hatfield comes," exclaimed the girl, in dismay. "I clean forgot he was about due agin tonight," and catching up her sunbonnet she drove the cows out of the "cuppens," and down the lane before her.

She had completed her task, and turned to retrace her steps, when she heard her name softly spoken, and wheeling around started back aghast at sight of a figure that appeared to her startled vision as suddenly and silently as an apparition standing beyond the wall, which had concealed him from view. Her knees trembled beneath her, and she grasped the wall to prevent herself from falling.

"Do n't ye know me; ye ain't askeered of me, Ad, shorely!" cried Buck Renfro, gazing with eager, hungry gaze into her white face and wide startled eyes.

"I be powerful glad to see ye, Ad, and ye 'll never know what I 've been through to do it, or how I've looked fo' this moment, but I'd ruther never have done it than to see ye look that way."

"I—I—I thought ye were a harnt, ye came so suddint and onexpected," she stammered, still gazing at him as if but half convinced.

"Ye shorely knew I wus n't dead; did n't Miss Ruth tell ye?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes; but I reckon it was hearing the others talk 'bout your being dead and buried over yander

whar that stone is sot up, and havin' to let on like it was so myself, and then seein' ye so onexpected—it were enough to give any one a start," she explained, defending her own weakness, which betrayed itself plainly enough in her agitated manner, her heaving bosom, the trembling hand upon the wall.

He smiled grimly. "So they all think I 'm dead and buried! Mr. Gilbert told me that; said the suhveyors sot up a rock next day nigh whar we fit to mark a boundry er suthin, and the folks roun' here took a notion they buried me thar, and he never 'lowed to tell 'em no better untwell I was well enough to git out o' here. He's a quare man. But a mighty fine man when ye larn how to take him—all the time apokin' fun at ye, and ef ye was a dyin' he 'd make ye believe ye war n't hurt a bit. He 's better 'n ary yerb doctor in the mountings, an' most as good as Miss Ruth herself, though he do n't know nothin' 'bout nussin' the sick. But she 's an angel. Ef there wus more wimmen like her they would be less men like me!"

"Indeed she is, and ye do well to favor her. They's mighty few would a forgive ye for what ye have brought on her and her 'n, Buck Renfro, let alone nuss ye as she done every minit she could spare from her own husband, stead o' restin' like everybody thought she was, an' she a needin' hit."

"That 's what worrits me, Ad," he exclaimed, with genuine distress. "I know I have done a heap o' wrong, but I never had nothin' to worrit me like that . Do n't ye 'low Joe Bob Colbert will ever git the use o' his left arm agin'?" he asked, with an accent of pitiable entreaty. "Ef they aint no bones

bruck, looks like hit 'd come back to him arter awhile."

"No," she said, with emphatic rejection of his hope. "The leaders is all cut, and drawd his hand up so he never will use it like he onct did, but he 's mighty techy 'bout hit, and nobody dast let on like they know hit. I 'lowed that ye mought be satisfied with that, and go long way from here, and leave we uns alone. But seems like ye aint," she said, bitterly.

In those few, poor, undemonstrative words Buck Renfro heard his fate pronounced. In them, too, he learned that the bitterest disappointment the heart of man can feel is satisfied revenge. All other dead-sea apples are as luscious fruit beside it. He had learned the truth of that old dogma as old as human nature, that Buddha, before Hillel and Jesus, had preached, "Hatred is not conquered by hatred, but by love."

"I wisht," he said slowly, but with the fervor of a great longing, "that he had shot me that day." With her striving to shield him from his enemy at the risk of her own life, death would have been so much sweeter than this! For what bitter guerdon had he striven that day to save his worthless life at the sacrifice of another's, upon whom depended the happiness of such an angel as Ruth Colbert?

For some moments she could feel, though she could not see, the eager, hungry gaze he bent upon her, for her head was averted, and her eyes downcast, and nervously she twitched off the heads of some wild wayside flowers with the switch she had used to drive the cows. He had been such a fierce, undaunted lover, that she had always heretofore stood in fear of him, even in his mildest moods.

But now for the first time all this was gone. A great change had somehow come upon him.

"Good-bye, Ad," he said at last, and his voice was weighted with woe. "I have been a fool—a blind fool—to ever think ye could keer for the likes o' me. I 've stayed on here day after day sence I got well, holin' up like a fox, and imposin' on Mr. Gilbert, a promisin' him every day to go the next afore somebody found me out, and every night sence I been able to git out a bed a creepin' roun' here hopin' to see ye. I never stopped to think what I might be a bringin' on ye, Ad. God knows I've brung enough, as ye say. I would give my life mighty willin' to ondo hit; but in course I can't do that. They aint but one thing I can do," he said, desparingly. "I kin go. Good-bye, Ad." He grasped her trembling hand with a sudden return of his old, fierce, dauntless manner, and pressed it in his with wild energy, as he bent upon her a burning glance, and the next moment he was gone.

Gone, so swiftly and suddenly that she would have hardly known whither had she turned to look instead of fleeing as she did toward the house; gone so mysteriously that a long-legged youth who had turned up from the path along the creek some moments before, and dimly descrying their forms, stood gazing with awakening curiosity upon them, found himself baffled by the sudden disappearance. The next moment he remembered that the wall near that point ran along the bank of a ravine, the same one that Gilbert had come the cropper over, and knew that the vanished man must have stepped down into it. Afire with curiosity to discover who this strange man could be who kept such strange nocturnal trysts,

"HE GRASPED HER TREMBLING HAND."

and divining that he would leave the ravine where it embouched into the woods, young Hatfield sped noiselessly forward to intercept and view him. But he was only gratified by a fleeting glimpse of the stranger's form, a glimpse, however, that aroused dormant memories in him, memories as vague and intangible as the light that dimly irradiated the sylvan scene. Somewhere, somehow, at some time past he had seen this man before, but where, or when he could not to save himself recall. Skulking in the shadows, making himself even more round-shouldered than nature had, like an ugly fate he followed, determined to discover the identity of the other, and dissolve the doubt that tormented him. But instead of striding along the path his quarry penetrated the verdurous glooms, and winding, mossy ways, with the celerity and skill of a fox. He seemed as sympathetic an element of the night's mystic witchery as the soft-winged nestling moths and poising murmurers abroad beneath the brooding galaxy this beautiful spring night. The next moment he had disappeared, and the baffled spy, who had entered an unknown world when he left the path, stood disconcerted and alone, amid the dewy somnolence of the rank woodland vegetation. He did not dare to advance lest the other, who had vanished, should be lying in wait for him, and, incontinently abandoning the pursuit, he retraced his steps.

He found Joe Bob Colbert sitting alone upon his porch, placidly smoking his corncob pipe, his left arm still in a sling, although there was really no longer use for that, but he could not bring himself yet to admit that it would always be helpless, preferring to delude himself with the belief that the

"AMID THE DEWY SOMNOLENCE OF WOODLAND VEGETATION."

ghastly wounds inflicted by Buck Renfro's knife had not entirely healed.

"Adelaide 's jes' gone over to her sister's with Ruth," he informed Hatfield, when they had exchanged greetings. "Ef ye put out arter 'em, I reckon ye kin ketch up afore they cross ther crick."

"I reckon I 'll jes' bide here with ye fer a bit," young Hatfield responded, gloomily.

"I 'll be glad to have ye, but do n't do hit on my account. I ain't lonesome, and besides I reckon Abram Crenshaw will be 'long toreckly. I 'lowed ye come to see Ad, and ef ye want to do hit ye 'll have to go arter her, for they do n't kalklate to git back afore bedtime."

But the other seated himself upon the porch, apparently oblivious to Colbert's evident desire to speed the parting guest, and asked, "Ain' they been nobody else here this evening?"

Colbert looked at him in some surprise. "No," he said, simply; but the monosyllable was as much an interrogation as a negation. The youth did not, however, seem disposed to explain his cause for asking the question, and for some time neither spoke. The mist-hung brook mumured ceaselessly beneath its filmy shroud, and the mystic whippoorwill, like an ominous, wandering voice, poured forth its plaint to the dreaming echoes of the mountainside.

At last a hurried step was heard approaching along the lane, and in the moonlight the form of Abram Crenshaw was seen. He had been in the habit of coming over, and sitting with Joe Bob Colbert until bedtime, and had not missed an evening since that fatal one upon which Joe Bob Colbert had

barely managed to reach his own house by Gilbert Garrett's aid before succumbing to the loss of blood, and the ghastly wounds he had received. He was later than usual, but this could not account for his hurried manner and his strange way of glancing over his shoulder, as if in dread anticipation of some pursuing terror.

"What 's the matter," exclaimed Joe Bob Colbert, noting the peculiar pallor and rigor of his face in the wan moonlight as he came nearer, "ye look like ye mought a met up with a ghost on yer way here."

The words were spoken merely in good-natured banter, and he was totally unprepared for the old man's answer.

"I have," he replied, with strange calmness. "But I 'low ye was the right one to see hit, stead o' me."

"Why—why—what do ye mean," cried Joe Bob Colbert, taken completely aback by the old man's strange words and awesome manner.

"I seen hit, face to face, in the woods nigh whar hits buried thar. I took the nigh cut through the woods 'count of being a little late, and the moon bein' up light enough to see by, and all of a suddint as I come along hit rose up right thar afore me. I seen hit as plain as I see ye. Hit was comin' toards me when I fust seen hit, moving through a little open space atween the trees, and thar I stood no more able to move than one o' the trees beside me. I could n't lift hand or foot. I 'd a hollered, but my tongue was numb, and thar was a quar chokin' in my throat. I felt my breath agoin'."

The old man paused, and wiped with the back

of his hand the cold sweat that broke out upon his brow at the gruesome recollection. A mousing owl on muffled wing drifted by like a specter into the woods, and the next moment the leafy vault was filled with its soft, tremulous cry. To the rightly informed naturalist it was but the same song of life and love, the same wooing to its listening mate whose echo responded across the misty valley, as the song thrush carolled forth at dawn. But to the superstitious montaineer it was a sound of doleful foreboding, and Abram Crenshaw shuddered as he heard it. Leaning forward, Joe Bob Colbert bent upon him a gaze in whose fearful absorption was displayed the terrible vitality every word possessed for him. "And then?" he asked, hoarsely.

"And then hit stopped almost in reach of me, and started back as if he dasn't lay hands on me yit. I could see hit as plain as I see ye—every feature of hit's face as plain as life. And then seemed like the spell dropped from me, and I could use my limbs agin, and I put out from thar at the best lick I could hit. But I know twan't no use. I mought as well stayed. I know my time has come," he said, despairingly. "And thar's that owl agin."

"Ye seen hit plain—could n't been fooled by nuthin', nor nobody else?"

"As plain as I see ye, and a most as close. Hit war Buck Renfro's form and face, same as life."

"Buck Renfro! That 's who hit was," suddenly exclaimed Hatfield, starting forward from the obscurity of the shadowing honeysuckle-vines where he had listened eagerly to all that had passed. Surely there is a magic in names, and many a secret store has been unlocked since Ali Baba's time by a verbal

key. "Buck!" how plain it all was to him now, how well he remembered the first time he had heard that name, when, fleeing from the spring at Mrs. Jackson's quilting, Adelaide Crenshaw had been startled into pronouncing it. He knew now where he had seen the mysterious stranger whom he had surprised talking with her over the wall in the lane. A few nights before he had been coon-hunting with Gilbert Garrett, and as he stood talking with him in his yard upon their return from the hunt, a man had silently started up the walk toward the house, but suddenly seeing them disappeared in the shrubbery upon the lawn. Surprised by his strange conduct—for little escaped the mountaineer's keen, furtive, glancing eyes—he had turned with amaze to Gilbert, but the latter at first professed to have noticed nothing, but afterwards lightly said it was doubtless only one of the surveyors who were still stopping with him, and hastily dismissed the subject as well as the mountaineer. He had been but half-satisfied at the time, and thought he had noted an air of annoyance and confusion about the young squire. The hour was late, the house dark, and all its inmates apparently wrapped in slumber—it was a little strange to find one of them thus skulking about, and starting guiltily at sight of its owner standing upon the threshold. He would hardly have shared Gilbert's assumed unconcern had it been his house; but now that, too, was explained. Though he had but caught a fleeting glimpse, the form, the movement, the man was the same that he had seen at the spring, and again that night in the lane, and that Abram Crenshaw had met upon his way back to Gilbert Garrett's creeping through the woods to

avoid such a rencounter; Adelaide Crenshaw's mysterious suitor—Buck Renfro.

It was all plausible enough now that the jealous lover had woven trifles light as air into confirmations strong as proof of Holy Writ; but the two men stared at one another in speechless surprise. Buck Renfro in the flesh, not in spirit, but alive and well, moving fearlessly among them, laughing at their folly—it was a galling realization!

"An' ye told me ye left him lying thar daid!" exclaimed Abram Crenshaw, bitterly.

"I told ye I seen him fall on his face, and left him thar. I like to not a got home myself. But ye tole me he war dead and buried, and a stone sot up over him."

"That lyin' Jim Renfro tole me that, and pinted out the stone, with some letters Mr. Gilbert had cut on it, and 'lowed it wer his name. I ain't sho 'bout hit yit," he added, looking suspiciously at Hatfield, loath to believe that he had been such a dupe, and still more loath to believe that his daughter, his own flesh and blood, had so turned against him.

"Ye air shore ye know Buck Renfro, or his ghost when ye see 'em, though—well, a ghost doan' leave tracks like a human. Thar 's tracks in that ravine, for I seen 'em," replied the youth, with conviction. "Whar ye seen the ghost is in a straight line twixt whar I seen him and Ad talkin', to Mr. Gilbert's house. I 'll agree to never tech liquor agin until muley cows sprouts hons ef ye do n't find them tracks all along the way, and the man as made 'em at the end."

For a moment the fierce old man gazed at the

youth, and then finding nothing to combat this unanswerable logic, turned, and said to Colbert:

"This all comes o' your wife, Joe Bob. I got nothin' to say agin her. She's an angel ef ever a woman was, but her ways ain't our ways, and I doan' onderstand them. Ye tole me yerself she tole ye 'bout Buck Renfro coming to see Ad. I mought a knowed there was somethin' quare 'bout Ad a'comin' to live here with ye arter I went to live with Jim and Sarey. Yo' wife may see her way clar to havin' that man with Steve Crenshaw's blood on his hands crawlin' in here like a reptile to steal my darter, but hit were a sorry day for ye, Joe Bob, when he come over the mounting. He come, and he's here yit. Man's fust trouble come 'long o' ther sarpent a deceivin' woman. This one has wound hisself 'bout my darter's, and yo' wife, and that young reptile over yander hes taken him into his nest like a brother. Seems like he has come to stay," he said, grinning horribly in his fierce satirical humor. And then with his clenched fist striking the puncheon floor of the porch a blow that shook the rafters, he said: "And by God he will stay. I 'll plant him this time myself, and plant him so damn deep that his ghost will never scratch out, and hell won't have to open far for him to fall in."

Chapter XIII.

A Midnight Surprise.

GILBERT GARRETT was alone in his room, his sanctum, "The Temple of Justice," as he had facetiously dubbed it upon receiving his appointment as Justice of the Peace. With the trophies and accoutrements of the chase, which were the most conspicuous features of the apartment, the name would have appeared to the most obtuse observer as a pure pleasantry, although an old print of Justice, conventionally blind, adorned the only space on the walls that was not devoted to sporting scenes, or taken up by the deer-head racks, upon which were hung guns, rods, rifles, dog-whips, dip-nets, spurs, martingales, minnow-seines, and similar gear dear to the heart of the sportsman. A real wool-sack reposed in a corner, from which it had never been resurrected since Gilbert, in a spirit of humor, had made Zeb fill it at the sheep-shearing. The lettering over the door of this unique apartment—"Abandon hope ye litigants who enter here"—may have had something to do with the undisturbed repose which this insignia of judicial dignity had enjoyed, but the eccentric way in which this erratic young squire viewed the duties of his office had more to do with it. He had quickly found that the mountaineer's were as honest as they were ignorant, and the differences among them in their dealings with one another arose generally from mistakes which he

preferred to privately investigate and rectify, rather than to be bothered with a petty lawsuit. The way in which he decided the famous case of Travers vs. Harner may serve as a fair sample of the primeval method in which justice was dispensed by this mountain Solomon. Time, which makes all things right, somehow fails to heal old wounds in the mountains, where differences are treasured up with miserly care against a day of settlement. And, although this little misunderstanding over a litter of pigs, had occurred years before, Lishe Travers and Mat Harner had never spoken to each other since, and at first it threatened to lead to one of those feuds which are so easily engendered in this region. But Travers, strong in his sense of right, had taken his case to old Abner Garrett, who had died before it could be tried, and this cause celebre had mildewed upon the docket, but remained perennially fresh and green in the hearts of the litigants. The facts were as follows:

Travers and Harner each had a razor-back sow to litter in the spring. In the mountains all the stock run at large, the hogs being marked by certain cabalistic cuts and slashes of the ear; but in this case neither of the men was able to catch his pigs to mark, and they disappeared during the summer, although each, as he supposed, gained occasional glimpses of his stock. Neither knew the other had failed to mark his pigs, and whenever either one saw an unmarked porker dash away with a frightened grunt through the undergrowth he concluded it was his own. In the round-up in the fall Harner gathered in seven out of the dozen pigs that his old sow had dropped in the spring, which was a very

good average for the mountains where foxes, wild cats, and other enemies levy tribute. Travers could find but three, and chancing by Harner's cabin discovered the seven unmarked porkers, to which he laid claim, and identified them beyond doubt by all his neighbors. The Cove was about equally divided between the two litigants, as Gilbert found by casually questioning all concerned, while he put the suitors off from day to day. One bright spring morning he sent for old man Harner, who accompanied Zeb down to the creek, where he found the young squire placidly seated on the bank bait-fishing for bass. Lishe Travers was already there, and both were then informed that he was ready to hear their case.

"But I haint got my witnesses!" protested old Harner, in consternation.

"And I haint got mine nuther," echoed Travers, in equal dismay.

"Who are they?" asked Gilbert, as he transferred a bachelor perch from the creek to the big minnow-bucket at his feet.

In the midst of the enumeration, he hooked a big bass, and adjourned court. Both mountaineers watched with eager and amazed interest his deft manipulation of the little rod which, with its multiplying reel, finally overcame the bronze-backed warrior who floated feebly upon its mottled side, and under Gilbert's direction Travers scooped it up in the landing net.

"Let 's take a drink before we open court again," said Gilbert, proffering his flask, and for the first time since their falling out the mountaineers amazed, and in spite of themselves amused, drank together.

"Now, gentlemen," said Gilbert, when the bottle had passed around, "this is a mighty busy time, everybody putting in their crop, and to save the interests of the noble art of husbandry in the Cove I have been around and examined all the witnesses you have enumerated, and there is no use stopping the plows to bring them here. I 'm going to decide this case, and save you both the trouble and cost of subpoenaing witnesses."

He stooped and picked up the minnow-bucket, and raising the lid called their attention to the fish in it. They looked at one another, and then at Gilbert, dumfounded. He was to all intents and purposes perfectly sober. "Pretty nice mess of fish," he said.

They hastened to agree with him.

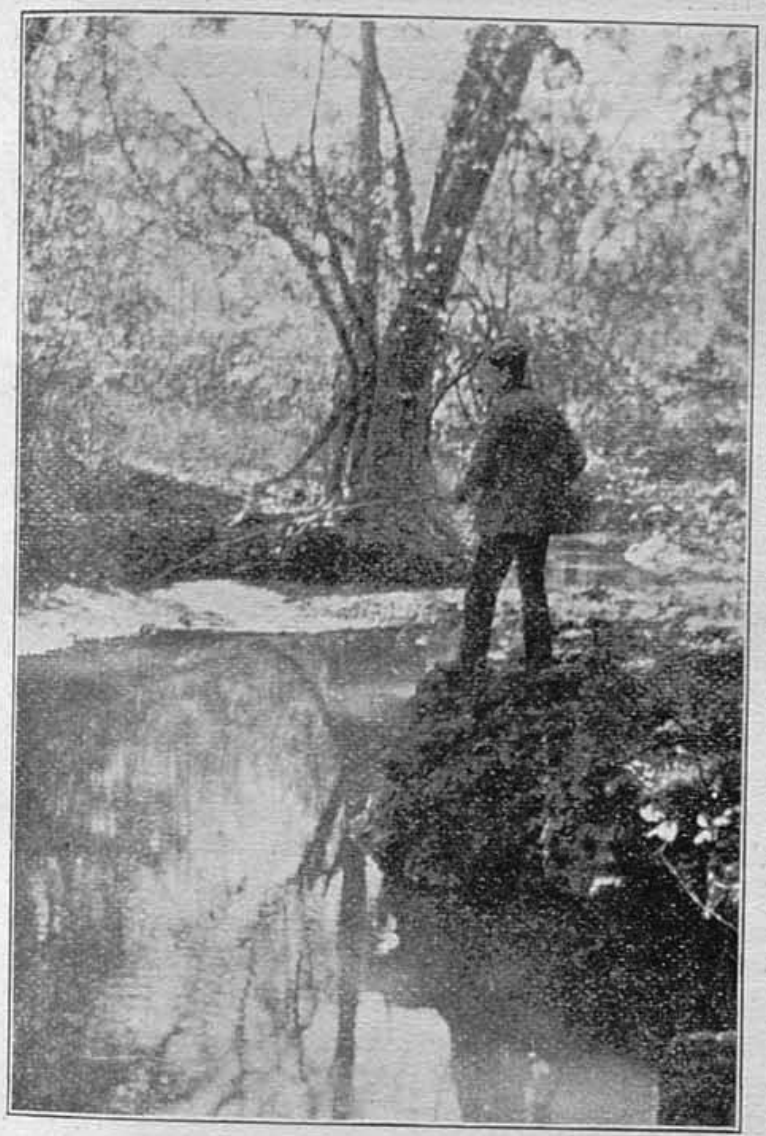
"They are mine, are they not?" he asked.

They assented in growing amaze.

He stepped to the edge of the water, and turned the fish out into it. With a scurry they were gone.

"Now, gentlemen, I hope neither one of you will catch any of my fish, because, being the squire myself, I do n't know where I can find another magistrate who will be smart enough to determine that they are really mine if I have to sue you for them. Court is now adjourned. Have another drink!"

As may be imagined from this original method of administering the law, the impedimenta we are accustomed to associate with the name was conspicuous by its absence from this unique "Temple of Justice." Nowhere to be seen were any of those invaluable repositories of our rights and wrongs, the law books, in which legislators and judges have,



"THEY FOUND HIM FISHING FOR BASS"

with an untiring spirit, painted in all their multiform manifestations triumphant truth, and hideous, hydra-headed wrong, but painted them with such art, such dextrous skill, in colors softening so delicately down, that Justice herself were puzzled to tell where the separate hues begin or end, and the mere mortal who believes himself wronged by his neighbor will labor long and wisely before he finds out whether he be really hurt or not.

Just at present Gilbert's presence in the abiding place of equity seemed to have about as much reference to his judicial functions as the room itself bore to its name. He was diligently occupied in testing the spring of several favorite fishing-rods, and an open fly-book upon the table beside him disclosed an array of freshly-assorted flies and leaders. He was preparing for an early start in the morning, realizing that in fishing, as in many other avocations, it is the early fish that catches the fly. His quondam guests, Griscom and the surveyors, had just retired, and there was not another light in the house save this in the Temple of Justice. With the cold neutrality of an impartial judge he tried all the rods, and having weighed and found wanting all but one, whose delicate balance was in perfect harmony, he delivered final judgment in its favor, and was executing sentence upon the others, remanding them to their racks, when he heard the knob softly turned and the door pushed open just wide enough to admit a woolly head through the crack, and reveal the face of old Zeb, upon which was an aspect of inquiry.

"Come in," said Gilbert, rightly interpreting the old darkey's look, and divining that he had not

knocked to avoid attracting attention. His preternatural air of mystery, and labored attempt at secrecy, ever since that night Gilbert had brought Buck Renfro home with him, was enough to excite suspicion in itself, if there had been anybody about to note or care what it portended. Zeb and Aunt Sookey, his wife, were the only ones beside Ruth Colbert, whom Gilbert had taken into his confidence. Old Joshua Gilbert, his grandfather, like all the pioneers, had built with an eye to substantiability, as was amply attested by the present condition of the place, despite its long neglect and misuse. A cabin back of the great house, which had been the home of the overseer in slavery times, was in a fair state of preservation, and here he had hidden Buck Renfro, doing everything possible for him during his illness.

Zeb squeezed through the narrow aperture, and closing the door behind him as softly as he had opened it, said, jerking his thumb in a peculiar, characteristic way over his shoulder toward the cabin which Renfro occupied, "He tole me to ax yo' ef he could see yo' to-night afoah yo' go to bed." Zeb had never pronounced Renfro's name since his coming, always referring to him as "He," with that peculiar back-handed jerk of the thumb towards the cabin.

"Why, certainly. I 'll see him at once. Where is he? In his room?"

"No, sah. He 's outside de back doah. I seen him gwine away shohtly arter sundown, and toreckly he come back, and been awaitin' impatient ever sence."

"Why did n't you tell me sooner? Bring him

in at once. Perhaps he wishes to go away to-night; I hope so, at least."

"Yes, sah; I does powfully hope so, too," echoed Zeb, fervently. "I been a 'spectin' dem mountingeers to come down on us kerwhallop eny minute, wit he fool kerryins on—a slippin' away fum hyar ebbery night, and a comin' back agin. Ef ebber dey git on he trail once dey gwine to run de track back hyar jes' same as dem houns o' your'n arter a fox. I ain' slep nary a night sence he been prodjickin roun' dat way. I doan' see why he doan' go long home. Ef he 's well enough to go pirootin' round here ebbery night he 's shohly well enough to git dar. I wish yo'd des up and tell him dat his room's better dan he comp'ny, and he hab to go. Dey ain' no tellin' what 's gwine to come ob dis, and de quicker he clar out o' here de better fo' all on us. I nebber got no chance to tell you ontil de odder gemmens gone to bed," he explained.

"All right, bring him in, Zeb, and I 'll do my best to speed the parting guest for his own good."

"Ain' dat winder open? I reckon I better close de blinds," said the cautious old darkey, and tiptoeing across the room, he softly made the shutters fast, and then subjected the rest of the apartment to a close scrutiny.

Gilbert watched with a half-amused smile these abnormal and unnecessary precautions, which were prompted, he knew, by the old negro's fears, not for his own, but for his young master's safety. But when he had departed as stealthily as he had come the smile faded from Gilbert's face, and a tender look came into his eyes—the dumb, dog-like fidelity

and solicitude of the old negro was touching, however groundless his fears were.

"What unaccountable creatures these negroes are," he mused. "To think of that old coon lavishing an affection he never felt for his own flesh and blood upon me, who have no claim upon it and never turned my hand over to deserve it. I suppose it is a survival in them of the old instinct in man, which found its most universal expression in the dogma, 'The King can do no wrong.' The old-time negro's master is his king."

His musings were interrupted by the entrance of Buck Renfro, after whom Zeb, remaining outside, closed the door with the same noiseless stealth.

"I 've come to tell ye good-bye, Mr. Gilbert," said the mountaineer, softly, "and to thank ye for all ye 've done for me. It 's mighty little I can do, or say, but I feel powerful—"

"Pshaw! Don't go to poking fun at me now because the circumstances attending your visit deprived me of the pleasure of giving you more hospitable entertainment. You always were a great joker. A man who can bury himself under a surveyor's corner-stone in one cove, and then come to life in another, is pretty hard to beat as a practical joker. What do you suppose your friends here in Blue Lick, who believe you have been translated to the ethereal Paradise, will think when they hear of you hale and hearty at the next dance in Paradise Cove?" said Gilbert, goodnaturedly, endeavoring with cheerful badinage to chase away the air of utter dejection upon the other.

"I reckon they 'll hear about it afore then," was

the unexpected answer. "I come upon old Abram Crenshaw to-night as I was comin' back through the woods. I was walkin' long with my head down, not thinkin' or keerin' much whar I went, or who I met, when I most run into him afore I seen him. He stood for a minute, and then run. I 'lowed he must a thought I was a harnt, or he never would a turned. I could a killed the old fool a dozen times that fust night I come here; he ain't got no quittin' sense, and would fight a buzz-saw ef he fell out with hit. But I reckon he 'll find out I warn't no harnt afore long. So I guess I better be goin'. I only wanted to say good-bye, and to thank ye."

"Cheer up, old fellow," exclaimed Gilbert, divining the cause of his dejection, and slapping him cheerily upon the shoulder. "Do n't think there is but one girl in the world. There are a lot of 'em. Now, I 'll let you into a little secret that you do n't seem to have discovered. It is the difficulty of the conquest that is alluring to an adventurous nature like yours, and the hopelessness of this infatution has been its charm for you. I know there are lots of prettier girls in Paradise Cove who would give their eyes to get you, and I could tell 'em how—just convince you that you would have to risk your life to do it, that 's all."

The mountaineer looked as if he appreciated Gilbert's well-meant encouragement, though it failed miserably of solace to him; but he made no reply, and for a few moments stood staring abstractedly into vacancy.

"Somehow I can't help getting interested in these strange creatures," mused Gilbert, looking at him

critically as he stood a prey to the passion that gnawed his heart ,and showed upon his face. "They are so blamed *human*."

"Well, I reckon I better be agoin'," he exclaimed, starting from his fit of abstraction, and holding out his hand.

"I 'm very sorry; that is, of course, I 'm very glad to have you go, and I hope you will call—I mean I hope you will not call again very soon," exclaimed Gilbert, in his droll way, determined to call up a smile to that haggard face, and grasping the outstretched hand warmly in his own. "I never was so glad in my life to see anybody—go."

The mountaineer smiled in spite of himself at this strange farewell—the words in such contrast to the manner and the warm, sincere handclasp of the disinterested man, who had befriended him at such risk in his hour of greatest extremity. He knew intuitively his horror of heroics and sentimental protestations, a mood which jumped with his own. They were both men with whom performance went before promise, men of action, not of idle boasts. Without a word he returned the other's warm clasp, and turned toward the door. He had expected to find Zeb awaiting him, and when he opened the door and looked out into the great dark hall, he hesitated, for as much at home as he was in the trackless woods, he was at a loss which way to turn here.

"Is n't Zeb there," exclaimed Gilbert in surprise, looking up and noting his absence. "Wait! I will show you the way," and catching up the lamp he preceded him out into the hall, but halted at a low "hiss," and peering down the dark length of the

passage descried the old negro at the farther end, standing at one of the long transoms that adorned either side of the door. For a moment longer he continued peering out, and then dropping the curtain back in its place darted on tiptoe toward them, exclaiming under his breath, "Blow out dat light, or take hit out o' here."

Gilbert stepped back into the room with it, and setting it down stared in amaze at the old darkey.

"Dey 's come!" was all he said.

There was no need to ask who. The old negro's wild expression, his drawn features, a certain pallor which showed despite his dusky skin, all betokened that his fears had at last been realized.

"Are you sure, Zeb?" asked Gilbert, reluctant to believe the worst, and hoping that the old negro had been victimized by his fears into imagining what he dreaded. "What have you seen to make you roll your eyes that way—I declare they 're all whites."

"I ben a heahin' suthin' ever sence 'he' come in heah. I was sittin' out dere in de dark, and fust I thought one o' de houns got out de kennel, and was tiptoeing cross de poach, and den I heah suthin' soun' mighty lak whisperin' front o' de doah, and I crept up dare close, and look out froo dem lill leaded panes, but I cahn't see nothin' er heah nothin', and I jes' 'bout made up ma mind hit were de win' I hearn, aldo ebbery ting look mighty still out dere in de moonlight, when I see a shadder movin'. I could 'n see nothin' but de shadder, an' toreckly anodder shadder jined it, and foh a minute or too dem two shadders wus mixed togedder, and den one o' 'em come out from de odder, and get longer

and longer, and I see de man dat were makin' it were comin' toards de front o' de house, and jes' den yo come out wif de lamp, and I hissed to yo'. De next ting I see de man plain, wid de moonlight fair on he face. Hit were Misser Abram Crenshaw. Den I knowed who de odder shadder wer—hit only made one arm. Seems lak I could see shadders ebbery where den, but I doan know whedder dey was men's shadders or not—I nebber stopped to see."

For some moments Gilbert stared mutely at the old darkey. He knew that the house was securely fastened; for the first time in years Zeb had bolted and barred the doors and windows every night since the arrival of Buck Renfro. The house had been built in pioneer times, when a man's home had to be his castle, and the heavy old oak doors and shutters were secured by iron bars. Gilbert felt that he could hold it against the whole Cove. But he was taken aback by the suddenness and unexpectedness of this surprise, while the suspense, the dread anticipation, the uncertainty as to what the besiegers were preparing to do, was unnerving.

Suddenly the suspense was ended by a thunderous pounding upon the door, which echoed through the house, rattling the windows and chamber doors, and setting the hounds in their kennels to barking furiously. Startling as it was to the sleepers above, aroused thus unceremoniously from their first light slumbers, it was a relief rather than otherwise to Gilbert. It afforded an opportunity for action. Anything was preferable to this terrible suspense.

The old darkey, too, seemed suddenly transformed. Although his face still betrayed traces of

excitement, the trembling horror attendant upon the first realization of his fears was gone, and he reached for one of the rifles on the racks with evident determination. The mountaineer was the only one of the three whose demeanor had not changed from first to last. His air of utter, dejected indifference remaining unimpenetrable. He followed the old negro's movements with his eyes, and said:

"'T aint no use. They ain't goin' to bother ye. They 've come for me. I reckon old Abram must a took a second thought and trailed arter me hyar. I reckon it 's jest as well now as any other time. But ye need n't worry; they ain't goin' to bother ye. Which way had I better go to git out o' hyar?"

For a moment Gilbert gazed at him in dumb amaze. "Why, what do you mean?" he gasped. "Do you think I would give you up to that horde of hungry wolves? I do n't deserve that from you!"

"No, no," protested the other, annoyed. "I never meant for ye to take hit that way; ye 've gone too far already to befriend me. But I brung this all on ye, and they ain't but one way out of hit now. They know I 'm hyar, and they 'll never quit until they git at me; I mought jes' as well face hit fust as last, and save ye a power of harm."

Gilbert was amazed at the calm stoicism with which he confronted his fate. "To go outside would be for you to go to certain death. But here you are safe. I do not think they will attempt to invade my house by force; but if they do, they will fare ill. I will certainly be justified in defending it, and it is a veritable castle. They will never take you from under my roof as long as it is over my head. Put down that gun, Zeb; it is our duty to preserve the

peace, not to break it. There will be time enough for that when—"

His words were drowned by the beating upon the door, which again resounded through the house.

"O, I say, Gil," called Bud Thornton, who with the other surveyors, having been aroused from sleep by the first summons, had peered out from one of the upper windows, and leaning over the staircase informed Gilbert of his discovery as soon as the sound ceased sufficient to be heard. "There 's a gang of dagoes out front, and it's plain to be seen they 're sorer than a dog about something. What 's the trouble?"

"I will find out in a moment," replied Gilbert, as he ran lightly up the steps, and unfastening the shutters of the casement in the upper hall he threw them open, and looked out. The forms of a number of men were visible upon the lawn, and several others, hearing the noise of the opening shutters, desisted pounding upon the door, and came out from the portico, and looked up at the open window. The moonlight glinted coldly upon the gun-barrels in their arms.

"Robbers!" was the unhesitating verdict of Griscom, who gave one frightened glance over Gilbert's shoulder, and dodging back betook his pajamas hastily from the dangerous vicinity, and disappeared in his room.

"Looks like the house is pinched," remarked the imperturbable Thornton, who remained by Gilbert's side, perhaps not setting as high a value upon his personal safety as the self-sufficient Griscom.

Stepping out upon the portico in front of the window, Gilbert walked to its edge, and stood in the moonlight, looking down upon the men below him.

"To what am I to attribute the honor of this visit?" he demanded.

"Come back fo' Gawd's sake come back, foh dey shoot you," hoarsely whispered Zeb from the open window. He had followed after Gilbert as quickly as he could, but arrived too late to prevent this foolhardy step of his young master. "Why did n' he let me ax 'em dat fool question?" groaned the old negro.

"Does look a little like a fellow who would drill out there like that might have bats in his belfry," admitted the judicious Thornton, forced to recognize the imprudence of his friend and the justice of Zeb's strictures.

One of the men laughed a harsh, grating, sneering laugh. "I s'pose ye doan' know; ain' got no idee, now? Wall, we've come fo' Buck Renfro, and ye 'll save yerself a lot of trouble by giving him up to us. Ef ye don't, we'll take him, that's all."

"Goin' to start a rough house, eh?" exclaimed Thornton, in the window, not understanding the demand farther than it was a threat, which was resented by Gilbert in every line of his attitude and expression as he gripped the railing before him and bit his lip, while he inhaled a deep breath, swelling with anger at the insulting tone and words. Bud Thornton's friendship was one of the uncalculating kind that makes no question of the merits of a controversy, but fearlessly sides with the cause it happens to find itself allied with. "I 've got that fellow covered, Gil," he whispered. "If they start a survival of the fittest, he 'll blow out first rattle in the box."

Gilbert's first impulse was to hurl defiance at

them all; but realizing that the fate of others beside himself might depend upon his words, he hesitated a moment, and controlling himself, spoke with as much calmness as he could assume:

"Who are you? By what authority do you invade my premises, and demand of me to open my doors with such threats? Are you officers of the law? Or do you come to break the law? Remember whom you are dealing with. It is not Buck Renfro; it is not one man; it is not only the inmates of this house whom you are contending with now, but the whole power and majesty of the Commonwealth of Kentucky. I tell you for your own good that the day for such deeds as you come here to perpetrate has past forever from Blue Lick Cove, and if one of you lifts his hand to-night in the attempt he will not find in all the mountains a hiding-place to conceal him. And I warn you, too, that the attempt will be vain. If you were ten times as many as you are, you could never force an entrance into this house while we choose to hold it, and we will do it, if we have to call to our rescue all the troops in the State militia. I bid you now, in the name of the law, and by virtue of the power invested in me as a conservator of the peace, to disperse and return to your homes."

The words fell upon them like a lash, and they cowered beneath the fearless majesty of the man who stood alone, unarmed, save by his consciousness of right, towering above them in the pale moonlight. The authority he had invoked seeming to invest him with a sense of security before which they were impotent.

Abram Crenshaw glared in speechless amaze at

the consternation with which this speech had infected his followers. If only Gilbert had gone back into the house he might have counteracted it; but standing there the incarnation of authority, the fierce old man felt himself powerless to cope with him. It is doubtful, however, if Gilbert would have triumphed in the end; the first surprise over, the old mountaineer would probably have infused them with his own dauntless spirit, and incited them to carry out their original plan of beseiging the house, and forcing the surrender of Buck Renfro. But the issue was suddenly decided in an unexpected manner.

Buck Renfro was far from feeling any confidence in Gilbert's expressed ability to shield him, or from being moved from his first determination to face his enemies. He knew them, and their fierce, unreckoning thirst for revenge. They might not, as Gilbert said, attempt to storm the house. That was at variance with the mountaineer's method of warfare. They would most likely beleaguer it. What hope, then, for him? It would only be to protract the evil hour, at what cost, not only to himself, but to the man who had befriended him when abandoned by every one else! It would only serve to secure their deadly hatred for Gilbert, and involve his benefactor in his own unhappy fate.

The close, pent-up house smothered him. He caught up the light as Gilbert sprang up the steps, and like some caged animal wandered from room to room that opened into the hall, looking for an avenue of escape, and came back into the hall again completely turned around. How he wished he were once more out in the free, open air, amid the track-

less woods that were an open book to him! But here! He was caught like a rat in a trap. If he must die, it should be in the fresh, open air upon the free mountain-side, among the mighty oaks, under the bright stars. He would die as he had lived, like a man, not like a cowardly cat crawling into its hole to be starved to death. The walls seemed to his disordered senses to contract, drawing closer together as if threatening to crush him. He paused at the foot of the staircase, and listened intently. Through the open window above Gilbert's words came back like a confused murmur. He knew then that he was talking to them; his life in their hands, if they chose to take it. It was time for him to go before this Quixotic young man hazarded himself too far, if he had not already done it. He hastened to the opposite side of the house, rightly judging that Gilbert would attract the attention of his enemies from that side. He found a door barred and fastened, but could not judge whether it opened outside. Near it was a window, through the cracks in which the pale moonlight shone. At a little distance he discerned in the shadow of a clump of shrubbery a long-legged figure that he recognized. Young Hatfield was evidently listening intently to catch what was being said in front of the house. Stealthily the bar was raised, and poising himself upon the sill like a panther preparing to spring, Buck Renfro burst through the swinging shutters and landed within a pace of the terrified youth, who fell over into the bushes to avoid the blow which was aimed at him by the clubbed gun in Renfro's hands. Springing over the prostrate form he dashed through the shrubbery as a rifle rang out, and yells

of more than fiendish fierceness startled the sleeping echoes of the mountain-side. Through the thickest of the concealing clumps upon the lawn he dashed, secure in their friendly shelter from the deadly hail of lead that was poured into them, in hope that a chance bullet might win its quarry. The sharp cracks of the rifles were bandied back and forth by the mountain-sides, and died away down the valley in mellow, fragmentary rattling. Such soothing power has time and distance. But no time, no distance can ever dull the sounds and scenes of that awful hour in the mind and memory of Gilbert Garrett. Transformed to fiends incarnate he saw the men before him but a moment before quiescent under his appeal, now fired with more than mortal fury, hounding with inhuman hate one poor, fleeing, hunted wretch. Powerless to hinder or help, he gazed in speechless horror upon the scene transpiring before him.

Bursting from the bushes, Renfro sprang upon the wall that fenced the yard from the road. With yells of fury, a dozen weapons were discharged at him as his form flashed into view ,and the next instant he sprang into the road. But instead of alighting upon his feet, he fell forward almost upon his face, for he had been hit. With a great effort he staggered up, and instead of dashing across the road, as he had intended, he darted along crouching within the shadow of the wall. He had almost reached the end of it when, looking over his shoulder, he saw the foremost of his pursuers dash across the road into the woods, cursing as they ran, deceived by the ruse. He crouched closer to the wall within its concealing shadow. Life was still dear to

him, despite its bitter desolation. Self-preservation is the most powerful of all instincts, and in moments of peril it is paramount even in the most worthless of lives. His pursuers had passed, and he started forward, when, back from the woods, evidently suspicious of some ruse, old Abram Crenshaw bounded into the road. His quick eye, undimmed by age and sharpened by the fury in his heart, caught the movement. Renfro crouched close to the wall, his rifle at his shoulder. Has he been seen? Can the panther that has once fastened its fangs in its victim and lapped blood, see or scent its hiding quarry?

Two rifles rang out like one, and the passing breeze that blew up the valley bore upon its breath the strong, fierce spirit of old Abram Crenshaw, whose body lay in the moonlit road, the grim face grovelling in the dust.

Chapter XIV.

A Life for a Life.

HIGH up on the mountain-side, beneath the great cliff that towers up toward the clouds at the head of the gorge, a man crawled painfully and laboriously over the sharp rocks scattered along the ledge. The stars that had lain low along the horizon when he saw them glinting through the cracks of the shutter hours before were now high over head, and the Great Dipper had almost turned its circle in the Northern sky. How long and weary those hours had been for him! How irksome the journey he had made! His strength was almost gone with the life that was slowly ebbing from the bullet-hole in his side. The great cliff swam like a ship at sea before his tired eyes. But he recognized the familiar features of the place. The rhododendron-bush was still there--but its blooms had long since faded, from whose midst he had gazed that bright spring morning down into the valley at her.

There, too, was the rock upon which the rattlesnake had stretched its sluggish length. The home of the reptiles had no terrors for him now. Fate had no farther power to harm him. He stretched his numb limbs. and lay down to rest at last. No one would ever think to look for him here, and his fate unknown even to his enemies would not fire his brethren with that thirst for vengeance which in the mountains is transmitted from sire to son to be slaked only in the blood of his slayers.

Retribution is the all-pervading law of nature indelibly engraved upon the heart of man,—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. Under the more favored conditions of society in which we live, this retribution is impersonal, divested of individual passion, and administered in the sacred name of justice under the tenets of the criminal code. In the Cumberlands, the Corsica of America, in the absence of the proper legal machinery to carry out the universal law of retribution, the blood of the murdered man cries not in vain for vengeance. With the mountaineer, retribution is an instinct,—the same primordial instinct from which first sprang Law whose equable administration is the basis of civilization. No case of a relapse into barbarism is presented by these mountain feuds, as in rural lynchings, or urban riots. It is simply a survival of the socially primeval. Things go on as in the days when there were no courts. The idea of the judicial regulation of private wrongs, lost when the forbears of these people left the coast and plunged into the woods and mountains a hundred years ago, has never been regained.

Buck Renfro knew that the knowledge of his fate would arouse the wrath of his kinsmen to deeds of reprisal which would be wreaked upon many innocent victims,—perhaps be visited upon that noble woman who had appeared to him as a guardian angel, and whose sublime self-abnegation was, in this last extremity, bearing its fruit. All old enmity and hatred vanished at that thought. No one would ever think to look for him here in this proscribed spot, in this serpent's den, and with him would die that fatal feud which had cost so many lives.

The spring which had gushed out from the rock earlier in the season was now nearly dried up, and but a murky little pool remained. All about its soft margin were marks of the loathsome life that inhabited this desolate spot. Squab footprints of frogs, sinuous lines of serpents and lizards that had come here to drink, and here and there a ragged scuffling mark where some grotesque tragedy had been enacted, some victim fallen a prey to the reptiles.

But the moon beamed above, and the stars looked down, and amid all the surrounding desolation of rock-ribbed ruin, this little pool reflected the face of heaven, as in a murky life of guilt one good deed may irradiate the darkest depths.

Chapter XV.

Clem Hackett Serves a Warrant.

'MAWNIN', Uncle Jimmie, 'mawnin' to ye. How's all?" was the cheery salutation that aroused "Uncle" Jimmie Hatfield as he sat in the open area between the two rooms of his cabin, tilted back in his hickory withe chair against the logs, and dozing in the pleasant spring sunshine.

"Why, howdy, Clem, howdy," heartily responded the old man as he leaned forward in surprise to gaze at his visitor, and brought his chair down upon the puncheon floor with a jerk that thoroughly aroused him. "I hardly know'd ye when ye rid up; it's been so long sence I seed ye. Light, and look at yo' saddle."

"No, thankee, I haint got time. I was jest passin' by, and stopped to say howdy," responded the horseman, declining the invitation to dismount. But, lazily shifting his seat in the saddle, he placed one elbow upon the pommel, and resting his chin upon his hand, kicked his feet clear of the stirrups, and allowing his long legs to dangle free, assumed as indolent an attitude as was possible to the preservation of his equilibrium. His horse, a fine-looking bay, evidently accustomed to the vagaries of its master, stood with drooping head, motionless, but for the switching tail with which it fought the flies. He was a man past forty, spare but strong of build, a figure which a life of exposure and exertion had divested of rounded symmetry, reducing the whole to hard substance. His movements, too, partaking of

the angularity of his structure, were lacking in grace. He was slow and deliberate of speech, as well as lethargic of movement. But it was the deliberation of restrained force, the lethargy of the thoroughbred before the fever of the race, the sluggishness of the foxhound husbanding his strength for the fury of the chase. The face, had it surmounted a frame of less strength, with its mild blue eyes, might have been thought indicative of a kindly, if not weak, and credulous good nature. But the strong set jaw hinted at a pugnacious spirit, and there were lines upon the face that told of past passions, as there were scars that told of past wounds. This was Clem Hackett, the "High Sheriff" of the county, whose courage was fire-proof, and who was known to be utterly without fear, but who had always so tempered his valor with discretion as to execute the duties of his office without any invidious interference in the family feuds that from time to time raged in his bailiwick, executing the warrants of arrest placed in his hands, but avoiding all partisanship.

"Any news over to Paradise Cove?" asked the old man when the other, who hadn't time to dismount, had comfortably disposed himself in the saddle.

"No-o," was the slow response, his natural drawl lengthened by his reluctance over the admission, "can't say that they is."

"Haint ye heerd nothin' of Buck Renfro yit?" asked the old man with real or feigned surprise.

"No-o-o," was the still reluctant response, "I haint. And I don't onderstand hit. Hit's been nigh a week now since I went arter Buck, and I 'lowed at fust that mebbe he was hidin' out until he could git his bond fixed up. But I misdoubt it now. I told his

brother, Aaron, that I'd give Buck two days to come in an' give hisself up. I 'lowed from what I hearn he could make out a case o' self-defense, but that's neither here nor there. I can't git track o' hide or hair o' him. I never would a believed Buck would a treated me this way. I always had a diffrunt notion of him. He's the fust Renfro I ever knowed to run off yit;" and the speaker shook his head sorrowfully. There was a personal grievance in his tones. His official pride was wounded, his confidence betrayed.

"Pshaw! you neenter think he's quit the kentry; he's jest a hidin' out, skeered o' Joe Bob Colbert."

"I misdoubt it; I'm mighty feared he's run clear off. But if he haint, he might as well give up fust as last for I'll git him."

"If the boys don't git him fust," said the old man sententiously.

The horseman straightened up in his saddle. The blue eyes gleamed with a cold glitter as of ice. His natural drawl was gone as he answered hotly: "If they do they'll rue it. I've been sheriff now for ten year, an' I've treated 'em right. I've tended to my own business. I never bothered none o' theirn. Many's the time they've asked me to do jest that thing,—'tend to my business and leave 'em to 'tend to theirn. Now they come interferin' with me. Here's a warrant for Buck Renfro that's put in my hands, and I say I'll sarve it. I'm sworn to sarve it. What am I sheriff for? But Buck Renfro says, 'No, sir, ye can't sarve it,' and runs off, or hides out, and does me dirty. But you uns, ye are worse nor him; ye say, 'No, sir, ye shan't sarve it; we don't need no sheriff'. That's what you uns say, why damn ye—"

"Not me, Clem, not me. I ain't never said no sich thing," protested the old man appalled at the tempest he had evoked, the slumbering tiger he had aroused.

"Well, they, then, damn 'em," amended the irate sheriff, shaking the warrant which he held in his hands at Blue Lick Cove in general. "Why can't they 'tend to their business and let me 'tend to mine! Mine is to sarve this warrant, and sarve it I will on Buck Renfro in spite o' all they can do. Then they can 'tend to their business—that's none o' mine,—and if they save the state the expense o' a trial nobody but the lawyers 'll be the losers. That's 'tween them and Buck Renfro; but I've said I'll sarve this warrant fust, and I'm putty genrilly known as a man to keep his word."

"That's right, Clem," assented the old man, solemnly nodding his head, "they ain't nobody a disputin' of that."

"Well, then," concluded the other, somewhat mollified, "what are they workin' agin me fur? They know I got this warrant. They know Sircut Coht don't meet until September. They know Buck'll give bond, and they's plenty o' time 'fore Coht meets to settle it 'atween 'em. But here they're a rarin' and a tarin' to git ahead o' me. Now I'll leave it to ye as 'tween man and man, Is that treatin' me right?"

"No," admitted the old man after judicious consideration, "but I don't think the boys ever come to look at hit that way. I know they ain't got nothin' agin ye, Clem. In course they're powerful riled agin the Renfros, and this stranger who come in here mong us and sided with them. He warn't no kin to the Renfros, was he?

"Not as I've hearn on."

"Well what in the world do ye reckon he wanted to take up with that low down Buck Renfro, and stir this thing up fur? If it wahn't for him this thing never would a happened,—leastways not jest as it did," amended the old fellow. "In course they's bound to be bad feelin' 'tween the Renfros and Crenshaws as long as any o' 'em's left. Abram was the last o' the Crenshaws, and the feud mought a died with him, but the way it's turned out Joe Bob Colbert and all his friends is dragged into it now and the Lord only knows whar it's goin' to end. No sir, I ain't a makin' no threats, but I'd hate to be in that stranger's shoes. I've always found hits a putty good plan for a fellow to mind his own business. Hands off is my idee. I can't see for the life o' me what he wanted to mix hisself up in hit for."

The sheriff had sudsided into his former slouching attitude, with his chin supported on his hand. He smiled knowingly, and bent his blue eyes in a quizzical gaze upon the sharp ones of the old man that peered out keenly from beneath the bushy grey brows. "I always allowed that ye was a putty smart man, Uncle Jimmy, but ye ain't doin' yo' repytation jestice. But I reckon it takes one o' us officers of the law to onderstand another. Why bless ye Squire Garrett ain't got no idea o' sidin' with one side or tother. He ain't done nothin' but mind his own business. He's a Jestice o' the Peace, ain't he?"

"Ye-es," reluctantly admitted the old man.

"Well hit's his duty to perserve the peace. And I want to tell ye right now he's agoin' to do it. He's got backbone, he has, and they ain't no Renfros or Crenshaws either kin keep him from doin' what's

right. Hit's the best thing ever happened for ye, and everybody roun' these parts when he come among ye. Ye know what he's a fixin' to do,—to build a railroad in here, and open up coal and iron mines, and saw up this timber. They's a heap o' diffrunt kind o' fools on this yeath, and they's some on 'em here findin' fault and objectin' to havin' anything done for 'em. I was glad to hear ye wahn't among 'em. I knew a smart man like ye would see it were puttin' dollars in yo' pocket. This little piece o' land ye got here that ain't wuth shucks now is liable to be the makin' o' yo' fortin, and lots o' these plumb fools that can't' make thar livin' now will find good hard dollars waitin' for 'em to dig up out o' the coal banks, or saw out o' the timber. They's goin' to be barls and barls o' money poured in here, and everybody 'll have a chance to git some of hit. But the men back in the settlemints that's putting up this money ain't goin' to come in here and turn it loose if they git the idee that they ain't no law here to pertect 'em same as they been used to. Now I been watchin' things as they happened, and studyin' over 'em for the last ten years, and I know, and ye know too, that all this here fightin' and killin' comes o' not enforcin' the law. I've been talkin' to the young Squire, and I'm mighty glad for one that he's got the sand in his gizzard to do it. He says this thing has got to stop, and he's the man to stop it too, whether it hurts friend or foe."

"I'm a little feered, Clem," responded the old man drily, "that he'll come nigher hurtin' hisself than either."

"That ain't goin' to hinder him. And if he does git hurt, as ye say,—he won't be the only one. As

long as he does his duty,—as a officer,—I'm with him,—as a officer,—ye onderstand."

There was no mistaking the gleam in those cold blue eyes, and the old man hastened to say:

"Why, Lor' bless me, how ye do snap a pusson up. Not as I say, Clem, 'fore God, I ain't got nothin' agin' him. Ye know I ain't takin' sides in this fight, though Joe Bob's mother was sorter kin to my wife. I be too old and crippled up with the rheumatiz. I was jest a fearin' some o' these hot-headed young fellows wouldn't look at it like we did. What ye say is mighty true 'bout makin' our fortins, and I'd be powerful sorry to see anything happen to the young Squiah. Hit'd be takin' dollars out o' my pocket; any fool 'd have more sense than to want to rob hisself."

'Well, I just wanted ye to know whar I stand, that's all," was the sententious reply. "Whar's Tom?"

The long-legged scion of the house of Hatfield was plowing. The little cornfield on the hillside was in full view. In the farthest corner stood the team hitched to the plow,—a dejected steer chewing the sassafras bushes in the unkempt fence-corner, yoked to a sorry-looking horse too busy fighting flies to join in the repast. Their master was nowhere visible.

"I heered the dogs barkin' up in the bushes somewheres a while ago," said the fond parent, "an' I reckon they must a holed some varmint, and Tom's tryin' to git hit out."

"Well, I ain't got no time to fool away, an' I'll jest leave this warrant fo' him," said the sheriff, producing it from his saddle-bags.

"Warrant!" ejaculated the old man in amaze.

"Fur Tom? Who's took out a warrant agin' him? What fur?"

"I believe ye said a while ago that if hit hadn't a been for the Squiah pertectin' Buck Renfro, and tryin' to keep the peace, this thing never would a happened. Well thar's them as thinks diffrunt. Thar's them as thinks if Abram Crenshaw and them as was with him hadn't a come to the Squiah's house that night Abram would a been alive to-day. Fact is Tom hisself's the cause o' this warrant bein' took out agin' him. He testified 'fore the Coroner to bein' thar, and has been noratin' 'round that he was the one to find out 'bout Buck bein' at the Squiah's an' told the others. I believe ye also said, Uncle Jimmy," continued the mild-eyed horseman in his blandest tones, "that hit was a putty good plan fur a pusson to tend strictly to his own business. Hit's a pity Tom didn't take after ye in that respect. It's a offense agin the law, an' a putty serious one, fo' a band o' men with force and arms to siege the house of a peaceable citizen, and a officer of the law. That's what Tom and the rest o' 'em 's got to answer for, and for fear ye mayn't read this right I'll tell ye this case is set for Saturday mawnin' in the coht of Squiah Garrett, Jestice o' the Peace, and Tom had better not fail to be thar. As I said afore we are goin' to keep the peace, and right here's whar we begin."

"We!" ejaculated the thunderstruck old man as the sheriff rode off. "We! I wonder what the devil's come over *him!* That's the fust time I ever heerd o' Clem Hackett actin' a plumb fool. We! I'll bet the Squiah's done gone an' bought him, that's what."

For some time longer he sat in mute amaze, merely ejaculating at intervals, "We!" Then abandoning his fruitless conjectures he yelled lustily for the long-legged hope of the house of Hatfield. That worthy, upon answering the summons, wasted little time in vain imaginings. But, his first consternation over, which divested him momentarily of power to act, he found relief in a characteristic manner,—by stretching his long legs in the direction of Cutshin Hollow, in which was the cabin of 'Lias Travers, who had been one of the party on the night of the tragedy.

Chapter XVI.

"A Survigrous Lookin' Manbody."

It was late when he returned. The old man, consumed with impatience, eagerly demanded what had happened to keep him away after milking time.

"What's happened? Nuff's happened, that's what. Never would a believed hit if I hadn't er seen hit myself," was the comprehensive reply. "Suke," to his sister inside the cabin, "gimme the bucket 'till I strip this pesky critter 'fore she and her calf bawls thar insides out."

"Never mind 'bout them, they kin wait awhile longer. Sit down and rest a minute and tell me 'bout hit," said the old man, unable to control his curiosity.

"Hit's too long a story; couldn't finish it 'fore dark, and ain't no use makin' a beginnin'," responded the sapient youth, starting off toward the "cuppens." "Onless," he added as an afterthought, "Suke'll do the milkin'; I am powerful tired."

For a moment the old man struggled with his curiosity which, getting the mastery, he ordered the girl to milk the cow, and, grumbling softly to herself, the pale-faced drudge shambled off to do his bidding, while her brother stretched his long limbs luxuriously across the puncheons. "No, sir, I never would a believed hit if I hadn't er been thar to see hit myself. Ye haint got any sperrits left in that jug onder yo' bed, has ye? I haint had a drink since I left the stoah, more 'n a hour ago, and

about four fingers o' churnbrain would be powerful helpin'."

The struggle that went on in the old man over this demand was longer than the other, but, finally yielding, he hobbled inside and brought out a gourd of the fiery liquor.

"Waal, sir," said the youth, smacking his lips, "when I left here I fust made tracks fur 'Lias Travers'. I seen his plow standin' in the furrow whar he'd left hit, and I 'spicioned the sheriff 'd been thar. Missis Travers said he'd stopped on his way up the crick and served the wahn't on 'Lias, and he had lit out fo' the stoah at the cross-roads hoppin' mad. I went on down Cutshin Holler to Bill Elder's. I seen his plow stickin' whar he'd left it, and I never stopped to ax no questions, but jest climbed up over Possum Ridge and pinted straight fo' the cross-roads. They was all thar, as I 'lowed they'd be, gethered in the back part o' old man Bolton's stoah, madder 'n a lot o' yaller jackets when thar nest's been plowed up. Some on 'em were in for goin' right down to the Squire's and havin' it out then and thar, but ole man Bolton tried to 'suade 'em not to;—said they was a passel o' men come in and camped thar yestiday to begin work on the railroad, and they mought take up sides with the Squire. I guess the ole skinflint wanted to keep 'em thar swillin' his sperrits. Hit's a orful mixtry, that busthead Ole Bolton sells; hit's got more raise-devil into hit than any biled drink in the mountings. 'Lias Travers had got outside o' several ho'ns of hit, and I seed there was a devil into him bigger'n a yearlin'. He was fast gittin' to the bellowin' and pawin'-up-dust stage,

and toreckly he swore he was man enough to do the job hisself, an' the rest o' 'em could stay if they didn't have a mind to follow him. He's been mightily sot agin the Squire, ye know, ever since he made fun o' his case against Mat Harner and threw hit out o' coht. Said he'd turn the tables on the cussed little pie-faced disciple o' supeeners, and bodaciously throw him out'n his own coht. I were mightily hope up 'bout 'Lias doin' hit too, an' savin' us all a lot o' trouble, when in come Joe Bob Colbert. In course everybody 'spected him to take the lead. He listened to 'Lias and the rest o' 'em, and then he told 'em they was makin' fools o' themselves; that if they got into trouble with the Squire jest now hit'd be helpin' the Renfros,—jess what they wanted; that the best thing to do was to fight the devil with fire, and send over to the county seat fo' a lawyer. We could beat these wah'nts, and then go on arter Buck Renfro and his gang,—there'd be plenty o' time to tend to the Squire arterwards. Most o' the fellers listened to Joe Bob, but some on 'em had heered that Mr. Gilbert had sent a doctor-feller, that calls hisself a surgin , and has come up here to tend the men they're goin' to put on the works, over to Joe Bob's to fix up his arm. He 'lows he can fix hit, but I don't believe he's any better than the yerb doctor. 'Lias and his friends were kinder 'spicious o' Joe Bob, and hotter arter the Squire than they were arter the Renfros. Time 'Lias had another ho'n or two it took 'em all to keep him from lightin' out by hisself. But by and by Joe Bob talked 'em all over to his way o' thinkin', 'ceptin' 'Lias, and I was gittin mighty down in the mouth and discouraged 'bout him, when I happened to look out, and damded

if thar warn't the Squire hisself over to the blacksmith shop. His hoss had cast a shoe, and he had stopped to have it fixed. Thar he was in front the shop, cat-a-cornered 'cross from the stoah, never dreamin' how clost he was to triberlashun. None o' the others seen him, an' I know'd if they did fust they'd keep 'Lias from findin' hit out. I seen his hoss was mighty nigh shod, and I was powerful uneasy that he'd git away 'fore I could 'tract 'Lias' attention. I kept a winkin' and makin' motions every chance I got, but the durn fool thought I was drunk and wouldn't pay no 'tention to me, but jest kept a rarin', and chargin' and swearin' what he was goin' to do to the pestiferous little limb o' the law, and him a standin' over thar as soft and pious lookin' as a suckit-rider 'most in reach o' 'Lias' long arms. I was 'bout as comfortable as a yaller dog in a bumble bee's nest. I seen the smith wus mighty nigh through, but jest then the others turned to listen to Joe Bob, and I grabbed 'Lias and wheeled him 'round facin' the door, whisperin' 'Yander's the Squire.'

'Lias had upset several more ho'ns o' Bolton's busthead inside his teeth, and the devil in him by now was bigger 'n a bull. He was fairly in the bellowin' and pawin'-up-dust stage. When I whispered that word in his ear his hair riz up with pure mad, and he looked up and down the road like a red-eyed bull looks for tother one when he thinks he hearn a bellow. Then he seen the Squire, and the hollerin' stage o' the disease took him. He fetched a roar, and riz three feet inside the stoah doah, and lit out in the middle o' the road in a hog-wallow, sploshin' the mud atop the blacksmith

shop and all over the offside o' the Squire's hoss.

'Hu—wee!' he hollered louder 'n a bull could beller. 'Take to the timber, fo' the lion's loose! Run onder the hen, ye little fuzzy, round-sterned pullit, yere's the chicken hawk, an' he's a-flyin' low!'

The smith drapped the hosses hoof he wus filin' roun' the aidge after nailin' on the shoe, and the Squire jest stood thar too bad skeered to move. I felt kinder sorry fo' the little cuss. I knew hit was all over with him. 'Lias was in one jump o' him, an' the fellows all come runnin' to the doah an' stood thar lookin' on. Hit was too late to stop the fun then.

'Lias fetches another roar, and says, sezzee, 'Clar me ten acres.—I needs hit to turn roun' in. I'se jes a scrimpshun the best man that ever laid a shadder on these mountings. I can lick a coht house full o' bulldorgs, wild-cats, snakes, squires, and other pizen things. Do ye hear me, ye puny little warrant-maker, ye false apostil o' law, ye sheriff buyer, ye double-barrelled, waterproof counterfeit o' Jestice?'

There wahn't no doubt 'bout the Squire's hearin' him, but he jes stood thar for a moment like he didn't. Ef he hadn't a been naterally pale-complected I reckon that talk o' 'Lias would a' made him so. I'll swar I felt sorry fo' the little cuss. He looked mighty small side o' 'Lias, and gittin' punier every minute. And jest to look at 'Lias ye couldn't believe he had over-bragged a bit. His shut were wide open as a gate, and ye could see his big chest heavin' like the swell on the river in raftin' time. His sleeves was rolled up, and the muscles on his arms moved like fat moles workin' onder the

skin. Oh! I tell ye he was a survigrous lookin' manbody. And when I see how wicked he was lookin' out o' the eyes I know'd then that the Squire wasn't many seconds ahead o' the herearter, and hit was gainin' on him fast. I'LL SWAR I felt sorry fo' him.

I reckon he was so bad skeered he jes didn't know what he was doin'. He stood thar fo' a moment, as I said, lookin' at 'Lias like he was some amusin' kind o' animal he had never seed afore, and didn't rightly know whar to place, a twistin' up the end o' his moustache with one hand, and dustin' his leg with the little ridin' whip in the other. Then he seemed to git tired o' bein' amused at 'Lias, and without sayin' a word, or noticin' 'Lias any more'n if he were a barkin' fiste, he handed the smith a silver dollar, and tellin' him to keep the change, I'll be durned if the finicky fool didn't turn squar 'round with his back to 'Lias, and put his foot in the stirrup, stoppin' to bresh the dust off his shiny shoe 'fore gittin' up. I see 'Lias' chest swellin' with 'stonishment and mad, until every button 'd been busted off the shut ef hit hadn't been open. Right thar I swar I quit bein' sorry fo' the durned fool. He desarved what he got. I seed 'Lias' har standin' up on his head like a mad dog's bristles on his back as he sprung fo' him, and the next minute that tarnation little fool was flyin' over his hoss' back with his arms and legs spread out in the air like a leather-wing bat's. He fell on his side, but turned over quick es a cat, and es 'Lias come runnin' 'round the hoss to finish him, he found hisself starin' squar down the bar'l of a 45-calibre, double-action Colt. The bullit in hit must a looked bigger'n a hen egg to 'Lias. Es he dodged hit

plowed a furrer 'cross the jamb of the stoah door es wide es a gopher plow'd made. The fellows hived inside the stoah like bees a swarmin' into a empty gum. 'Lias dodged back behind the hoss, and were a hundred and sixteen steps deep in the woods 'fore the squire could shoot agin, and he's a powerful quick-motioned man at that. I never knowed afore to-day that thar was a man on the top side o' the livin' yeath could give these here well-poles o' mine a argymint. But they is and 'Lias is that man. The Squire lit astraddle his hoss at one jump, and took arter him through the woods and over the fences,—sech ridin' never was seen in these mountings. But 'Lias,—wings'd been in that fellow's way; he never looked back oncet, but jest distributed hisself in the direction o' Cutshin Holler, a scrimpshun slower nor chain-lightning. Talk about skeers! I'll bet ef 'Lias is sound asleep and ye whisper 'Squire' in his ear his legs'll go through runnin' motions like a dog's when he dreams o' rabbit huntin'.

When 'Lias with the Squire arter him was gone, and we couldn't hear the poppin' o' his gun no more, the fellows that had took to the woods come in, and we all lined up to the counter in the reglar way. Old man Mat Harner, who's been tryin' to make friends soft-spoken like with 'Lias ever sence he won the hawg case, and had been backin' 'Lias up and agging him on to pitch the squire out o' coht, now speaks up and says, sezzee:

'I were sorter fooled in the nater o' the Squire, boys, as my frien' 'Lias was too. The idear o' shootin' irons, an' the melt to use 'em, bein' mixed up with as much durned citified foolishness es he showed, never struck me, no more'n hit did my young frien'

'Lias. What I wish to remark is this—What's done is done, and what's said is said, but ef the Squire hears bout hit, HIT DON'T GO!'

The blamed old blatherskite were crawfishin' a ready, and a skeered most to death somebody'd tell the Squire what he'd been sayin' 'bout him, and puttin' 'Lias up to do to him. I've got a durned good notion to tell him myself."

Whether Gilbert's encounter with 'Lias Travers convinced the more reckless spirits that there was more temper in the metal, and that it was of sterner stuff than his easy-going, pliant disposition had led them to imagine,or whether the counsels of Joe Bob Colbert and the older heads would have prevailed anyhow, is problematical. But certain it is that the cases against Joe Bob Colbert, et al., for breach of the peace, to the disappointment of many sensation-seeking spectators, were tried and disposed of the following Saturday with the utmost felicity and dispatch. Or, as Tom Hatfield said: "Everything was run off as smooth as a fresh greased wagon on a sandy road."

The Honorable Jeems Pendergast, a legal light from the county seat, represented the defendants, and raised bewilderingly technical objections to the progress of the trial, which were, however, overruled with equally bewildering promptness and rapidity to the great disgust of the Honorable Jeems. The presence of the defendants in the party with Abram Crenshaw was proved by old Zeb, who had recognized them. But, as was contended with stentorian eloquence by their attorney, it was not proved that any of them did the shooting; and, somewhat nettled at the high-handed way in which Gilbert overruled

his best points, he proceeded to make an inflammatory, spread-eagle speech upon the constitutional rights of American citizens and freemen, contending that it had not been shown *his clients* had any unlawful intention, or that any of them had committed any offense in coming there, or were anything but peaceable and law-abiding citizens who had the misfortune to simply be present at the fatal affray between Abram Crenshaw and Buck Renfro.

Dreading the effect of his incendiary speech upon the excitable mountaineers Gilbert cut him short by saying if his clients were what he contended they could have no objection to the judgment he purposed rendering. He had made up his mind anyhow, and there was no use in wasting so much eloquence. He then proceeded to render a judgment worthy of Sancho Panza. He began by enlarging upon the heinousness of the offense, and showed that the murder of Abram Crenshaw was the direct result, and they were each in a measure responsible for that result. He read the statute, and its penalties, and proclaimed his intention to maintain the law and preserve the peace. And then, when they were lugubriously expecting the severest penalty, said he would take their attorney at his word and put them each under a five hundred dollar bond to keep the peace, which, as they were law-abiding citizens, would be no penalty at all. But without mincing words he warned them to prepare to forfeit their bond before any of them took up arms again in such an enterprise.

Sheriff Hackett was there, mild-eyed and bland, but the extra force of deputies he had scattered through the crowd, to all appearances idle spectators, might as well have been dispensed with.

"That was a trump card ye turned, Squire," he said gleefully, when the crowd had quietly dispersed, dumbfounded at the unexpected turn. The defendants had been advised by their attorney to be careful not to do anything to forfeit their bonds,—advice which may have been influenced by the hint privately dropped in his ear by Bud Thornton that the Blue Lick Mineral Company would need the services of a local attorney in the management of its vast legal affairs.

"They ain't none on 'em goin' to give up five hundred dollars, or work hit out in jail, jest to take a chance at kerryin'-the war into Paradise Cove, and beatin' me to Buck Renfro," said the sheriff with conviction. "I'm putty ginrally known as a man o' my word. I told 'em I was goin' to sarve this warrant ef Buck was in the mountings, and they neenter try to git ahead o' me. Ye've put the winnin' card in my hands. They ain't none on 'em goin' to pay five hundred jest to draw cards; ye've raised the ante clar out o' thar reach."

"I am glad you think so," replied Gilbert. "It was the only plan that I could conceive of to avert the war that the genesis of every other mountain-feud indicated was imminent. It might not prevent Joe Bob Colbert from fighting Buck Renfro. They will be deadly foes I suppose as long as either lives. But it certainly will have some effect in preventing the others banding themselves with him to wage war upon the Renfros, as I had certain information they were preparing to do."

"It is very unfortunate that you insist upon antagonizing these people in this way," said Griscom who had not failed to manifest his disapproval of the en-

tire proceeding. "And exceedingly unwise, as I think your father will agree with me in saying. If you have no regard for your own safety you should consider the interests of the Company which certainly are at stake. These are very dangerous and desperate men, and the trouble is they won't discriminate. We, too, are involved with you. I live in constant dread of being ambushed. It would have been better for us if you had left them to fight it out, and they would soon have killed one another off."

A shade of anger darkened Gilbert's face, and his lip curled in scorn at the utter selfishness of this speech. But his habitual good temper coming to the rescue, he checked the cutting answer upon the tip of his tongue, and contented himself with saying, as he elevated his feet upon the table in front of him and tilted back in his chair, lazily blowing a wreath of cigarette smoke from his nostrils as if he as lightly expelled all care and responsibility:

"I regret exceedingly, my dear fellow, that things have not been ordered to suit you. But you do me too much honor in attributing the ordaining of them to me. I am merely a blind instrument, a creature of fate. What is, and what has been, is as it was predestined to be. It is the comfortable creed of many excellent moralists that in the game of life the best we can get is the worst of it. To cultivate a becoming resignation under the circumstances I would recommend to you a work that is a trifle out of date, it's true, but is still pretty good authority on the subject, the book of the late Mr. Job, the first chapter of which is I believe to the effect: "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

"Will I incommode you if I put mine up to?

Thanks," said Bud Thornton, elevating his feet besides Gilbert's, and tilting back in his chair. With a sly twinkle in his eye, and a ludicrous assumption of gravity upon his face, he said: "If Job had lived in the mountains I think he would have put that differently, Gil.

'Man that is born of woman' (and I notice they are mostly that way here) is of feud days and full of whisky. He riseth even from his cradle and girdeth up his loins, and goeth forth to seek his grandsire's enemy, and is cut down like a flower by his grandsire's enemy's cousin's brother-in-law.

He goeth forth in the morning in joy and gladness, and cometh back at night in scraps and pieces.

He trampleth on the toes of his fellow-man, and getteth himself filled with buckshot even unto the fourth generation.

The wind bloweth open his door at night, and when he riseth up out of the bosom of his family to shut it, his neighbor bloweth him into the bosom of Father Abraham.

He goeth forth on a journey and turneth his back on his enemy, and lo, the last end of that man is worse than the first, and it taketh the doctors three days to pick the ammunition of his enemy out of that end.

Yea, verily,his life is uncertain, and he knoweth not the hour or the day when the coroner will sit upon his remains."

"You are incorrigible," said Gilbert smiling in spite of himself. "No wonder Griscom has left us in disgust. You are absolutely sacriligious."

"What part o' the scripturs did ye say that text were from?" inquired the sheriff who had listened with grave attention.

"From the Book of Job," replied the commentator without a smile.

"Waal, I've heered Passun Withers preach on many a diffrunt text, but I never heered none come nigher to fittin' things as they air."

Chapter XVII.

Disillusion.

THE spring, which with its swelling buds, and bursting blooms, and awakening life, had been so full of fruitful promise, had come and gone, and the long, hot, ripening summer which had witnessed the fruition of those spring-time promises had waxed and waned. Mellow autumn was upon the mountains. It was an ideal day in that rarest of all the changing cycles of the year, the beautiful Indian Summer. A blue haze hung upon the distant hills, and the great hardwood forests were aflame with breadths and depths of color that no painter ever dared to spread upon canvas. In the variegated recesses there was the deep and restful autumnal quiet, a sort of enchanted stillness, broken only by sounds pertinent to the coppice, the faint rustle of a falling leaf, or the squirrel's inconsequent chatter. But in Blue Lick Cove were sounds and scenes that had never before disturbed the profound, patriarchal peace of the Arcadian dwellers in that Arcadian realm,—a realm where simple pleasures pleased, where the bright waters, and the blue skies, and the brown woods and fields, had sufficed to satisfy their simple wants. The confused murmur of a multitude of men at work, the clash of picks among the rocks, the chopping of axes, the jarring shock of the steam drill felt far along the mountain-side, or the dull roar of the blast had for many days proclaimed the dawn of a new era upon Blue Lick Cove. The sun was not an hour high, but

an unusual and feverish activity among the foremen in charge of the various branches of the work betrayed an evident anxiety to complete it against the arrival of some approaching event. There was hurry and bustle everywhere, the foremen shouting orders, and hastening their men about, who seemed to cheerfully enter into the spirit of the occasion.

"She's due here at noon,—reckon you'll get those rails laid in time?" inquired Jim Stevens, the contractor, of his foremen at the head of the fill which was rapidly nearing completion under the efforts of negro men and mules that were dragging dirt out of the cut with huge scrapers, and dumping it upon the embankment.

"Yes. I'm going to put all the niggers at that just as soon as this is leveled up. We'll have to spike 'em down any old way temporarily and go over 'em again to-morrow. I reckon there won't be more than a couple of coaches, and the railroad company will likely give them a light switch engine,—almost any thing ought to stand that. We'd a had everything in shipshape before now if it hadn't been for Mr. Gilbert making that change in the terminus. I can't see what he wanted to throw it way over here for. That old graveyard ain't nothing but an eye-sore anyhow, and there's where it ought to have been where it was first intended. I reckon you won't forget to put in a bill for extra work,—this wasn't in the original contract, you know."

The other chuckled and winked at his subaltern. "Let me alone for that," he said with a satisfied smile. "Have you got ties enough?"

"A plenty. This fellow Colbert, who's bossing them mountaineers, has just come down with a big

load, and I told him not to bring no more. I'd put his mountain men to laying rails, but they are no good on earth fooling with the irons. Funny how those fellows can sling an axe, and get out the prettiest ties you ever saw, and yet can't lay a rail straight to save 'em."

Joe Bob Colbert having finished his work sooner than he expected, started home to change his working clothes for his best suit, and accompany his wife back to the big barbecue that was to celebrate the completion of the little branch road that connected Blue Lick Cove with the great trunk line and the great world beyond. The first train over it was to convey the president of the Blue Lick Mineral Company, Gilbert's father, and his friends, who were due to arrive by the very liberal schedule about noon,—barring accidents. Turning his back upon the right of way, a broad swathe cut through the forest and undulating along the mountain-side, Joe Bob Colbert struck into the path that Gilbert Garrett had followed that bright morning in early spring upon which he had "gone into business." He had not followed it far when with some surprise he met his wife hastening toward him.

"I am so glad to meet you," she exclaimed. "I was just thinking how I would find you to tell you not to wait for me. Mr. Garrett sent Zeb over to ask if I wouldn't come down to the house, and help Aunt Sookey tidy things up before his folks, who are coming from the city, arrive."

"I don't know as ye have to work out," he said haughtily and sulkily.

"Oh, Joe, you know it isn' that,—it is only a favor he asked. Of course, he wants to have everything

nice, and, I suppose, thinks I would have more taste in such matters," she said with conscious pride in the compliment implied by the request. "Men folks know nothing of such things. He and Mr. Griscom ordered some lace curtains for the windows, and uncle Zeb says now that they have come, none of them know how to put them up."

The mountaineer's brow was darkened, and he looked away along the mountain-side. "Ye have got a home o' your own, but it don't seem to be as takin' to your notions as the grand house of a couple of bachelors."

"That is not true, Joe, and you know it," she answered quietly, her face flushing indignantly. "No woman ever loved her home better, or tried harder to make it pleasing to her husband. I have laid your clothes out on the bed, and you'll find hot water, and your shaving things in the kitchen," she added, looking up furtively.

But he did not notice the words or the look that accompanied them, and continuing to gaze over her head with brow unrelaxed, said: "As for favors, I don't know as we-uns air under any obligations, or ever asked any favors of him."

Looking up to the mountain-side where his still had once been hidden, could he say that? She knew that Joe Bob Colbert had never comprehended the philanthropic motive that prompted Gilbert Garrett to "go into business"; that he was the incarnation of stubborn, self-relying independence, and would have refused to profit by it had he gained such intimation, that so far from feeling grateful for Gilbert's interference in the fight with Buck Renfro which probably saved his life, he bitterly resented it, and that the po-

sition he had received through Gilbert's influence upon the works had never occurred to him as any favor, but quite the contrary. He actually harbored a feeling of hatred towards him for bringing about the change in his life that time had failed to wholly reconcile him to, possessed by an indefinable yearning for the old free life of the mountains that had gone from Blue Lick Cove forever.

But with a sense of his injustice strong upon her she blurted out: "Gilbert Garrett has been the best friend you ever had. He has been a noble and unselfish friend, and never even given us an opportunity to return the obligations we are under to him—"

He darted at her a sudden look that froze the words upon her lips, a look of mingled pain, anger, and resentment. "Then ye can go an' ye can stay with yo' high an' mighty gentleman, if ye have a mind to. I shan't care if I never see ye again," he said bitterly. And, without another word or a look back at her, although she called to him appealingly, he strode away.

She stood looking after him until he disappeared around a bend in the creek. Her lot of late had not been a happy one. Diverse as they were, she had from the first cheerfully accommodated herself to his ways of thinking in all that she could consistently reconcile to her conscience. But, ever since that fatal affray with Buck Renfro, a barrier seemed to have sprung up between them that no time, no effort upon her part, could efface. And of late there had grown upon her a haunting fear that it had perhaps been all a mistake, that he could never be what she wished to him. His love upon which she had so confidently counted in those first days of their married

life, but a little more than a year before, seemed now to have failed her utterly. Upon this, the first occasion he had an opportunity to show it, the first time she had acted counter to his slightest expressed preference, he had cruelly cast her off without cause, excuse, or explanation. She was made to feel all the burning indignation that man's heartless injustice, and cruel selfishness can alone inflict upon the sensitive heart of woman. Grieved and hurt, she stood looking after him, his cruel words cutting into her heart like a knife. But, without a thought of compassion, or even a relenting look back at her, he strode deliberately away, doubtless wishing as he had said, that he might so stride out of her life, and never see her again. She brushed the tears from her eyes, and a feeling of resentment took possession of her, a wish that she might make him feel what she had suffered. It was some consolation, though a poor one in comparison with the weight of her woe, to turn to thoughts of one whose friendship had been so gratifying to her, so sincere, unselfish, and disinterested. It was some consolation to feel that in any extremity she could rely upon that.

As she came up the worn, uneven, stone-flagged walk in front the old Gilbert house, she was met by Griscom, who, since the assumption of his duties as general manager of the new company, had lived here with Gilbert Garrett. He was stretched upon a settee on the porch idly reading, a most unusual position for him who seemed to have no other thought in life beyond work and money-making, which were synonymous terms to him. She had taken an instinctive if causeless dislike to him from the first, and the more she had seen of him the more intense it became. He

sprang up, seeing her approach, and throwing down his book came forward to meet her.

"Is Mr. Garrett here?" she asked. "I came in answer to his request, and will be very glad if I can be of any service."

"No," he replied, with an expression of annoyance. "He isn't here just now, and I think you misunderstood,—it was I who sent for you."

"Oh," she exclaimed, unconsciously betraying her disappointment. "Zeb certainly said he came from him."

The old negro was the only one who refused to recognize Griscom's authority here, persisting in looking upon "Marse Gilbert" as the head of the family he had served so long, and consequently the only one to obey,—a peculiarity which Gilbert himself professed to find much amusement in. "I did think that old darkey had some sense, but my conviction is shaken," he said facetiously. "There's that old hound my late lamented kinsman, Abner Gilbert, left. He tried to bite me the first time he saw me, and has done nothing but growl at me since, while Zeb has imposed upon his own credulity by a mere name. The dog's astuteness compels my unbounded admiration." Griscom knew that Zeb had obsequiously taken his order only to go straight with it to Gilbert for further instructions. This and her apparent disappointment were particularly galling to him at this time. There was no accounting for the peculiar conduct of negroes and women.

"The fact is," said he pleasantly, masking his annoyance under a forced smile, "we are, of course, anxious to make as attractive an appearance as possible to our guests, and recognizing the shortcomings

of a bachelor's resources, I determined to ask the benefit of your refined taste. Aunt Sookey and her daughters are only awaiting your orders if you will kindly suggest to them what you wish done. There's a case of window curtains in the hall, but I don't believe they understand how to hang them. If you will be so kind, I am confident we will surprise our guests with the tastefulness, and charming effect of our bachelor quarters."

His strained and effusive style, in such contrast to Gilbert's frank and impulsive manner, was exceedingly disagreeable to her ears. But she gladly assented to do what she could, and was soon absorbed in an occupation so interesting to the feminine nature. She was considerably annoyed by the officious, if well meant, attentions of Griscom, who followed her from room to room as she directed the negro girls how to arrange the old-fashioned lambrequins, the linen and table service, the sash curtains, portieres, etc. The house had been scrubbed from top to bottom; everything was scrupulously neat and clean, and the freshly laundered linen bespoke Aunt Sookey's ability as a housekeeper. There was really nothing for her to do but unravel the mystery of the lace curtains.

"Where did you say Mr. Garrett was?" she inquired abstractedly of Griscom, whose attentions only bored her.

He had not said. The truth was that Gilbert and his present occupation were disagreeable subjects to him. For the first time Gilbert had asserted his authority, and asserted it in direct contravention of Griscom's. He had lazily lounged down to the work the day before as the men began tearing down the old stone wall about the graveyard, and stopped

them. The terminus of the railroad track was located just beyond the graveyard and it was necessary to convert a small corner of it. Griscom had been sent for, and argued with him in vain, showing that none of the graves would be disturbed, and that only this unused and unkempt corner was wanted, while the wall would be put up again, only a few feet farther back. He was deaf to reason, saying simply that the little plot had been devoted to that purpose by his great-grandfather, and that it was all the old gentleman had reserved out of many thousand acres, and he proposed to see that his claims were respected. The necessity of removing the terminus to an entirely new point less adapted to the purpose, was explained to him, but it only increased his obstinacy, saying that it ran entirely too close to the graves anyhow, and he had serious misgivings that the old fellows, so used in life and death to the patriarchal peace that prevailed about them, would be unable to understand the rumble and shriek of the train, and might think it the last trump calling them from their graves,—a mistake which would be exceedingly embarrassing, should they awaken only to find themselves thrown upon an unsympathetic nineteenth-century world.

Thoroughly exasperated by such ridiculous treatment, Griscom had ordered the men to proceed with the work, and backed by the plans and survey which had been approved by the president, Jim Stevens, the contractor, told Gilbert reluctantly he would have to obey Mr. Griscom. But his men refused to proceed with the work. To an impartial, and disinterested spectator it would have been exceedingly ludicrous to have heard the fate depicted by Gilbert as being in store for the presumptuous mortal who dared to

violate the resting-place of the old Indian-fighters who slumbered there. All the horrors they had learned from the savages, of which scalping and tongue-splitting were the mildest punishments, combined with the haunting terrors of hoodooism would be visited upon any one that removed a stone, and the superstitious negroes promptly fled the haunted spot. Grinning with rage at his defeat, Griscom refused to have anything further to do with it, and Gilbert had changed the terminus to a point some distance away. It was his anxiety to complete the work thus delayed before the arrival of the magnates, that kept him out on the works. The other was the most suitable terminus, and he had no idea of letting the work hang fire, but proposed pushing it to completion.

Griscom was as devoid of any sense of the ridiculous as he was incapable of appreciating the sentiment that had actuated Gilbert, but unconsciously in detailing the childish folly of that eccentric genius, he drew such a droll picture of him sitting on the wall terrorizing the superstitious negroes, that Ruth Colbert broke into a laugh despite herself. A shocked and pained expression came upon Griscom's face, and his chagrin was not allayed by the arrival of Gilbert.

"Are they done?" he inquired of Gilbert in some surprise, after greetings had been exchanged, and they stood watching Ruth trying to adapt a modern lace curtain to the wide old-fashioned casements which were built upon dimensions liberal enough for a barn door.

"As good as done. They've finished the fill and the rest is easy,—level ground, you know. The way they are throwing rails and ties is a caution. I left because I didn't want to be *particeps criminis* to train

slaughter. I am afraid the terminus will be the graveyard after all. I do hope none of our expected guests have let their accident policies expire."

"No wonder Aunt Sookey couldn't hang these curtains," exclaimed Ruth, turning to them in despair. "They are just half the size they should be. What shall we do?"

"With the curtains? They might do for minnow seines," suggested Gilbert, in default of any more practical suggestion from the others.

"You are impossible," replied Ruth in deeper despair. "Is there nothing else here that we can use for sash curtains,—anything to take away the bareness of these great staring windows?"

Aunt Sookey wrinkled her black face in fruitless cogitation, but suddenly lighted up with a happy thought.

"Whar's dat big cedar chist,—de one wid de brass hannels dat useter be in de back attic," she inquired of one of her daughters. "I ain't been up dem back attic steps fo' yeahs an' yeahs."

"Hit's up dere yit."

"I ain't seed de inside o' dat chist sence ole Miss died, but dere useter be all kinds o' fixins in dat chist. Marse Abner ain't paid no 'tention to dem kinder things, you know. He was a crusty ole bachelor; 'pears lak it run in de fambly to be bachelors, doan hit?" she added, suddenly struck with the observation.

"But not necessarily crusty, Aunt Sookey," protested Gilbert. "Do me the justice to observe that I am not crusty, and that I do pay attention to these ephemeral refinements. Now I am consumed with a desire to delve into that chest. I will never know

peace until I get to the bottom of it. Why it must be a perfect treasure-trove; rare old laces and bridal dresses of extinct pattern, and old lavender-scented love letters, and the dickens only knows what,—maybe a family skeleton or two hidden away. Come, let's lift the lid, and pry into the secrets of the past," he exclaimed, gaily starting forward.

"You better git dat bunch o' ole keys,—dey's a big brass lock on dat chist," counseled the practical old negress. "An' ef yo' finds any skeletons in hit, lak yo' says, fo' de lan's sake, doan 'sturb 'em, chile. We's gwine to hab trouble enough long o' dem fool niggers prodjickin' wid yo' grandaddy's grave. Dey's ben 'nuff done now to make him hant us all,—a-tearin' down dat wall!" she exclaimed accusingly, looking over her brass-rimmed spectacles at Griscom.

"Did you ever hear such nonsense?" Gilbert heard the outraged utilitarian exclaim to Ruth Colbert in the hall as he went into his room after the keys. It all comes of that rubbish he told those ignorant railroad hands. The contractor tells me you couldn't get one of them away from the fire at night if every mule on the works broke lose."

He found the keys at last and when he returned to the hall Ruth Colbert came forward to meet him with a flushed face and an expression which looked like anger, while Griscom turned his back, and sauntered out upon the porch.

"Aren't you going to join this expedition into the dark ages?" he called to him, but without looking around Griscom said he "believed not".

In the attic among much rubbish they found the old cedar chest, and Gilbert dragged it around so that the dim light from the small cob-webbed panes of the dormer window fell upon the lock.

"So excited I can't fit the key," he exclaimed, rattling one much too small around in its capacious throat, and glancing at the eager face beaming bright-eyed over his shoulders.

But the excitement was unfeigned upon her part. What could be more intensely exciting to the feminine nature than this delving into the secrets of the misty past, with all the alluring anticipations that his extravagant words had excited? It was truly treasure-trove, and in the delight of the moment all her troubles were forgot.

"Here's a brass key,—brass lock ought to have a brass key," he argued. "What do you say now we will find? See if you are good at guessing."

"Does it fit?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know, I havn't tried it yet."

"Why don't you?" exasperated with his coolness.

"Because you haven't guessed, and besides, I'm afraid it might be a Pandora box, and the lid fly open, and all the evils escape."

"Then let me take the blame," she cried, her patience exhausted, and laying her hand upon his to turn the key. He promptly imprisoned it with his other hand.

"Oh woman! woman! ever ready to rush into danger, and loose untold evils upon us poor men," he exclaimed dramatically.

"I notice you are ever ready to rush after us," she retorted, struggling to release her hand.

Their friendship was so platonic, and so sincere, they knew each other so well that she did not struggle very hard. How long he might have held it or what might have happened next, for unforseen things sometimes happen when handsome youth of oppo-

site sexes engage in such harmless diversions, will never be known, for just then a step was heard upon the stairs and Griscom appeared. They both turned and looked at him inquiringly, and he returned their look with ill-concealed suspicion.

"Beg pardon. I dislike very much to be forced to interrupt you, but Stevens is down stairs insisting upon the final terminus being establishd. He has the grade made and is ready to lay the last rails. You know, I have nothing to do with this location."

"I showed him about where to stop. Anywhere there will do; he's far enough from the graveyard now to satisfy even the scruples of Aunt Sookey," Gilbert chuckled.

"He declines to take the responsibility."

"Oh, if that's all then I will come, and assume that burden. All my life my father has bewailed my failure to assume the responsibilities of my position. Nothing will please me more. Tell him I will be down directly."

"The train is almost due, and all his hands are waiting."

"Then let 'em wait," answered Gilbert exasperated.

The key grated in the rusty lock and he threw back the heavy lid. A faint sweet scent of old lavender mingled with the spicy odor of the cedar was exhaled into the room.

"What's come over that fellow, I wonder," he ruminated, as he heard Griscom returning down the steps. "Acts like a perfect boor lately. Must be getting dyspeptic. I wouldn't leave while he was here out of pure cussedness, but I must go now. Linen, old clothes, dresses, et cetera,—mostly et cetera," he exclaimed, thrusting his arm down into the chest

and tumbling what he could into view. "I'll leave you to continue the search alone. If you find anything you want, keep it for yourself, and if you find anything I want, keep it for me. I believe it is the ancient usage among finders of buried treasure to divide the spoils. But if you find any of my family skeletons, remember Aunt Sookey, and—blush. As long as you can blush at them I understand it is a certain charm against their 'hanting' you." And he ran lightly down the steps.

He was detained longer than he expected, but at last he got away and tripped lightly up the steep attic stairs thinking to surprise her. The surprise was all his own. Standing by the dormer window was a figure that might have stepped from out one of the old oil paintings down stairs. She had found a quaint flowered silk dress that fitted her faultless form perfectly and that was of a pattern peculiarly adapted to set off the rounded yet graceful symmetry of her figure. Upon her face was a film which he at first took to be the effect of the light streaming dimly through the dusty, cob-webbed panes, but as he looked he saw that she was weeping.

She started, and glancing suddenly up, saw him, and dashed the tears from her eyes and unconsciously, involuntarily, smiled through her tears at sight of him standing there. It was something to think that his mere presence could bring with it so much of comfort to any one in need of sympathy. He realized with a strange thrill that her action had been a purely natural impulse, unanticipated and uncontrollable.

"You have been weeping," he said, simply, coming forward with unspoken sympathy in his eyes.

"Yes," she said smiling. "I have been playing Il Penseroso. Did I enter into the spirit of the part? What do you think of my costume?" she asked quickly, turning about and smiling archly at him over her shoulder.

"Your costume is picturesque, and appropriate to your beauty. I never saw you look more charming. It is only surpassed by your acting." His admiration was conveyed with even greater daring in the eyes with which he gazed upon her.

"If the party to-night was only to be a masquerade I would be tempted to go as your grandmother," she laughed.

"Grant me my wish and wear it anyhow. You can not believe how becoming it is."

"But masquerades, however becoming, are not adapted to everyday wear."

"Are they not? You have lately led me to believe they were. This is not the first time, Ruth, that you have dropped your mask momentarily and I have seen the real unhappiness behind your brave but false masquerade of sweet cheerfulness. I do not ask your confidence, but if there is anything that I can do to lighten your sorrow I would be glad—I would be honored with the privilege. I know you are unhappy, and I think I know the cause. Is there nothing I can do?"

His sympathy, his tenderness, his generosity affected her visibly. It was inexpressibly sweet to her to find some one who appreciated her,—so true, so unselfish, so noble, so faithful to his friendship when her faith had received such a blow, and the one she had put before all other men, who had sworn to love and cherish had proved so faithless, her idol so

unworthy! What an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence was Gilbert's in that hour!

"You have done all and more than I could have hoped for of truest friendship in my most unreasoning moments. Do not think me unappreciative, and believe me if there was any one on earth to whom I would turn with gratitude and confidence it would be to you. But there is nothing I could ask of you now, nothing that you can do," she answered, looking up at him with fervent gratitude in the eyes whose long lashes were wet with tears.

"There is, there must be, Ruth. You are untrue to yourself in your endeavor to be true to one for whom you were never intended,—who is all unworthy the noble sacrifice you are making, and who is as incapable of understanding as he is of appreciating it. Bah! you are casting pearls before swine," he exclaimed passionately.

His words seemed but as an outer echo to the unuttered feelings within her heart. He seemed to know whatever he chose to know of her inmost thoughts.

"But what can I do?" she exclaimed despairingly, turning to him involuntarily for succor in this darkest hour of her trial, the drowning wretch clutching at straws,—her head in a whirl, her heart torn with conflicting emotions, the fierce energy with which she had struggled so long seeming to desert her at last, her will yielding exhausted in the presence of a stronger power and a helping hand.

He was very near to her and he seemed so strong, so manly, so noble in thought and deed. It was but nature, feminine nature, in this hour of weakness, forsaken, cast off by the one upon whom she had the

right to count, to feel with delight that there was such a friend to lean upon. He was very near to her. She could feel his breath upon her hair.

"Let me take you from this living death, let me save you from yourself—and from him." His strong arms were about her, her head was upon his shoulder, and his lips were pressed to hers.

With a startled cry she sprang from his passionate embrace, and stood with wide, staring eyes, white-faced, and frightened. In a moment all her hopes had been annihilated, her trust and confidence destroyed in him, as well as in herself. It was a sudden and rude awakening from her dream of platonic friendship.

"Oh! what have we done?" she moaned piteously, burying her face in her hands. And then as he came towards her, exclaimed, "No! no! You must not,—how can you be so cruel!" And then a feeling of fierce resentment flushed her white cheeks with two bright red spots of anger, while her lips quivered with scorn as she said: "Is this your vaunted friendship, your respect, your unselfish sympathy! Would you make me hate myself,—would you destroy my happiness forever to gratify an idle fancy? What have I ever done to deserve this from you?"

He stood dumbfounded and abashed. "Forgive me," he said humbly. Never by word or look have you given me the right to so far forget myself. I would rather have died than have hurt or offended you. But I have loved you truly and devotedly. If it is a sin I am proud of it. It is the only unsinful love I have ever had, and my life has been better for it. You prompted the first unselfish action I ever did, and that was before I even knew you. My life had

been a barren one, barren of good to myself or any one else. The first time your name was ever spoken to me it was an inspiration to a good action,—poor as it was, the first impulse to better things I had ever known. From the very first hour I met you I have been the better for breathing the atmosphere ennobled by your mere presence, from contact with the purity and goodness exhaled from you. I have wished to be worthy of you. My love for you has been as pure as man's can be. Had you been happy,—had I thought your love another's, nothing, no temptation, however strong, could have ever made me pain you with this disclosure. But, Ruth, you are not happy, and it cannot pain you to know that I love you, unselfishly and unsinfully, and if your love is not mine now, it will be. You cannot scorn such true devotion as mine to you."

There was all his old characteristic self-confidence in the words, but an appeal as well,—and in the look which accompanied them. All her anger had vanished, and a look of tenderness and sympathy was in her eyes as she said softly: "I am so, so sorry, for you,—and—for myself."

Admission as it was, the most vehement rejection could not have been so final, so utterly annihilating to his hopes. "You do not, you cannot mean it, Ruth. I do not ask you now for even permission to hope. I can wait until you are free. The time will come—"

"No! no! you must not talk this way to me," she exclaimed. "It is wrong. I would be sinning against you as well as him to permit it. That time will never come. 'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' You must forget me,—there are other, happier women who are free,—who will make you

happy as I never can. Forget me as anything but a friend. I can, unhappily, be nothing else to you, but that I would always be." Sobs choked her voice, and, turning hastily toward the steps as if unwilling to trust herself farther, she was gone.

Chapter XVIII.

"I Call You."

IT had been a great day for Blue Lick Cove. The Honorable Jeems Pendergast, who had represented the county in the legislature, had been the orator of the day. When the elder Garrett as president of the corporation had formally received the little branch railroad from Jim Stevens of the construction company, and with his own hands had driven the last spike, the Honorable Jeems had made the great speech of the day, and, as he afterwards modestly said, the effort of his life. Gilbert remembered little of it, save that the orator had referred to Jim Stevens, the contractor, as the mighty magician, spinning his iron spell over the mountains; to himself as the Fairy Prince who had come to awaken the Genius of Industry from her sleep of ages in the Cove; and to his father as the modern Midas whose touch turned all to gold, and for whom Blue Lick Creek would prove a new Pactolus to pour a golden stream into his coffers. With prophetic ear the orator had heard the busy hum of industry already coming from the saw mills, the coal and iron mines, and had seen the night lit up by the lurid fires from the coke-ovens and smelters that only awaited the completion of the railroad to pour their products into the lap of commerce. It was the regular stock-in-trade industrial speech that was probably first spoken in England, and gradually transplanted farther and farther westward with terms transposed to suit the environment.

Now that it was all over and the eventful day was done, and the startled echoes of the Cove had repeated for the last time the unfamiliar shriek of the locomotive as it backed off up the mountain-side, drawing back to civilization the car containing the gay party of capitalists who had made a day of pleasant junketing out of it, Gilbert loitered along in the gathering shadows, and reflected over it all as he returned from the terminus where the iron rails stopped abruptly in a field of stumps. Twelve months had not elapsed since that afternoon he sat upon the log high on the mountain-side, and confronted the future before him. He recalled the feeling of anguish and of fear that had come upon him as he thought of the living death, buried in this black hole; the sombre ranges all around him seeming like prison walls, buttressed and massive, frowning down upon this sunken cell, while out there, just beyond the mountain wall, lay the glorious blue-grass region, where, long ago, civilization had made a great leap of over a thousand miles from the shores of the Atlantic into the lap of that lovely agricultural paradise. And face to face with the blue-grass region, after a hundred years of contact with its culture and refinement, the savage mountains had remained as they were at first,—a savage world of chaos, without law and without order, void of culture, industries, or art, void of everything that could make life worth living.

He recalled his first Quixotic dreams, his hopes to achieve the apparently impossible. He had seen them become actualities. But as he gazed back at the broad swath cut through the forest, narrowing to a line along the mountain-side which represented the railroad, and then at the burning pitch-pine torches of

the great construction camp in the valley, with its hundreds of black forms surrounding the ruddy fires, he realized how futile it all was, how barren of results to him.

He heard the unmelodious scraping of fiddles. They were preparing for the dance. The sound only served to accentuate his own distress. He turned off from the stone-flagged walk, and in utter dejection sank down upon a stone that had fallen from the coping of the wall. For the first time he saw sharply the dreadful misery of his life, its isolation, the black loneliness of the heart which strives to deceive itself with dreams until the hour of death.

At last he arose resolved. He had sat so long that he was stiff and cramped. Upon the porch he met Bud Thornton who, upon the conclusion of the survey, had accepted a position in the service of the company. Gilbert had of late suspicioned that Adelaide Crenshaw had something to do with the young rodman's lingering in the mountains.

"Hello," he exclaimed, button-holing Gilbert, "you are the very fellow I am looking for. Judge Pendergast has brought his Frankfort habits with him and we are trying to get up a little game of poker for his benefit. Take a hand!"

"You will have to excuse me for the present. But why are you not dancing?" inquired Gilbert in surprise. Thornton had been chiefly instrumental in arranging this affair, explaining to Gilbert what a politic move it would be toward conciliating the favor of the mountaineers. A set was in full swing, the measured tramp of the feet keeping time to the tuneful scraping of the fiddlers, the couples visible through the open windows as they balanced back and

forth with a sedate seriousnes worthy of the most solemn function,—a typical mountain dance.

Thornton glanced over his shoulder with an expresion of disgust at the illuminated interior. "Call that dancing! Well just go in once and then order your shroud. Say, Gil, you ought to have seen me,—I went up against the game, but I was clear to the bad, and I blew out the first chance I got."

Old Zeb who stood in the shadow peering in at the unwonted spectacle, and in whose eyes the whole proceeding was a profanation, encouraged by this unfavorable criticism, chuckled softly to himself and said: "De idee o' dem poah white trash a-flingin' dere heels in ole Marster's pahlors, an' tinkin' dey kin dance; as solemn 'bout it as a passel o' jackasses in a snow-storm wid de fodder gin out. Jes' look at ole Miss Jackson a cavortin' dere, an' a fannin' herself wid a turkey tail! She better be at wuck on de ash-hopper. An' dere's dat long-legged Hatfield,—'minds me ob a suit o' clothes on a clothes line ob a windy day. Jes' look at dat odder feller now,—doan he look lak dat ole fat wagon hoss dat skeered at de locumotif to-day?"

Just then Griscom appeared in the doorway of the hall, and said: "All right, Bud, Stevens says he will take a hand, and that will make up the game."

When they were gone, Gilbert said quietly: "I am going away in the morning, Zeb, and I want you to help me get my things together."

This was the resolve to which he had come. There was nothing else left him to do. To forget her, to seek that celestial nepenthe in other scenes as she had commanded, to find happiness elsewhere, he had no hope. But to stay would be but to protract the

misery, perhaps entail destruction upon her as well as himself. He smiled bitterly as he recalled the conceit with which he had styled himself an exile, and bewailed the fate that had banished him to this spot a few short months ago. And now he was going away. Now at last was he truly an exile,—outlawed by hope and happiness, under sentence of eternal banishment from the heaven of him who loves.

The entire front of the house was given over to dancers. In the rear of the entrance hall, and separated from it by heavy oak folding doors which had sagged with their weight, and worn a groove in the floor, was a spacious reception hall. With its old oak wainscoating, its great wood fire-place, and the quaint staircase against the wall, with the two rectangular turns leading to the floor above, it bespoke a bygone era of architecture. This was facetiously dubbed the "Ram Pasture". Here, an hour or more later, when he had completed his preparations for departure, Gilbert found the men at cards. Young Thornton sat with his hands thrust into his pockets gloomily contemplating his few remaining chips, having discarded his hand. He sprang up on Gilbert's entering, and said eagerly: "Here, old man, I wish you would sit in for me. I'm up against it good and strong; the luck's bound to turn, you know, but I've blown in my coin, and can't afford to stay for the tide."

"All right," said Gilbert, smiling at this specious argument, "upon condition that you share the benefit of the turning tide at least to the extent of what you have already invested," and then as the boy, whom he knew could not well afford to lose, protested against this generosity, he added: "It's only fair, and it's the only condition upon which I will take your place.

Run along now—I heard some one inquiring very solicitously for you as I came through the hall." And then aloud, "If the gentlemen have no objections!"

They had none, of course, and Griscom who had lost, said with a sneer as he dealt the next hand: " 'Lucky at love, unlucky at cards', I ought to retrieve my losses now that you are here."

Gilbert looked up, surprised at the words. and the insolent tone. He saw that Griscom had been drinking. It was a condition foreign to his estimate of Griscom's disposition, but there was excuse for it. This was the first break in a nearly a year's hard work, and marked the completion of the initial step in the great enterprise. There had been a barbecue, and much feasting and toasting in honor of the visiting magnates, and this was but the legitimate result. Tomorrow, their holiday past, they would return to work the harder for it. Liquor affects men differently. The others were as jovial under its influence as Griscom was disagreeable, and for some time after Gilbert entered the game, it progressed smoothly enough, interrupted only by good-natured chaffer and raillery. The stakes were small, only sufficient to create an interest in the game, but were contested for as bitterly by Griscom as if a fortune were at stake. His chagrin was far from being allayed by his ill luck, but Gilbert was at a loss to understand the peculiar bitterness he displayed toward himself, and which could not be accounted for solely upon the ground of his own good fortune, although he won at every hand. At last Griscom suggested raising the limit. The others at first demurred, but upon his insisting as the heaviest loser, and the only means to recoup, they good-

naturally assented. Gilbert had said nothing whatever. Turning to him with a baleful glance, Griscom asked sardonically:

"Have you any objections, sir?"

"None whatever."

"I thought not," was the next taunt as he dealt the cards. "I believe this is a profession in which you became proficient before being forced to leave the city,—if there is anything in the gossip of the clubs. It seems that in this game, as in most others, luck is of little avail against professional skill. I will be fool enough, however, to back my luck again; I raise the ante," and he slid a stack of chips across the table.

Gilbert laid down the cards he held in his hand, and clenched it, while a flush of anger suffused his face. But the action passed unnoticed by the other players, as well as the implied insult in Griscom's words, and glancing at their cards, and the size of the ante, they gave vent to good-natured exclamations of defeat, and throwing down their hands repaired to the sideboard to seek consolation where consolation was to be most quickly found,—in the flowing bowl.

A pallor followed fleetly the flush upon Gilbert's face, betraying the strain he was under to suppress his wrath. Without trusting his voice or looking up at his adversary he calmly threw the chips upon the table.

The few remaining chips at Griscom's elbow hardly sufficed to see the raise, and laying his cards face downward before him, he deliberately reached into an inner pocket, and produced a pocket-book from which he extracted a roll of bills which he added to his pile. Gilbert raised his eyes. As he did

so he saw with a slight start of surprise over Griscom's shoulder a faint glimpse of a fluttering hem of a dress at the corner of the landing upon the staircase. The form of its wearer was concealed from view, but he recognized the figured pattern of the quaint old silk. The next moment, seeming to recognize that his attention was attracted, it disappeared. He knew that she had left the house long before. But he did not know that, failing to find her husband at home, she had returned to seek him, and he had given Adelaide Crenshaw a brief note for her, merely stating that he was going away where he would never see or bother her again, but could not do so without first asking her to forgive him for the selfish, unthinking words with which he had afflicted her. He knew now that she must have received this note sooner than he expected her to do. But why had she taken this means to let him know that she was here,—for, of course, there was no one else in the room she could wish to see. For a full minute he sat there in his chair, distraught, oblivious to all, in a whirl of contending emotions, and then with a start he was recalled from his abstraction by the cold voice of Griscom saying, "Well, when you are done stargazing, and descend to our uninteresting level, we would like to know what you are going to do!"

What he was going to do! That was just what he was asking of himself, but with another meaning. Or did the satirical smile upon the malevolent face opposite him mask a deeper conception of what was passing in his mind than he thought? What did he mean by those ambiguous words? But no, Griscom could have seen nothing; his back was turned, and no one in the room but himself could have caught that

fluttering glimpse. Gilbert did not know that the glass covered picture upon the wall which Griscom faced, at a certain angle reflected the staircase like a mirror.

"I call you," he said hastily and laid his cards face uppermost upon the table.

White with passion, Griscom dashed his own defeated hand into the discarded deck, and for a moment bent upon him a look of intense hatred. Then his lips wreathed in a malevolent smile, and writhed with deadly locution, as, in the silence that followed, the others looking silently on at this culmination of the game, his words issued hissingly forth from between his set teeth:

"Your skill as a gambler is only surpassed by your success as a Lothario. I congratulate you upon your 'luck' with cards and women. It would be ungallant for me to detain you farther from your assignation." He arose and, pushing back his chair, said with affected courtesy: "My humblest regards to Madame Colbert."

Gilbert was upon his feet in an instant, but before he could hurl himself across the table to strike the blow for which his hand was clenched, there was a sudden movement behind him, and Joe Bob Colbert whom none of them had noticed, and who had been sitting, drooped over apparently from liquor, in a dark corner behind the projecting chimney, started to his feet, overthrowing his chair, and with a single stride reached the table. His face was flushed with anger as well as liquor.

"What—what did I hear ye say? Let that name fall from your lying lips again and—"

"That will do!" interrupted Gilbert authoritatively. "No more. This is not your quarrel—"

"One at a time, gentlemen, one at a time, if you please, and I will attend to you both," exclaimed Griscom, backing away from the table with one hand behind him.

"But it is my quarrel; I will make it my quarrel. Who are ye to fight her battles!" exclaimed the infuriated husband, turning fiercely upon Gilbert.

"Fool!" was his reply. "I tell you this is my quarrel; neither you nor yours have anything to do with it. You are mistaken, as these gentlemen here well know; you are only making yourself ridiculous. I have a personal account to settle with this gentleman, and you have nothing to do with it."

"Very adroit, Lothario, very adroit indeed; worthy of the gay deceiver," cried Griscom goadingly. "Settle it between yourselves which of you has most claims upon the lady—"

He never finished the sentence. With a cry of rage Gilbert overthrew the table to get at him, and as he started back to escape being struck by it, sprang across it so quickly that Griscom had his weapon struck upward as he fired, and the next instant Gilbert's hand was at his throat, and he was borne back violently to the wall. And then suddenly he was free again. Dazed, his head in a whirl from the blow it had received against the wall, he was for a moment unable to understand what had caused his adversary to so suddenly release him, and brushing the plaster from his eyes he saw his smoking pistol lying at his feet where it had fallen, and looking up, his late antagonist standing in the centre of the room, his expression one of annoyance and utter confusion. Just beyond him stood Joe Bob Colbert. The others, with palpable lack of confidence in his erring aim, had

promptly fled from the room at the shot. And then upon the landing of the old-fashioned staircase he saw with surprise upon surprise, a female figure, a vision of female loveliness, in a quaint, flowered silk dress.

Gilbert thought he had never seen her look more lovely, nor could he ever look upon her appearance with more annoyance. It defeated his last hope to keep her out of this unfortunate affair, to accomplish which he would willingly have given his life. Whatever prompted her to such imprudence?

Griscom felt that she spoke alone to him as looking down upon them with flushed, excited face, she said calmly, and with the dignity that so well became her:

"For shame! Is this the pastime of gentlemen? I came to look for my husband, and lingered to see how gentlemen acted among themselves. Our poor, uncultured mountain people do not conduct themselves so. I came to learn what true gentility was. Fine, gentlemanly amusements you have,—gambling, quarreling, fighting, and—caluminating a poor, defenceless, absent woman,—taking from her the only possession she has in all the world,—her good name. Gentlemen! Ha! ha! ha!"

The thoroughly abashed man looking up at her drooped his gaze before her fearless glance. He shrunk before her first words, instinct with such withering scorn. He cowered before that satirical denunciation. Anything he could say or do would have seemed a work of supererogation, so debased he felt, so far beneath her; and, like a whipped hound, he slunk out of the room.

For a moment Gilbert stood disconcerted, uncertain whether she wished him to follow Griscom or to stay.

And then feeling that he probably stood between husband and wife, he turned to go, but was halted by a fierce exclamation from the mountaineer, and wheeling, confronted him. A look of intense hatred distorted his face,—a look that Gilbert had seen once before. And now, as then, he confronted it with cool but determined and unfearing defiance.

"Yes, ye, damn ye,—ye air the one I want. What do I care for t'other one? He never took my still from me. He never brought this change on the mountings. He never sided with our enemy, and nussed him back to life to be turned loose like a reptile upon us. The blood of Abram Crenshaw isn't on his hands. It ain't him as cast us out 'n our old lives, and lords hit over us now, and wouldn't even leave us our wives! Ye have changed things mightily, young man, sence ye come into the Cove, and with yo' law and yo' cohts, and yo' officers ye may think to make nigger-slaves out'n us. But there's free men left yet, and ye can't escape yo' day o' reckonin'."

He had been drinking, and he was working himself up to a point he had never reached before. There was a murderous gleam in his eye that Gilbert had not seen that other time. But as he paused for breath he felt a light hand upon his arm, and a soft voice said appealingly, "Joe!"

He started, and shook it from his arm, but did not glance around, and kept his baleful gaze upon Gilbert.

"Joe," she said then, and there were tears in the voice, "you do not know what I have suffered for you, but do not make me suffer more. I have been true to you,—all that a good wife could be I have

tried to be to you,—tried, oh! so hard, Joe, to please you. Do not drive me from you. I want to be good, and be true to you. Help me, Joe!" There was warning as well as entreaty in the words. "Think of how you came to me, a young, thoughtless, simple girl. I was taken as by storm with your strength, your manhood, and I gave you all I had, Joe, myself. Don't throw that poor gift away now," and then she placed her arms about his neck.

Joe Bob Colbert would have been more than mortal could he have resisted that appeal; it was sweet to him, as it would have been to any man, to feel those lovely arms about his neck, that head upon his shoulder. And that most radiant, most divine of all feelings, the triumph that swells the heart of man when lovely woman woos him, expelled for the moment all enmity and hatred. Oblivious to all else he turned at last, and clasped her to his bosom.

Gilbert softly turned the knob of the door, and silently withdrew. As he closed it after him he heard her say—and somehow he felt that the words were for him, that she was unselfishly contemplating the sacrifice herself that he might not have to go:

"We will leave this place, Joe. It is no longer the mountains that were the breath of your life, and I will be content never to hear another steam-whistle, to go far away wherever you wish. I will be your Ruth in deed as in name. 'Whither thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people; thy God my God!'"

Chapter XIX.

At Last.

FROM the club house to the stables there was unusual stir and bustle about the grounds of the Hillside Hunt Club one grey day at the tag end of the hunting season in early spring. Not gentle spring etherially mild as in Thompson's seasons, but raw, cold, and nipping spring as too often the case in Kentucky seasons. Although it was not a hunting day, the previous week having witnessed the last regular run of the season, there was still an air of unusual activity and preparation as for some important event. And although it was still early in the day a crowd had already begun to gather such as no hunting day in the height of the season ever brought forth. The sound of a coach horn was heard, and a yellow drag swung through the grounds; a smart little dog cart drew out of its way, and it stopped before the porte cochere. A number of lively young men got out, some going into the club house to study the board upon which were chalked up a number of names. The others went direct to the stables to inspect the hooded and blanketed inmates who were to settle that day over the steeple-chase course the mooted question of their ability to go cross-country which a season of hard riding had failed to entirely elucidate to the satisfaction of their owners. There were nine names upon the board.

"Well now what do you think of that!" exclaimed

Jack Harkaway, in tones of inexpressible disgust as his eye fell upon one of the entries. "Nomad, with Mr. T. Jefferson Arnett up!"

"Why yes. Didn't you know 'Gene Melton had sold Nomad to him?" answered one of his companions.

"And I offered Sir Tristam to him for a mere song. Well, Nomad wasn't the only animal sold in that transaction. Wonder what 'Gene got for the old skate?"

"Dunno, but he got all he was worth if he had been a gift. If the old bolter don't break the boy's neck I'll be fooled. It hasn't been a week since 'Gene had him fired. I met young Arnett on the road yesterday proud as a peacock over his purchase. 'What are those bandages on his legs for?' I asked, playing innocent. My, but that boy is a green one! He said Nomad was very thin-skinned on account of his high breeding, and Mr. Melton put them on to protect his legs from the briers. Say, how's that for a good one!" And then they all laughed heartily at the verdancy of the young dupe.

"The idea of letting that young idiot ride a steeplechase,—the stewards ought to refuse the entry. He's a shocking pounder," asserted another one of the group. "I let him try that bay mare of mine, and she threw a curb,—I had to knock a hundred off her price on account of it."

And then they all turned to greet a newcomer who acknowledged their salutations with stiff nods, and having overheard a part of their conversation, said reminiscently, as he glanced at the board, "Nomad? Nomad? He's not an imported horse is he?"

"Why yes. Young Curtis brought him over, but

didn't have 'hands' to ride him, and traded him to 'Gene for a Lissak filly with no mouth to speak of."

"Well he has rather an ugly reputation on the other side,—ran through a hurdle and broke his jockey's neck I believe," and he passed on to the breakfast-room.

"Talk about warm propositions," exclaimed young Mr. T. Jefferson Arnett to a couple of young gentlemen on the other side of the room, who were evidently strangers, "but do you see that swell-looking fellow over there,—the one with the morning coat over his racing jacket just going into the breakfast-room,—well he certainly is the bell cow. They all follow him. Yes, he's the favorite in the betting. Doesn't he look cool though," he exclaimed enviously.

For Mr. T. Jefferson Arnett, despite his labored attempt to appear unconcerned, was very much excited over the approaching event in which for the first time he was to participate. He talked and laughed loudly, for he considered it unmasculine to exhibit the perturbation he was in, and the height of his ambition was to be considered very mature indeed. He was an aspiring youth fresh from school, and some day would be rich. He had recently been introduced at the club, where he instantly became very popular with the members who had horses to sell. He thought he had never met such genial and hospitable men before. A dozen of them offered him mounts, complimented him on the way he rode, and intimated casually that he had gotten more out of that particular horse than they had ever been able to do, and the animal seemed so well adapted to his peculiar style of riding he ought to own it, etc., etc.

Somehow he was sensible that for some inexplicable reason his popularity seemed suddenly to wane. Its decline dated from a few days before when he had purchased Nomad, but of course that could have nothing to do with it.

"Oh! I say, Jeff," exclaimed one of his companions, staring at him over a very high collar with a vacuous stare in which there was the light of a discovery. It had been prompted by the reference to the breakfast-room. "You ought to feed your face you know."

"Yes," assented the other. "Don't let us keep you, old chap. We lunched before we came out, you know. First thing you know they'll be pulling this thing off, you know, and you'll get left."

It was a prospect that had no terrors for him. He never had less appetite in his life. But he could not afford to let the others find that out, and with a great pretense of being hungry he sauntered into the breakfast-room. The favorite in the betting looked up from the paper spread out before him, and nodded cheerfully.

"Join me," he said, and the waiter at his back brought another chair to the little table exclusively reserved for the great man.

Young Arnett felt flattered at the distinction, for it was a distinction to breakfast with him. He continued reading his paper with a preoccupied air, not noticing Arnett further. But this was characteristic of him. He was not given to small talk. When he did speak it was to say something that others repeated. More than likely it was something that still others regretted having provoked him into speaking at all. And yet men as well as women thought well of him, and sought his society. What he thought of

them in return no one knew. His wit though keen was kindly, though dreaded it did not rankle. He spent his summers abroad. Young Arnett wondered vaguely why he rode steeple-chases anyhow,—he had no reputation to make; he could not care to win,—to him it was too easy to be alluring; his life was one continuous crimson sun-set. The boy determined that if he got through this one alive he would never tempt fate by entering another. Then he gave the waiter an elaborate order, and the great man opposite looked up in surprise, and laid down his paper with a smile.

"You are very keen," he said quizzically, attacking a dainty roll peckishly, and washing down the morsel with a sip from his demi-tasse.

"Why, I don't know," stammered the boy, feeling that those clear grey eyes saw through his specious pretense. "Fact is, I don't feel very hungry, but I,—I thought I would order all that stuff in hopes of finding something I could tackle. That isn't all you are going to eat?" he concluded, staring at the scant prospect of provender before the other.

"Yes, I don't care to gorge myself," he said, with that peculiar smile. He looked perfectly cool. He had won many steeple-chases over all kinds of dangerous courses, and ridden horses that had killed good men. "It's nothing to be ashamed of. It's the excitement. That's a part of the game. Whenever I lose the excitement I will quit riding. But that will hardly be while the game lasts. What with law and order leagues, societies for the suppression of this, that, and the other, its about the only game left for a man to indulge in where he has a chance to break his neck. 'No game was ever yet worth a rap

for a rational man to play, in which no disaster, no mishap, can possibly find its way,' according to the old couplet, you know."

He sipped his coffee meditatively, and added softly with a strange far-away look in his eyes. "It's a good way to go,—when your time comes,—all over in a minute, and no fuss about it."

"Yes, but 'sposing a fellow doesn't want to go," protested Arnett, appalled at the prospect elicited by the others words, which were far from reassuring to him. He had too much to live for. And then he thought how much more of happiness the other's cup must contain, and realized how cowardly the unguarded exclamation must seem.

"Well I don't know about that," was the strange reply. There was still a musing look in the grey eyes. He spoke as if he were talking to himself. "I don't know about that. I do know that you can't if you want to,—until your time comes." And then he seemed to recall himself with a start, and said in quite a different tone, "You are riding Nomad, I believe. He is a bolter and you ought to —"

"No, but I beg pardon." interrupted Arnett, who resented this slander of his horse, coming as it did from one who could not possibly know the animal as well as its owner. Much pride comes with the sense of property in one's first horse. "Some of the boys have been telling you that,—they are mad because I didn't buy their horses. Mr. Melton broke him of that thoroughly by using a curb,—I have tried him and know."

The other smiled leniently at the youth's championship of his pet. "I am glad to hear he is over

that. But he is a close jumper,—I rode him in England when he was young and sound,—and that is a fault which does not improve with age. Do not rush him at his jumps, but give him his head free. He is willing enough. Most beginners get falls because they think they know how to 'lift' their horses, and 'foot' them at their jumps. Let him have his way. He has been chasing longer than you have, and knows what he can do. If he refuses fall out of the race,—it is better than falling off,—if you are not ready to go. According to the old saw it takes seven tailors to make a man. The hunter construes it seven croppers to make a horseman. You have had your tailors, I believe, but your croppers are yet due you. Take my advice if you wish to keep on the debit side of the ledger. There's the paper if you care to look at it." And he turned to his mail, which lay unopened beside his plate, evidently done with the subject, leaving the boy to ponder the advice which he well knew was not given idly.

There were a number of missives directed in feminine script, invitations mostly, and one apparently business letter, the envelope bearing a typewritten address. This was regarded with a frown, and laid aside until the others were read, and then returning to it he opened it. There were two typewritten pages, signed by the president of the Blue Lick Mineral Company.

"Important meeting of the directors I presume, —well, why don't they notify my banker in the first place,—they know he has my proxy. What is the use of boring me with all these business details for which I have no inclination," he grumbled to him-

self. He was about to return the pages to the envelope to forward to his agent in town, when his eye caught a name upon the last page that attracted his attention, and, eagerly scanning a paragraph from which he could derive no meaning, he hastily turned it over, and began at the beginning.

"Dear Gilbert," it ran. "I know how averse you are to being bothered with our business affairs, but a matter of much moment has arisen that necessitates my violating your instructions. To state the case briefly, you may remember that the vein of coking coal upon which we depended for the smelters lay upon the south side of the ridge. Shortly after beginning operations it was discovered that there was a peculiar and unexpected fault, or rather dip in the vein. It ended abruptly a short distance from where mining was first begun and reappeared farther along the mountain side upon land which was claimed by an old moonshiner by the name of Colbert. It seems your grandfather had given one of his ancestors a vague sort of deed to the land upon which he had squatted, intending to convey a strip of land along the creek in consideration of some inconsiderable services rendered him by the old squatter. It was evidently the intention of the deed to convey a small plot of land for farming purposes, in fact the word "tillable" is used in the deed, but under a liberal construction it has been held to convey a strip running all the way back from the creek over the mountain to the original boundary line on the ridge, and including this very valuable coal field. Mr. Griscom, who was our general manager at the time, seems to have incurred the enmity of this old moonshiner, as indeed he did most of

the people with whom he came in contact up there, and to make a long story short, instead of purchasing his claim, which could have been easily done at the time, the matter was litigated, and decided against us. In the meantime the company had been working the vein under legal advice, and damages were consequently assessed against us in an exborbitant amount. Upon the termination of the litigation we endeavored to buy the land, but this Colbert seems to have been a peculiar, dog-in-the-manger kind of a fellow, and refused to sell at any price what was worthless to him or anyone else except this company. The damages we were forced to pay him seemed to place him above the need of money, and enabled him to gratify his spite. We have since then been working upon the other end of the vein at ever-increasing expense. We have finally got to a point where it will not pay us to produce, and unless something is done the works will have to close down. This will explain to you the decrease in your last semi-annual dividend, and the delay in declaring the present one which is past due. Unless something is done at once there will be no more dividends to declare."

Gilbert lay down the letter at this point, and, finishing his coffee, fixedly regarded the dregs in the bottom of the little cup. It was not a pleasant prospect he saw there, if the frown upon his brow were any indication. Looking up he met his own gaze in the opposite mirror, and the frown became portentous. Men as well as women had pronounced him handsome, but he seemed to find little consolation in the contemplation of the reflected face. The gay, insouciant, and self-confident expression which had once been its prevailing characteristic was re-

placed now by an air of serious if not melancholy reflection. There were romantic stories about him whispered by the sentimentalists, but details were avoided with that studious air which always attends the artistic stretching of the blankets of veracity to their most tenuous extent. When an eligible young man sucessfully eludes the wiles of match-making mammas, and simply asserts his privilege of preferring the freedom of affluent bachlorhood, it is the popular mood to believe with Tommy Atkins that he had "cared a sight deal too much for one woman to 'ave much likin' left for the lot." His hair was prematurely streaked with grey at the sides. It is wonderful what changes a few years of affluence can make in a man, for of course affluence alone was responsible for these changes.

His father had died some time before, and he now owned the controlling interest in the Blue Lick Mineral Company. He had taken no interest whatever in the management of its affairs, but had taken some interest in the recent report of his banker that the usual semi-annual dividend was past due, and his balance in bank about exhausted. This was his only source of revenue, the balance of his father's estate having gone to his step-mother, and that little phrase "no more dividends", possessed appalling prospects. But he determined that come what might he would not gratify the Vatinian hatred of Joe Bob Colbert by humbling himself to sue for favors at his hands. He wondered how the writer had obtained the idea, for of course he divined before reading it that this was to follow,—perhaps the mountaineer had intimated as much. He lit a cigarette, and resumed the perusal of the letter. The

first sentence caused him to start with surprise, and eagerly devour the few remaining lines.

"Some time ago we learned of the death of this man Colbert, who seems to have been overtaken by an avenging nemesis in the shape of another moonshiner,—an old feud, which is an old story in the mountains. We have since then been endeavoring to open negotiations with his wife, the residuary legatee, who, I understand, is a most estimable lady. The difficulty was in locating her, but we finally succeeded in doing so at a place called "St. Mary's-on-the-Mount," a charitable mission which she seems to be interested in furthering. She replied to our request for her price upon the property that she would be entirely governed by you. In fact her reply constitutes an acceptance of whatever price you fix. It is worthless to her as it is valuable to us. I have reason to believe that the money will be devoted to the aforesaid charitable purpose, and were we in a position to afford charity I would advise being liberal. But of course charity begins at home. Our surplus has been exhausted in the increased running expenses. We will have to negotiate a loan upon the plant, which, being unencumbered, it will be easy to do. I understand you are familiar with the location of the land, and know its worth, or rather worthlessness, considered from any standpoint but that of our present needs. Please reply at once, and also address a letter to Mrs. Colbert, which will be my authority to close this deal at the price you fix, and I need trouble you no farther."

Gilbert arose abruptly, thrusting the letter into his pocket, and, catching up the balance of his mail, went hastily up to his room where, an hour later,

his colored valet found him busy writing. The saddling bell had sounded some time before, and the negro was nervously expecting the bugle to summon the starters to the post at any moment. His master was dressed for the race, having put on a morning coat over his colors before going down, but he hung around pretending to be busy with Gilbert's wardrobe.

"It's mighty nigh time fo' the bugle, sah," he said finally in desperation.

"All right, Jackson, I believe I am about through now," answered Gilbert. He addressed three envelopes, and enclosed the letters he had been writing in them.

"I am afraid they will never forgive me for this," he said smiling to himself as he sealed the one addressed to the President of the Blue Lick Mineral Company. "But as I own three-fourths of the stock they ought to stand it if I can. They will have to. I suppose the company can pay out in a couple of years. Wonder what I am going to do in the mean time?" he ruminated. "I am afraid this will be my last steeple-chase for a while. It's a bad time of year to sell hunters too. I suppose I ought to give Jackson notice now so that he can look for another situation," and he turned toward him with some regret,—for he had been faithful to his young master as only dogs and negroes can,—to explain the necessity under which he was to part with him when the clear notes of the bugle, sounded on the course, penetrated to the apartment, and, starting up with an expression of agony from his occupation, the darky exclaimed:

"Dar now, you'll be late now, sah!"

He possessed an exaggerated idea of the importance of punctiliousness in small affairs, a conviction which had received many severe shocks since he had entered the service of his erratic young master. But Gilbert appreciated the heinousness of keeping a lot of restive horses, and equally impatient riders and spectators awaiting his pleasure, and hastily started up, holding one of the letters in his hand.

"Mail these at once," he said, indicating the two letters upon the table addressed respectively to Mrs. Ruth Colbert, and the President of the Blue Lick Mineral Co. "If I should have the luck to break my neck see that this reaches its destination," and he thrust the third letter into the breast of his racing jacket.

The starters were forming for the parade, and he had not yet weighed out. Had it been any one else the race would probably have been run without him.

"I never knew Gil to be late before," said Jack Harkaway in the paddock.

"Confound him, I wish he would come on," answered Harry Hunter, who was shivering in his thin silk racing jacket.

"There he is at last," and Harkaway, who was an old hand in the game, and had kept on his coat, stripped out of it, and, handing it to his groom, clambered into the saddle.

The nine starters filed past the line of spectators who were drawn up on foot, and in carts, and coaches, and traps, and four-in-hands. Mr. T. Jefferson Arnett on Nomad fixed his eyes on the old hurdler's ears, but he was conscious that the gaze of the entire crowd was upon him. He wondered what they were saying. He wondered if by any

freak of thought transference they divined the fear he was in.

Afraid? Who said he was afraid? It was excitement—that was what Gilbert Garrett called it, and told him it was nothing to be ashamed of. But all the same his face burned, and a queer swimming was in his head, and oh, how he wished it was safely through with.

They were at the post. They all turned around, and then old Nomad, who had walked up to the post like a cow, plunged madly forward the moment his head was turned, and Arnett caught his breath. The starter yelled at him impatiently. He got Nomad short by the head, and wheeled him back into line, and then suddenly, so suddenly that he was almost unseated, some one shouted "go" as his horse plunged forward again, he saw the flag fall, and the race was on. He found himself galloping easily across the open meadow in the middle of the bunch. Why this was as delightful as it was unexpected. The exhilaration of confidence arose in him, and the fear,—no the excitement,—fell from him like a garment.

The field strung out as they swept on to the first jump, for the cautious were willing to wait for a lead over, and the experienced were equally willing for the green hands to cut out the pace and pump their mounts at the start. It is the finish that wins a race. The boy suddenly found himself in front, and felt lost. But he remembered that he had only to steer between that double line of little fluttering silk pennons that marked the course. The thunder of hoofs was close behind him, but he did not dare to look around, and he could not hear Hark-away say to Gilbert who was coming up on the left.

"Let the kid go. He'll ride out soon. A mile at this clip will kill old Nomad."

But he did see a horse's head creeping up on his left, and a moment later heard Gil Garett say quietly: "Steady,—there's four miles before you."

He nodded his head with sudden comprehension, and put his weight on his horse's mouth. The next moment they flew the low hedge together, and settled into their stride once more across the open pasture. It was close-cropped, affording the fine springy turf that blue-grass renders unequalled, and they swept across it at a pace that almost took his breath away. He leaned heavier against the bit, and two of the riders passed him.

"Now give him his head," Gilbert exclaimed beside him as they came at the fence on the far side. It was fully a foot higher than the hedge, and made of stout plank. He went over it with his heart in his mouth, and he knew what Gilbert meant when he said Nomad was a close jumper. The horse's knees scraped the top plank, and his hind hoofs rattled upon it. But he was over, and floundering through the cornfield. It was soft and sticky. With a whoop Harkaway went by him. The next moment a shower of mud flung from his horse's heels struck Arnett in the face nearly blinding him. He ducked his head, and lightened his pull upon Nomad's bit, but he saw vaguely that some one else was going by upon the other side. The ground seemed to stream away beneath him like a brown river. Peering through the shower of mud he dimly described three blurred forms bobbing over a fence in front of him, and the next moment he felt himself rising in the air as he

followed them over upon good going again. It was turf, and he urged Nomad forward to gain upon the leaders. The fever of the race was infecting him. He knew now why men rode steeple-chases. A keen shivering glee flashed through his soul. Such a flight is among heroic feats,and fills one with the fire of valor. He longed once more to be in front of them all. He heard a crash behind him. "Some one's down," he thought, but did not look around. He saw Gilbert Garrett leisurely sitting back on his bay mare in front, glance over his shoulder at the sound, but settle into his seat again. How gracefully he rode, holding his mount well in hand. And then he seemed to lift the mare along without an effort and draw away from the other two that were with him. Arnett took it as an indication that the time had come to let out his mount, and released Nomad from his pull. But the two in front seemed to him to fall back to him rather than to gain upon them himself, for Gilbert held him at the same distance stride for stride. The course turned sharply to the left over another hedge, and into a meadow. Was it the home meadow? No,—only one resembling it, but the race was half over. He urged Nomad madly on, and as he went at the hedge saw too late that he had violated Gilbert's instruction to not make him rush his jumps. Fortunately it was not a fence,—the old hurdler went over, or through somehow, and landed stiff-legged on the other side with his rider up on his neck. Arnett scrambled back into his seat, and groped for the swinging stirrups with his feet, but did not get them into the irons again until half way across the meadow. But he regained them at last, and plunged his feet home so that he would not

lose them again. Before the next fence was reached he had passed first Hunter and then Harkaway.

"Go ahead young fellow," said the latter good-naturedly. "I'm out of it. Ride while you can,—you've got a chance for second place."

He saw that he had gained nothing upon Gilbert, who was rating along easily under a heavy pull, the bay mare moving like a machine beneath him. It was apparent to all the rest now that he had the heels of the lot, and the race was won. But the fury of the running was seething in the boy's veins, and drawing the whip from under his leg he touched his tiring mount with it. The old racer responded gamely to the call, and plunged madly forward at the next fence.

There was a startling crash of breaking rails, and glancing around Gilbert saw young Arnett coming an appalling cropper over the fence. The next moment old Nomad struggled to his feet trailing his rider head downward, and broke into a runaway gait. The feet had stuck in the stirrups this time.

Gilbert saw in a flash that there was no time for either he or the others to attempt overhauling the runaway. Before that could be done the boy would be swung under the hoofs, or dashed to death. There was but one thing to do, and he did it. Wheeling the bay mare about, as if she were upon a pivot, such perfect mastery did he possess over his mount that without perceptibly checking her gait, he threw her fairly across the path of the runaway. He had but a short distance to ride, and calculating pace and direction correctly, the bay mare met Nomad fairly at right angles.

Gilbert was conscious of a stunning shock as the

two horses collided, and the next moment he was in a struggling heap, the flash of hoofs the last thing before his confused sight, and then all sensation was swallowed up in darkness.

* * *

When he awoke he wondered vaguely where he was. In the semi-obscurity he recognized the room. He was lying in his own bed. He tried vainly to recall the horrible nightmare from which he had at last escaped. And then out of the multitude of dreams which had tormented him, dreams vague and confused in all but their haunting horror, one vision appeared clear and distinct, a vision of flashing hoofs smashing down upon him. Then he remembered what had happened.

But how did he come here? The hoofs were as vivid before his eyes as if it had been but a moment before that he had felt that stunning shock. And yet he realized it must have taken some time to go through all those other dream horrors. He raised his hand to his head. It felt like a foreign substance. returning no more sensation than if it belonged to another. It was swathed with bandages. He heard some one stir in the darkened room, and endeavored to sit up, but found himself incapable, and sank back exhausted among the pillows, his heart thumping violently, and his breath coming quickly with the feeble effort.

He heard the faint rustle of a dress, and when he opened his eyes again it was to gaze into hers. So had she come to him in dreams, and so had those beatified orbs in many waking moments, haunted his memory; but now,—he wondered vaguely if he could be dreaming,—it was so different from the

fearful delirium through which he had passed. And then she knelt down beside him, and took the hand which lay upon the counterpane in both her own. A strange glow of hope broke over him, and flowed like living fire through all his veins at the touch. If this were a dream then never before had fancy so cheated man with its shadowy semblance of the substance of things.

"Ruth," he exclaimed, "is it—can this be?"

"Yes, dear," she answered softly, "it is I, your Ruth, here by your side, where I have the right to be,—at last. Don't you know me?"

Know her! If he were dead, as he had dreamt that he was, surely that touch could recall him to life, as her face drew nearer, and her lips were pressed to his.

"But what—how came you to be here?" he asked after a few seraphic moments.

"I got your letter," she replied simply.

"What letter?"

"Both,—but for me there was only one." The door opened, and Jackson came into the room with a tray. He did not seem at all surprised at seeing the handsome young woman kneeling there with his master's head pillowed upon her arm. But then Gilbert remembered that he must have been delirious for some days, and Jackson was possibly enured to strange things.

"I am afraid, Jackson," said the injured man with a shadow of his old smile, and a trace of his old cheerful badinage in his voice, "that you have made a glorius mistake, which, among other things, has placed me in the light of a premeditated prevaricator. One of those letters began with the statement that I

was dead, sort of obituary notice,—I told you not to mail it unless I broke my neck."

"Yes sah," was the cheerful reply. "But I went to de race, sah, and arterwards, sah, I got 'em all mixed up, and didn't know which from 'tother, sah."

"For which obliquity of duty, sah, you can consider your wages doubled, sah."

"Thankee, sah."

"Will you forgive me for fooling you and failing to break my neck?" he asked.

Her answer was quite sufficient, and certainly expressive, although not expressed in words, and Jackson setting down the tray, with rare good judgment betook himself hastily out of the room, divining that his duty for the present lay elsewhere.