NAZARETH

A TALE OF THE

LURAY CAVERNS

WARREN.

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BY

B. C. WARREN

"For through that country there was a great way to go, namely, of a year and a half; and the same region is called Arsareth."—II Esdras xiii. 45.

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TO

M. S. B. W.

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ARSARETH.

CHAPTER I.

BY THE BROOK.

On a summer afternoon in the year 1830, a young girl stood, fishing-rod in hand, by the side of a brook in one of Virginia's loveliest valleys, the Valley of Luray. No fish had disturbed her hook for more than an hour, yet still the cork floated lightly on the stream.

She was not fishing, but dreaming; indulging in that favorite pastime of girls of her age—a day-dream.

And truly the day was one to dream in. One of those glorious days in mid-summer when the mountains seem asleep in a robe of misty light; the murmur of insect life floats lazily on the air and all nature seems pervaded with the soft influences of sloth and repose.

This Virginia girl, over whose golden hair twenty summers have shed their warmth, is deserving of our attention.

While she stands looking on the stream at her feet, but observing no feature of brook or field or sky, we will take the liberty to study her, for if there ever was a girl whose face was an index of her soul, that girl was Alice Davis.

In that State, noted for its graceful girls and stately ladies, Alice would not be called beautiful; but on a second look there would be something manifest in her, such a forceful character looking out of every feature, as cannot be expressed by the word "beauty" even as it is far above it.

In her blue eyes there is manifest a strength of purpose, that can readily be observed even when her whole nature is, as on the present occasion, in repose.

The lower part of her face indicates firmness, and one would not look twice at her to form an opinion that he was looking at one who possessed a resolute mind and a fearless spirit.

Grace and vigor are manifest in every outline of her body, while her eyes, as they look upon the brook, are expressive of a soul oppressed with melancholy, but warmed with the fires of poetry and love.

Summer in a Virginia valley once enjoyed is never forgotten. The deep, rich hue of sky and water—not a hard metallic gleam, as in more northern latitudes, but an azure glory through which the eye penetrates and beholds hue meet hue, and color melt into color with an enchanting suggestiveness that can be *felt* but never described.

The atmosphere of Virginia is an atmosphere of chivalry and poetry. The winds that blow across the Luray Valley, from the Blue Ridge, as they breathe over its varied surface of hill and dale, and whisper through its pine-trees, seem to greet the fancy with suggestions of romantic story and feed the imagination with thoughts of love.

While Alice Davis, lost in reverie, toys with her fishing-rod, we will take the opportunity to observe at least a few of the natural beauties that abound everywhere through this wonderful valley.

In the distance the Blue Ridge Mountains intercept our vision on the southeast, and, as the afternoon sun strikes them aslant, the far-reaching shadows cover up the lines of light until their summits purple into darkness and mingle with the tracery of cloud that floats above them.

Now let the mind journey across the Great Valley, and we shall see the peaks of the North Mountain standing up above the rocky elevation, like sentinels upon a parapet; while over and among them strange and cloudy shapes glow and change, separate and combine; with fingers of mist comb out the sunbeams and from their prismatic fragments weave for themselves garments of many-colored light, arrayed in which they seem to

stand on crystal battlements, a glorified reflection of earth's mountains, outlined on the vast expanses of the sky.

Such is the Great Valley of Virginia—a land of corn and wine and song; a land of romance, aristocracy and tradition. Virginia—the watchword of honor and valor. Its soil—the home of earth's fairest daughters. Its atmosphere—the very breath of love.

Alice Davis, still looking at the brook, but seeing nothing of it, starts suddenly, for just before her the stream reflects, as in a mirror, a strong, manly face.

"How many fish to-day, Alice, dear?" asks a clear full voice. "You don't mean to tell me that you have been fishing through all these hours and caught nothing? Rather interesting I should say, yet when I first saw you I could have sworn that you were engaged in the sport with the deepest interest."

The face of the young lady colored slightly as she replied, "I have enjoyed the sport without inflicting cruelty on the fish. John, why did you come up so quietly? You made no more noise than a ghost."

John Elton sent a laughing glance from his brown eyes at this remark, certain that whatever else he resembled on or under the earth, he certainly bore no sort of likeness to any form of that frontispiece of superstition, a ghost. Drawing his tall, symmetrical figure up to its full height, he asked,

"Since when have I reminded you of a ghost? I trust the ghostly labors to which your father devotes so much of his time, have not weakened your nerves, Alice. How is Mr. Davis? Still employed in metaphysical researches, I suppose?"

While this last question was being asked, an observer might have noticed a change come over the expressive countenance of Alice Davis. Her features became drawn as though she suffered; and as she replied, both eye and voice indicated the deepest sadness.

"The research in which my father spends his days, and which makes such rigorous demands upon him as scarce leaves him time for food or slumber, will end I fear, not only in destroying his faith in an all-wise Creator, but also in wrecking both his mind and body. After many years of earnest study and experiment, he

appears to be no nearer the truth he seeks, than when he first began his quest for it, while the strain on nerve and brain, to which he is subjected, and the disappointment which results from repeated failures, have well-nigh worn him out."

"But do you never remonstrate with him, Alice, dear?"

"Remonstrate with him," she replied, "then you are not aware?" Here she paused and colored painfully.

"Aware of what?" he asked.

"That it is my assistance that has made my father's experiments possible; that the encouragement of my presence and sympathy alone has saved him from despair and possibly from madness or death."

"Good heavens! Alice Davis," exclaimed the young man, "I never suspected this. You have already given amazing proofs of filial affection in crushing down the emotions of your heart, in obedience to the wishes of your father; but is it possible that in addition to all the other sacrifices, he has seen fit to demand that you immolate yourself, your time, your health, yea, even the beauty and purity of your girlish faith, on the altar of this most absurd and abominable superstition?"

Here the girl drew back and made a gesture of dissent, while her lover—for at the first glance, such the young man is seen to be—lifted his hand and pointed toward the declining sun, whose dim and beamless rim seemed resting on the purple hill-tops.

"I must speak my mind," he said. "Look at the sun. Only an hour ago it was filling this whole valley with laughing, joyous glory. Now behold it, wrapped in vapors and shorn of its beams, it appears as though settling into the rayless caverns of the mountains, to be seen no more. Even so will it be with your young life. Like yonder sun, it has been giving color and beauty to all this portion of the valley; why, there is not a slave to be found on any plantation within a circle of twenty miles, but knows and loves the name of Alice Davis. And from the day I first saw you, three years ago, adrift upon the Shenandoah, having seated yourself in an oarless boat without observing that it was not fastened to the shore—from that day, the sum total of all the affection that this valley feels for Alice Davis, has become concentrated into one mighty affection,

and such a passionte love is this moment the pride and treasure of my heart."

"Yes, and from the hour when I first saw you," quickly exclaimed Alice, "as you bent at your oars in the endeavor to tow my boat back to the land, you have felt no thrill of love for me that has not been returned."

"And yet, Alice, at the command of your father, you promised not to marry me, and not only that, but you have encouraged the attentions of Walter Desmond, whose only recommendation is that he is rich, and whose only claim to your consideration is the request of Mr. Davis that you favor him."

Again John Elton glanced toward the western heaven, from which the sun had gone, and in whose placid depths now shone the evening-star.

"And Alice," said he, "as surely as the sun became obscured by gloom, and went down behind the shadows of the mountain, so surely will your young life be obscured by these uncanny influences. Your health and spirit will be broken. Your dear hand bartered for the gold of a rich profligate; and even the rich legacy of a Christian faith, left you by your mother, as she passed into the unseen, will be torn from you by the mad ambition and superstition of your——"

"Hush!" said Alice. "Cast no such reflections on my father. I assure you they do him great injustice. In the first place, he never *made* me promise anything. He *desired* a promise from me that I would not marry you until the time when your fortunes or mine became such that we could be united without fear of actual poverty. And as for Walter Desmond, the only wish father has expressed so far"—and here Alice showed evident hesitation—"is that I should treat that gentleman with the consideration and attention due from me to his warmest friend."

"Yes," added Elton, "the only wish he has *expressed*. But you know very well that your father never intends you shall be mine; that it is only the slight service that I was enabled to render him that prevents him from positively forbidding me the house, while that Desmond is treated with all the consideration due a social magnate of the first water. But forgive me, Alice, I did

not mean to wound your feelings. What, not crying? Oh! it was cruel of me to say such things, but then my great love for you, my darling, makes me positively savage against any one who should try to distress or injure you in any way; even though that one should be your own father."

"You have not been cruel, John, nor has cruelty been manifested by my father, but harsh circumstances have driven him to adopt opinions and take measures foreign to his own better nature. He believes the day will come when the present generation will recognize in him its greatest living benefactor; and every wind that blows over the earth will then be laden with the voices of his fame."

"And do you share these wild fancies of his, Alice?"

"Only in part. But come, the dew is falling very heavily and the hour for tea has long since passed. I am sure Aunt Chloe has not forgotten me, and doubtless we shall find enough for two."

Crossing the rustic bridge that spanned the brook they passed down the path through the shrubbery a little way; then as the gloaming deepened into night they crossed the road and entered the sloping lawn on which stood the home of Eldridge Davis.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTIVE.

THE house into which the lovers passed was a sufficient indication of the poverty of its inmates; needed repairs on the roof had been neglected until portions of the rafters, decaying, had allowed sections of the shingles to sag in. Some of the windows were minus one shutter, others had lost both. There were holes in the roof of the piazza that served as loop-holes for the stars to shine through.

And of the many "Quarters" back of the lawn, that had once served as homes for the small army of plantation slaves, all but three were now empty and most of them had fallen into ruin. A cheerless place one would say, who might be forced to seek shelter for the night at the Davis homestead.

Certainly it would not afford a very promising prospect to one who might view it from the lawn; while if observed from the rear, it seemed to be but one story in height, as a "shed roof" ran down on the western side. Large mulberry-trees grew round it on all sides except in front, where tall English poplars shot skyward.

Standing at the lawn gate, in the evening, and looking up at the front of the house, one would be strangely impressed by the appearance of the three windows in the second story, which, being wholly without shutters, seemed to stare out over the roof of the piazza through the gathering darkness, with a white and ghostly look, as if the phantom faces of the former inmates of the house were mourning for a prosperity that should return no more.

But we must hasten to remark that all this unfavorable appearance was confined to the exterior. Once cross the threshold of that home, while the indications of limited means and pinching economy might

abound on every hand, yet one would instantly be aware that the inventive genius of some cultured woman had been at work there, and that she had succeeded in so employing the very limited means at her command as to transform this unpromising structure into a really pleasant and comfortable home.

As Alice Davis and John Elton enter the house, they are met by Aunt Chloe, one of those Virginia household treasures, that are now but a tender memory of other days.

Her head was swathed in a huge, red bandana handkerchief, her eyes rolled up until scarce anything but the whites were visible, and with hands elevated, she greeted them with a perfect stream of African volubility.

"Bressed Lawd, de suppah table done stan fo' two hou's; Mastah eat his suppah long go an done walked out. I was feared you had get lost, honey. Nebber spected dat Mistah Elton was long wid ye. 'War air de fish? Spec's ye hab mighty poo' luck. Let Aunt Chloe fol' de line up and you chil'lun go right in to suppah."

The fare was not sumptuous, but to John Elton as he sat at that table with its spotless linen, faultless china and simple yet wholesome food, and above all, with the blue eyes of Alice Davis glancing at him across the board, there was a pleasure in that supper which he would not have exchanged for a seat at the table of a king.

Is there anything more pleasant in this world than an hour at the tea-table with those we love? The labors and duties of the day all over, the doors of the past closed and bolted on the experiences of another ten-hour period, and we enjoying a rest that derives its chief zest from the weariness superinduced by honest toil.

But if such pleasures linger round the ordinary tea-table, how are they enhanced when the tea-urn is presided over by a charming girl of twenty summers, and her sole companion is a brown-eyed youth of twenty-three?

Ah, Reader, doubtless in the halls of memory you can find some picture like the one we have been feebly painting; if so, there has come a light from it that has

given a silver edge to your every cloud of sorrow and will pierce your future's gloomy hours and shoot them through with gold.

If the heart be true, such pictures as this will warm it through all time, and out of it will grow Hope's roses which shall breathe their sweet breath, even on the confines of the tomb.

Let them enjoy their supper, and while Aunt Chloe bustles about in the kitchen, we will take the reader back to a period seven years before the commencement of this story. Eldridge Davis was then a prosperous man, rich in fertile fields, which under the faithful labors of his slaves yielded him annually abundant crops; but this prosperity was in no sense due to the management or sagacity of Mr. Davis.

Martha Davis was not only the "angel of the household" in that home but also the prime mover and manager in every enterprise undertaken by her husband, whether of an agricultural or commercial character. While abounding in good sense and business ability, Mrs. Davis was not in any respect what might be called a "masculine woman." Every instinct of her nature was truly womanly, and with the prudence of a good house-keeper, she blended the gentleness of a true wife, the warm love of the best of mothers and the faith of a consistent Christian.

Of all this, the character of Eldridge Davis was the very antipodes. While he was a man who meant well, a student, and a Virginian of the old school—a gentleman; at the same time, he had an impulsive spirit, a quick temper and a weak will—a very unfortunate combination in the character of any man. Besides, he paid but little attention to business and permitted the care of the plantation to fall largely on the shoulders of his wife.

On her mind, rather, for once the plans were laid a competent overseer attended to their execution, and a large number of slaves, of both sexes, relieved the members of the family of any share, either in the household or plantation toil.

The head of the Davis household was a nervous, dark-complexioned man of light weight—never weighed over one hundred and thirty pounds—and afflicted

very much with indigestion and malaria. A dreamer of the most approved type, whose mind never evolved an idea that bore even the most distant kinship to utility. In fact, his range of study was almost wholly within the regions of the occult. At the time of which we write, little was known of mesmerism, still less of clairvoyance; while the possibility of charging material objects with electricity thrown off by persons of peculiar temperament, was a subject scarcely understood at all by the masses of the people.

True, there were occasional phenomena and manifestations that could not be understood, but the wiseacres of that day condemned the whole thing as the product of a diseased fancy; while a great mass of negro tradition that peopled every house, wood, and especially every graveyard, with a horrible army of ghouls, ghosts and gibbering fiends, caused sensible people to cast additional ridicule on every attempt to solve the mysteries of "ghostly manifestation" or make any inquiries in the realms of the supernatural.

But regardless of ridicule or contempt, it was along the dim shores, and over the rayless waters of this very country, that Mr. Davis had resolved to make his voyage of discovery. So far as the hopes and joys of practical Christianity were concerned, he gave himself but little anxiety about them. Theoretically he was a Christian, although it was more the unconscious influence and sweet spirit of his wife, than any fidelity of his own, that made him still recognize the old landmarks in the religious system of his native land.

Alice Davis, although the only child of her parents, seemed an exception to the general rule supposed to apply in such cases, for no amount of petting or caressing was able to spoil either her good manners or the sweetness and gentleness of her disposition. From her earliest years, a slave was ready to obey her slightest wish and humor her every whim. Her every desire was gratified. Her every caprice was honored.

Yet amid it all, Alice developed a disposition which was a marvel of considerate kindness and love: and when she reached the age of twelve, there was not a slave on her father's plantation but loved her. Nor did it stop there; on all the plantations for a dozen

miles away, the name of Alice Davis was, with both master and slave, but a synonym of popularity.

She was a fearless rider, and on her black pony, "Gipsy," used to scour the country far and wide, sometimes doing errands for her father, but oftener enjoying a brisk canter in the early morning before the other members of the family were astir. Or, when the shadows lengthened down the mountains and the refreshing breath of the evening began to dispel the sultry influences of the day—this was always a favorite hour with Alice for a ride—she would don her graceful habit and jaunty hat and in a short time would be miles away.

On such excursions she always had a kind word or a polite nod for all whom she chanced to meet, and as she passed along the highway, many a dusky face would be turned toward her, and from over the fence she would catch the words spoken by one laborer to another, "Dar goes Miss Alice Davis, Lawd bress her."

It was on the nineteenth of November, seven years before this story opens, that an event occurred that brought a sad change to the fortunes of the Davis family. Mrs. Davis had been in feeble health for some time, but as she was not the sort of woman to magnify trifles, no uneasiness was felt by the family, who were unconscious of her real condition; it was thought a few simple remedies would stop the cough which troubled her.

About this time the intelligence was brought that an aunt of hers, who lived upon a neighboring plantation, was dead. Of course she must attend the funeral. Although the weather was not cold, there had been a rain the night before and on the afternoon of the funeral the ground was damp.

Mrs. Davis left her carriage at the gate of the cemetery, followed the coffin to its last resting-place, and stood, during the service, on a portion of the clay that had been thrown from the grave. As a result of this imprudence, she was stricken with pneumonia, and in two weeks after the funeral of her aunt, she was carried to the grave.

It was on the nineteenth of November, as we have

said, that Mrs. Davis passed away. While it is not our purpose to draw a picture of the death-bed scene, yet we will say that her spirit left the earth, not like the swallow, darting out into the unknown gloom, but rather like the dove, which after the day is ended, delights to rest its tired wing in the shelter of the friendly dove-cote.

The presence of the Ice-Crowned Monarch struck no terror to the Christian's heart ; but as the light of Faith fell on him, he became transformed into a seraph oarsman, whose noiseless strokes should waft her soul beyond the flood.

During her last hours, Martha Davis seemed chiefly concerned about her husband. While she loved Alice with all the tender affection of a true mother, yet such was the character and tendency manifested by the child, that the mother had long since ceased to feel any apprehensive fear about her future, except as that future might depend upon the conduct and fortunes of her father. Therefore, it was for Eldridge Davis that she was doubly anxious.

She knew him to be utterly incapable of managing the affairs of the plantation ; and she feared that when she was no longer present to counsel and influence him, the tendency toward occultism, that she had noticed was growing on him of late, would obscure the last ray of truth with the blackness of utter superstition. But little of this fear did she express in words. She knew her husband well enough to know that his defects were largely the result of the peculiar constitution of his mind, and that any warnings given, or promises extorted from him, would only tend to deepen his sorrow, without serving any useful purpose in the future. Therefore she said but little. Holding the hand of Alice, who sat beside her bed, she looked out through her chamber window toward the western sky, which was aglow with that peculiar splendor, as of light penetrating a veil of vapor until subdued and softened by it, which has given the Indian summer in Virginia, the fame of being the balmiest and sweetest period of the year.

On this subdued glory which rested like a spell on mountain and forest, Mrs. Davis gazed, while her soul

drank in its beauty. But she spoke no word, nor was the silence broken, save by a sob which now and then burst from the burdened heart of Alice, or a low groan that occasionally came from the distant corner, where Mr. Davis sat, his head bowed in grief upon his hands. As the sun shot its last spear over the blue rim of Virginia's mountains, another spear pierced the walls of a mortal tenement; and the soul of Martha Davis was with her God.

It was not long after this that things began to go wrong in the Davis homestead. A general "shiftlessness" began to manifest itself on all sides. The corn was planted either too early or too late; or else the ground was not properly prepared for its reception. Sometimes after having been planted, it received such wretched cultivation that it never came to successful maturity. And so with all the other crops on the plantation.

Next, the new overseer proved to be neglectful of his duties and permitted the slaves to spend whole days in idleness, or else fritter away their time in the performance of work that amounted to but little; then again, he would crowd upon them greater tasks than they were able to perform, beating them cruelly if the work was not done in the allotted time. As may be readily imagined, the natural result of such mismanagement was that a spirit of sullen indifference began to manifest itself in the negro "quarters," until, from the cheerful group of servants who used to sing their weird melodies in the moonlight, and execute their grotesque dances when the labors of the day were ended, in two years after the death of Mrs. Davis, there was left only half the original number, and they were neither able nor willing to do the work of the plantation.

The failure of crops had necessitated the contraction of debts which could only be paid by the sale of one or more slaves—an affair that always caused Alice deep regret—and this state of things had gone on until all the best of the slaves had been sold. While affairs had thus been going from bad to worse on the plantation, quite as marked a change had been taking place in Mr. Davis. There were days together when he was never visible outside the house. Locked in his study, which

was the north room on the second floor, he would have his meals carried to him by Aunt Chloe, who was never permitted to enter her master's room; for in answer to her knock he always opened the door, and after receiving the food she brought, he would reënter his study and immediately close the door; and she could hear the key turn, as he locked it after him. Nor did he confine his labors to the day. But also through the hours of the night, the light might be seen streaming from the upper half of his window (the lower half being curtained) and not a slave could be induced to approach that portion of the dwelling alone after dark, because they affirmed that "Uncle Ned"—one of their number—returning from a coon-hunt about one o'clock in the morning, had seen, staring through a pane in the upper half of that window, a face as ghostly pale as any that lay under its coffin-lid in the family cemetery; its stony eyes, looking straight out over the piazza roof, were fixed in an expression which froze his blood, while round its head there danced and played a garish light, that made the apparition visible.

No one doubted the testimony of "Uncle Ned," for was he not a "Prophet in Israel" and an "exhorter" in the "meetin'?" Beside, this statement was corroborated by the experience of many others of the colored persuasion, who were ready to testify, so they said, that they had heard sundry unearthly noises proceeding from the closed room, as they did their belated chores. Some had heard chains rattle and others, wild imploring voices that seemed to struggle out of the very depths of woe.

And strange to say, these voices and noises had been heard "right while Mar's Eldridge's light wa'r burnin' in de room." In fact, the slaves believed their master to be in league with the Evil One. "Sold to him, body an' soul" as "Aunt Chloe" remarked to "Uncle Ned." "An' wo'st of all, he is gwine to bring my poor lam', dat her mother done lef' me on her def bed, into de same fix."

For a while Alice tried to use her influence with her father to prevent his spending so much time in the study of the occult sciences; but at length, seeing how useless were all her efforts, she ceased to remonstrate

with him, and as she had, because of her sympathetic nature, always enjoyed his fullest confidence, she found herself at last taking an active interest in his studies.

Alice never meant to pass beyond the moral limits of investigation, but her chief desire was to be a companion to her father—the one being in whom he could confide; to whom he could speak freely of the strange facts that might be revealed to him, as he traversed the unmapped lowlands of the Supernatural. Of one thing she was resolved, that whatever changes might occur in the opinion of her father, she would never lose her faith in the truth of Evangelical and Orthodox Christianity.

In the meantime, things went from bad to worse on the plantation.

The neighbors, while still retaining their love for Alice, would speak of the Davis homestead with an ominous shake of the head. As one of them remarked, "Ah, it was a sad day for that household when the Lord took Martha Davis."

"Yes," answered another, "and if Miss Alice doesn't take her mother's place soon, times will be still worse with them; for the roof will be sold from over their heads for debt, or else will tumble down upon them."

CHAPTER III.

"YOU HAVE SAVED MY HONOR."

"AND now, Alice, as your father has not yet returned, will you tell me something more about his fancies—or his studies, I should have said?" asked John Elton, as he and Alice Davis were seated in the parlor, after tea. "It is a matter of common talk that he is engaged in some sort of speculative study, yet never until I heard it from your own lips, did I know that you were interested in it."

"No," replied Alice, "with the exception of Aunt Chloe and Uncle Ned few if any of our slaves even know that I assist my father in his labors."

"Well, what is this great secret," John asked, "to which you referred this afternoon when you said that by means of it your father expected to make his name famous? Surely you do not mean to tell me, Alice, that you believe in all this pitiful moonshine—if you will allow me to manifest such apparent disrespect for the opinions of your father as to so term them?"

"Well," said Alice, "I told you my apprehensions with regard to father, but I only referred to the strain upon his health of nightly vigils and repeated disappointments."

"But I inferred from your remarks that there were other dangers, that his hopes for the future, his belief in the religion of his race, even his faith in——"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, "all that is true; but if you could see the strange intelligence that material objects appear at times to manifest, during our experiments, the startling results of certain thought-processes and bodily exercises, as I have seen them, I hardly think you would again dare to call it 'pitiful moonshine.'"

"I hardly understand you, Alice," replied her friend, "I thought the special hobby of your father was alchemy. I supposed he believed it possible, by certain

chemical combinations, to find a substance equivalent to the 'philosopher's stone' whose touch should transform into gold the baser metals."

Here Alice burst out laughing. "Oh no, John, father's dreams may be wild and unearthly, but he is at least free from an insanity like that."

"Well then, in the name of all that's wonderful, tell me what this secret is! What is it he desires to know, and how does he expect to know it?"

Just here footsteps were heard crossing the piazza, and a question was addressed to Uncle Ned, by Mr. Davis.

"I am sorry, Alice dear, that we must cease our conversation just at this point, as I assure you, the theme is one that deeply interests me," John Elton remarked, as he arose to take his leave. "You know that my visits must be few and far between. But as soon as possible I shall come again, when I hope to hear the remainder of this strange story; in the meantime, I may hope, may I not, dearest, that you will have a care for your health and not overtask yourself? And, Alice, you will not forget the fact that I truly love you, will you?"

Here a dark moustache drew very near the wavy tresses just beneath it; but the intruding footsteps sounded nearer, and with a "Good-evening, daughter, good-evening, Mr. Elton," the master of the house entered the room.

John Elton extended his hand, which Mr. Davis received with the cool touch of indifference. A few commonplace remarks were made, and the young man bade good-by to father and daughter and passed out into the night.

The moon was working wonders that evening in the Luray Valley. The shadows cast by the shrubbery along the road, seemed pierced by blades of silver, and a jeweled veil enveloped one-half of every tree. The brooks were dappled with alternate light and shade. Cobwebs wet with dew, floating in the air, made it appear as though the swift shuttles of the fairies had woven over all the valley a robe of gossamer.

The overseer's spirit was in full harmony with nature's beauties. He believed that whatever influence

Eldridge Davis might have been able to exert upon his daughter with respect to the strange study in which they were mutually interested, it was very evident to his mind, that nothing had been able to shake the fidelity of her soul to the man she loved. Hence, whatever mystery might gather round the Davis household, John Elton gave himself little concern about it, so long as it did not injure Alice, and this she had assured him it would not do.

It is now time that we should ask, who is this John Elton, that in return for the slight service of towing her drifting boat ashore, Alice Davis should bestow upon him the unspeakable treasure of her girlish heart?

A broad-shouldered, manly youth with dark hair, brushed well up from an intellectual brow, under which frank brown eyes looked one straight in the face. And from the hour when they had first looked into the agitated face of Alice Davis, as she drifted helplessly upon the Shenandoah, their expression she had never forgotten. Their glance had touched a hitherto voiceless chord somewhere in the depths of her soul and she knew that its music would never cease.

John Elton's only fortune was the honored name he bore, and the blue blood that filled his veins.

His father, Orville Elton, had been an extensive ship-builder in the early days and had sent out many vessels to the Spanish Main. After having amassed a large fortune, one day the tide of his prosperity began to turn, as all tides do. Storms destroyed a number of his ships; still others were captured by pirates; and this ill luck, together with some unfortunate speculations, soon rendered the Eltons nearly penniless. Such disaster told heavily on Orville Elton, and when John, his only living son, was eleven years old, he found himself without a father.

These repeated reverses, together with grief for the loss of her husband, were too much for the delicate constitution of Mrs. Elton, and in less than a year after the death of her husband, she was resting by his side.

What to do with the orphan boy now became a serious question. It was at last resolved that out of what remained of his father's estate after the debts

were paid—and it was little enough—John should be educated. So at the age of sixteen, our hero found himself dependent upon his own resources.

While his education would have qualified him for a position as secretary in any office, and even for a still more responsible and lucrative position, yet he never could endure the idea of being closeted with musty books; so after one or two unsatisfactory attempts in that direction, he chose the free, healthy life of the plantation and—much to the disgust of his friends—accepted a position as overseer, offered him by Harold Hopkins, a planter who resided three miles distant from the Davis homestead.

Whoever will consider the peculiar features of Virginia society, also at the same time remembering how much stronger social prejudice must have been sixty years ago than it is now, will not wonder that the sensitive nature of Eldridge Davis felt a smart, when a neighbor's overseer presumed to pay attention to his daughter.

Beside, his opposition to such a thing was intensified by certain ambitious dreams, in which he had associated his daughter with a certain wealthy neighbor, who, of late, had become his most intimate friend. This man was none other than the one already referred to by Elton in his conversation with Alice—the planter, Walter Desmond.

Nor is it likely that John Elton would have enjoyed the scant courtesy he at present received from Mr. Davis had it not been for the kindness he had shown that gentleman on a certain critical occasion, an account of which we shall presently give.

It was this good turn that Elton had done him in the past, together with the known wishes of Alice, whom her father feared to offend, especially just at this time, that prevented Eldridge Davis from taking steps to cause the visits of the overseer to his home to cease.

A true gentleman is never more rigid in exacting all the little courtesies and forms of respect which he imagines are due him, than when he has experienced a reverse of fortune. Especially would this apply to gentlemen of Virginia sixty years ago.

Eldridge Davis was no exception to this rule. A

little over four years before the opening of our story, Mr. Davis had attended a political meeting in the village of Luray, some miles distant from his home. Representatives of many of the first families of the valley had assembled to hear the issues of the campaign discussed, and to participate in the social and convivial pleasures that have always made political gatherings so popular with our country gentlemen. But, as is frequently the case, *all* who attended that meeting were not gentlemen.

Among the crowd there soon appeared here and there a rough; then two or three tavern loungers. Gradually, this intrusive element increased in number, and brought with it a sprinkling of those nondescript individuals who are usually invisible, except on the occasion of a political meeting, circus, horse-race, or the like, when, bracing themselves with huge quantities of bad whiskey, they sally forth, attracting attention chiefly by their loud voices, bad language, and burly forms. Such a crowd, if it has a leader to its taste, is frequently a serious menace to the peace and order of a country town.

In this uncouth company that congregated at the meeting, there chanced to be a blacksmith by the name of Brinkley, whose shop stood at a "cross-roads," only a little distance from the village.

A short time previous to this meeting, Mr. Davis, while riding near Brinkley's place, found that his horse had lost a shoe, and, fearing that it might go lame before he could reach home, he rode by the shop to have it shod. Brinkley did the work, but did it in such a wretched manner that Mr. Davis felt obliged to remonstrate with him. He informed him that he never permitted a blacksmith to cut away so much of his horse's hoof, and that his method of "burning on the shoe" was very objectionable, according to his opinion.

Brinkley immediately took umbrage, and began to use such language that Mr. Davis, not caring to hear it, paid for the work done, mounted his horse, and rode away.

About four o'clock on the afternoon of the meeting Mr. Davis, surrounded by four or five of his friends, was expressing his opinion of the speech to which they

had just listened. While he was in the midst of his remarks a person approached the little group and laid his hand heavily on his shoulder. Turning quickly, Eldridge Davis found himself confronted by the blacksmith, Brinkley.

"I want to know what you have been lying about me for, all over this county?"

These were the words that were hurled into the face of the planter as he started back a step and shook the hand of his assailant from his shoulder. A moment he paused—so complete was his surprise—and then with flashing eyes, demanded: "What do you mean? Are you aware to whom you address such language?"

"Oh, yes," was the insolent reply, "I know all about who I am talking to. It's no gentleman—only a beggarly aristocrat. That's all you are, Eldridge Davis, a poor, proud, contemptible beggar, and Mark Brinkley is the very man that can tell you so, right to your teeth."

The insulted gentleman could stand no more, but, clenching his fist, dealt the scoundrel a blow between the eyes that made him reel.

Any one who has attended a political meeting in the country and seen a fight started there, mainly through the influence of whiskey, can imagine the result of that first blow. The crowd of roughs, always ready to be spectators, or even assistants in such an affair, flocked from every quarter.

"Hurrah for Mark Brinkley!" "I'll back Mark Brinkley," were the cries heard on all sides.

It was evident, at a glance, that Eldridge Davis was no match for his burly antagonist, nor would he—had it been a matter of choice—have deigned to soil his hands with such a person. But the necessity was upon him. Stung by the unprovoked insult, and especially by the maddening taunt about his poverty, made in the presence of his friends, Mr. Davis had struck the man, and now his only course was to defend himself to the best of his ability.

Without a weapon and confronted by a man of twice his strength, his position was indeed perilous. Nor were his friends apparently able to render any assistance; the whole thing had been so sudden that they scarcely realized what was taking place, until they

found themselves the centre of a crowd of the worst rum-crazed fiends to be found in all the valley.

Such a scene, it would appear, could only end in Mr. Davis being badly beaten and possibly killed. Just at this juncture, when Brinkley was about to return the blow, an athletic form struggled through the crowd and sprang between the blacksmith and the planter.

"Stand back, men," the stranger cried, "back I say, Brinkley. Why, you hound, what has this gentleman done that you should insult him in this manner?"

"He struck me," shrieked Brinkley, "and I'll have his life," at the same time attempting to spring past the young gentleman and get at Mr. Davis.

The stranger promptly knocked him down. Then before the blacksmith could arise, he called to the assembly in a loud voice:

"Gentlemen, I heard the insult passed. This man was brutally assaulted and was called 'liar' and 'beggar' here in the presence of his friends. Do you mean to force a gentleman of Virginia to bear such outrage? By heavens, not while I can lift a hand to stop it!"

Many in the crowd drew back; they had no desire to feel the weight of a hand that could do the execution which they had just witnessed. By this time the blacksmith had arisen from the ground and with blood-shot eyes was confronting his opponent.

"Why did *you* meddle?" he exclaimed. "It was no quarrel of yours, young man! Eldridge Davis has told it up and down this valley that I was not fit to shoe a goat, much less a horse; that I ruined the best saddle-horse he had. I meant to thrash him for it, and I will do it yet," he shrieked, his anger waxing with his words. "The next—" here he was interrupted.

"There will be no 'next,'" cried his opponent. "We will settle this matter here and now. Men," he exclaimed, "this fight is in defence of a gentleman and for the honor of old Virginia."

The effect produced by the speaker's words was instantaneous and entirely favorable to him. He had appealed successfully to that love of native state which is a perfect passion in the breasts of all Virginians, even though they be like those to whom he spoke, of the lower classes.

A cry was raised at once, "Hurrah for Elton," "Good for John Elton," "I'll back the gentleman overseer."

There was no fight. The blacksmith, seeing his friends forsake him, with a muttered exclamation turned and strode away.

A few moments later Eldridge Davis and John Elton were standing apart from the crowd. Grasping the young man's hand, the former remarked:

"Some men might consider they were under obligation to you, if you had saved their lives, or rescued their property from destruction. But, young man, such services are not worthy to be named in comparison with the one which you have rendered me; *you have saved my honor!*"

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE CAMP-MEETING.

"MISTAH DESMON' wishes to see ye, sah," Aunt Chloe announced, as she knocked on the door of her master's study one afternoon about a week after the visit of John Elton.

"Where is he, Chloe?" asked Mr. Davis.

"In de' parlor, sah, waitin' fo' ye."

"Inform him that I will be down at once."

A few moments later, the two men were seated and engaged in conversation.

Walter Desmond was, perhaps, thirty years of age, although fast living and the free indulgence of epicurean tastes had so effected him as to cause him to appear much older. He was not, by any means, a bad looking man.

Tall and slender, his every motion was full of grace, and every act and word denoted the fact that he was thoroughly familiar with all the usages of polite society. His appearance was rather of the feminine type, and when he spoke, his voice had none of that depth and fulness that is supposed to indicate a strong, masculine character.

The countenance of Desmond did not improve under close inspection. Light hair that grew low down upon his forehead, eyes of an uncertain shade of blue, and features that spoke more of passion than purity, served to destroy any good impression his trim figure might have made upon the observer.

But it was not the features of Walter Desmond so much as it was his facial expression, that caused the unpleasant impression to which we refer. There was a fulness and protrusion of the eye, a thickness of the lower lip and a general expression of coarseness about the face, indicative of the fact that he did not live in the upper stories of the human habitation; conse-

quently that pure thought and refined sentiment were stranger to him than passionate impulse and selfish gratification.

"I came over to invite you and your daughter to attend our lawn-party at Desmond Hall, next Wednesday afternoon," said Desmond. "It has been a long time since we have had the pleasure of your company, and as for Miss Alice, why, one never sees her any more, so I trust you will both make amends by attending our party. Many of the first families of the valley are expected to be represented and my sister especially desires that your daughter shall be one of our guests."

While Desmond was extending his invitation, Eldridge Davis manifested considerable uneasiness, which fact was not lost upon his friend.

"Why do you hesitate?" he asked. "I am sure your studies are sufficiently fatiguing to make a little recreation both profitable and pleasant."

"Oh, certainly, it was not of myself that I was thinking," Davis answered, nervously; "that is—if Alice would consent to go, but do you know, Desmond, my daughter seems to care nothing for society; it is with the greatest difficulty that I can induce her to accompany me even for a social call, and I am sure that at the first mention of this party she would make some excuse and utterly refuse to go."

While Mr. Davis was making these last remarks, the face of Walter Desmond gave indication of rising anger. Drawing his chair nearer to that of Mr. Davis, he said:

"And can you not guess why this is so? Simply because in the society of *one*, Miss Alice loses zest for the society of the many. That overseer of Harold Hopkins——"

"Hold, Mr. Desmond," said the other, "John Elton, whatever may be his social position, is the friend of my daughter and a caller at my house, and, while this is a state of affairs with which I am far from being pleased, yet, such being the case, I must ask you to show becoming respect in your remarks concerning him.

"Yes, but have you forgotten, Mr. Davis, that you gave your consent that I should pay my addresses to

your daughter? Now if you look upon my suit with favor, why is it that this Elton is permitted to be continually in the way? Of late, Miss Alice has manifested more than usual coldness and I lay it all to the visits of this confounded Elton. Why do you not forbid him your house? You could at least do that much."

"Why?" asked Eldridge Davis; "because, in the first place, he is my daughter's friend, and in the second, I owe him a debt of honor, such an obligation as a true Virginian may not forget."

"And I understand then that in order to discharge this fancied obligation that you term a debt, you intend to give him the hand of your daughter. Is that it, Mr. Davis?"

The face of Eldridge Davis presented a picture of confusion touched with anger as he replied:

"Well, Desmond, tell me what to do. You see the position I am in. I do not care to insult young Elton; notwithstanding his humble occupation, he is a gentleman, and I stand in such relation to him that to act unkindly would not be gentlemanly on my part. Beside, Alice would never brook an insult passed upon her friend. The girl has a will of iron, and while obedient and passive on most points, when aroused on a question of principle or honor she would no more bend than one of those oaks across the way. Now this is just my position, can you tell me what to do?"

Walter Desmond meditated for a moment.

"I think I understand the situation," he said, "and I assure you I appreciate your view of it. It appears there is but one course to pursue and that is to remonstrate with your daughter. Show her the disadvantages—nay, the virtual impossibility of a union between John Elton and herself, and the advantages—but I will say no more. You know best with what arguments to influence her; I can only wish for them the best success. And I may expect you both at the party, may I not?"

"Well, of course, I shall not come unless Alice decides to accompany me," was the reply; "and of that I have but little hope; but this much I will promise, I will do my best to persuade her. Besides, I intend to say some serious things to Alice, more serious than anything I have yet said."

"Well, I hope to see you both, I am sure," said Desmond. "I am sorry that your daughter is not in, as I hoped to have a few words with her before I left," saying which, he left the parlor, crossed the piazza and sprang upon his horse which awaited him on the lawn.

"Where have you been, Alice?" asked her father an hour later, as she entered the house by the rear door. "Mr. Desmond has called and invited us to attend a lawn party at Desmond Hall next Wednesday. He desired to see you very much, but after waiting quite a while, he had to go away disappointed. I trust, however, that he may be compensated by seeing you next Wednesday, for of course you will accept his invitation, Alice?"

"No, indeed, I cannot," she quickly replied, "I have arranged to spend my time differently next Wednesday."

Mr. Davis, swallowing the angry expression that arose to his lips, requested his daughter to step into the parlor as he desired a word with her. The door being closed, he turned to her and said:

"Why is it, Alice, that when Mr. Desmond calls, you are always out? I have noticed of late that you take especial pains to shun him. I am sure you must have seen him this afternoon as he came upon the lawn, as I heard you singing just a moment before. Yet when he calls, Aunt Chloe informs him you are not in."

"Well, father, I hope I am not a prisoner in the house because Mr. Desmond chances to call on you," said Alice.

"He does not 'chance to call' as you term it. Nor does he call on *me*. Let there be no nonsense between us, Alice. You are perfectly aware that *you* are the cause of Mr. Desmond's visits."

"What do you mean, father?" asked Alice, her face aflame with indignation. "You know well enough that I have never encouraged the visits of Mr. Desmond, and I now tell you that I positively dislike the man, and were it not for the fact that he is a friend of yours, I should certainly refuse to meet him."

Mr. Davis looked hard at his daughter for a moment; visions of another face came up between them—a face

that for seven years had been sleeping under its green roof out in the cemetery. When he spoke again it was in a changed and lower voice.

"Forgive me, Alice dear, I did not mean to offend you, but you know how it is with us. Of late it has been a very difficult matter, I assure you, for me to scrape enough money together to run the household. The house is falling down for want of repairs and I scarcely know which way to turn."

"Ah, father," said Alice, "if you would only give up this pursuit of yours even at this late hour something might be done to better our condition. I am willing to direct all my energy to the reduction of our domestic expenses, and at the same time will help you plan for the management of the plantation."

While the girl spoke these words, it was wonderful to see what a glow and zest was manifested in her face. It seemed as if a door of hope had been opened somewhere in her soul, the light from which was shining through her countenance. But as she caught the expression on her father's face, her own instantly darkened.

"No, my child," said he, "we have labored too long together, you and I, and discovered too many of nature's precious secrets that she has treasured in her vaults from the beginning, to relinquish the search now, when strange voices fall upon us out of the unseen, and thrill our hearts with promise. Why, Alice,"—and his voice grew animated as he spoke, "our feet are already on the threshold of those gloomy halls where a race long since departed from the earth, have left their records and their treasure. Patience, daughter, a few more vigils, a few more questions asked and a few more answers wrung from the sealed lips of reluctant shades, and the mighty secret will be ours. With wealth beyond our wildest dreams, and fame which is more sweet than wealth, and I tell you the proudest families in Virginia will be ambitious to class us among their friends."

"Yes, father, such have been your hopes for a long time," said Alice, with a weary little sigh. "I only trust they may be speedily realized. As you say, financially we are in a desperate condition. We have sold slaves and horses, much against our will, until

absolutely, we can sell no more. We have not enough men now to run the plantation; and since we discharged the overseer, contrary to your expectations, you have found it quite impossible to manage your affairs to any profit."

Alice scarcely realized whither she was drifting, until she observed the sudden interest manifested by her father.

"And that is just the reason, Alice, that I invited you in here at this time. The only help that I can hope for must come through Walter Desmond. You know he loves you. He has also, as you well know, asked me to favor his suit. I have given him my promise to do so, and now, Alice, I ask you, as an all-important favor, not to shun the society of Walter Desmond. Go with me to his party; look with favor, if you can, upon his suit; and remember that the day you stand with him before the altar, you will lift a load of sorrow from your father's heart. With you the wife of one of the richest planters of Virginia, I could take my time in working out this secret, and with your help—for it must be understood that I am still to have that—we could apply ourselves anew to our experiments and doubtless in a short time the answer that we hope for would be ours."

"Father, why do you hope for greater success in your studies after I am married than you have now? You have my assistance all the time I can possibly spare from household duties, and I am sure, such spirit and energy as I now give to this work, would no longer be mine to give were I to bid adieu to happiness and become the wife of Walter Desmond."

"I suppose your happiness would not be so utterly destroyed by standing at the altar with another whom I might name," said her father, in a tone of sarcasm.

Alice said nothing in reply to this, but simply gave her father a steady, calm look; the meaning conveyed by that glance would be more easily felt than expressed. Her father's eye fell beneath it and he appeared as though conscious of having said more than was consistent with true manhood.

"Forgive me, daughter," he remarked, "you know I cherish deep respect for Mr. Elton; I cannot but feel,

however, that were it not for his presence and influence there would be no bar to the accomplishment of my desires. I have no reproach to cast upon either of you because of this, and I believe your friend to be an honorable man, but oh, Alice, I beg of you, use some discretion in this matter. You cannot possibly hope for a marriage between Mr. Elton and yourself. His circumstances are such that he cannot possibly support a wife, in any way satisfactory to himself, for years to come. What have you to hope for in that direction? You are aware that our dwelling and its surroundings are such as are not likely to prove attractive to desirable society."

"Father, you speak as though I were an object of barter," exclaimed Alice, tears of vexation springing to her eyes.

"No, daughter, I mean nothing of the sort, I am only taking a sober view of your future, social as well as matrimonial, and outside of this Desmond affair, it does indeed look dark. Allow me to urge this matter of the lawn-party a little farther——"

But here the feelings of Alice could no longer be restrained; the full weight of her embarrassment rested on her as it had never done before, and with a great sob, which together with her tears, was the only proof of her deep distress, she arose and left the room.

The day on which the lawn-party was to be held was all that could be asked for in the way of perfection, even from the climate of Virginia. While the sky was cloudless, there was a refreshing air, a cool but gentle breeze from the hills that tempered the rays of the sun and rendered the atmosphere just the desirable temperature to make a lawn-party enjoyable.

The aristocracy of the valley had assembled to do justice to the hospitality of Walter Desmond and his sister; and no pains were spared by either, to have the music, refreshments, and every other part of the entertainment, all that the tastes of the most fastidious might demand.

But it was not to the Desmond lawn-party that Alice Davis went that Wednesday afternoon. About two o'clock on that day, two horses passed off the lawn of

the Davis homestead, and their heads were turned in an opposite direction from the home of Walter Desmond. The horse which Alice rode was a dark bay, of such beautiful clear-cut form, such trim shapely limbs and evident marks of superior breeding as would have thrilled a jockey's heart at the first glance.

When other horses had been sold from the stable, Alice's favorite—"Rex"—successor to "Gipsy" that she used to ride—had always been reserved.

There seemed to be a perfect understanding between "Rex" and his mistress. When Alice desired to ride leisurely along enjoying the cool breath of the evening, "Rex" would seem to know it instinctively, and would so moderate his pace that the oscillations of the saddle became as gentle as the motion of a rocking-chair. But if a faster gait was desired, she had only to press her hand on "Rex's" neck when instantly they were off like the wind; while by laying her whip between his ears, Alice could cause him to take a dead run, leaping every ditch and fence that obstructed his way.

The other horse was a large black one, and the person who rode it was no other than the man that Mr. Davis, in his interview with his daughter, had admitted was "a man of honor," her friend, John Elton.

When Alice informed her father that she had a previous engagement, as a reason why she could not attend the Desmond lawn-party, she had reference to this ride which she is now taking in company with her lover.

John Elton had invited her to ride over with him to the camp-meeting in progress at Preston's Branch, about five miles distant from her home. The leisurely canter in which they indulged soon brought them in sight of the camp-ground. It was on the side of a hill and in the midst of a fine grove of large oak-trees, interspersed with pines, which lifted their tall, straight forms far above their more sturdy neighbors.

Living water, clear and pure as the River of Life, gurgled from the side of the hill on which the camp was "pitched," and it was around these springs that the "young people" gathered after the services of the day were over, to spend an hour in "frivolous gayety" before the "sound of the trumpet" called the congregation to evening preaching.

When they rode up on the camp-ground, Alice dismounted from "Rex," while her friend turned both horses over to the care of the "pound-keeper," who soon provided them with a liberal share of corn and fodder. John and Alice then made their way to the circle, round which the tents were arranged.

The summer tourist whose vacation has been spent at Ocean Grove, or some other fashionable and well-conducted camp-meeting, can have but little idea of the sort of meeting we are now attempting to describe. Two rows of tents extended round a space in the centre, which was provided with seats sufficient to accommodate perhaps four thousand people. These tents, if they deserve the name, presented a very nondescript appearance. A very few of them were made of boards, but for the most part, they consisted of blankets thrown across green boughs that had been bent and tied together, while their ends were sharpened and stuck into the ground.

In many instances families had driven to the encampment in their ox-carts, which had been covered for the occasion with green boughs and blankets and after driving down a "forked" stake they had rested the "tongue" of the cart upon it, thus improvising a tent unrivalled for its grotesque effect in the annals of religion or romance.

About one-third of all the tents in the encampment were these "covered carts" and it was a favorite trick with the "godless sons of Belial" who always made their presence felt at a Virginia camp-meeting in the early days, to prowl around in the dark at an hour when sound sleep was holding sway over the pious occupants of the ox-carts, and, by giving the tongue a sly tip dislodge it from its "forked" resting-place, thereby to give those within a tilt upon the ground.

The seats on which John Elton and Alice Davis took their places were of the plainest possible construction. In the centre of the circle was the preachers' stand, an arrangement consisting of a primitive sort of pulpit, round which in a semicircle, were ranged the benches for the preachers, while just before and below it off the platform was the "mourners' bench," a place prepared for those who sought religion; over all this and sheltering

it was a booth of boughs. A fence was built round the stand and in it were two apertures, called gates, although there were no gates to them, which during the revival period were guarded by the managers of the meeting and no person was permitted to enter the inclosure, unless he were a minister, a "worker" at the altar, or an approved penitent. We use the term "approved," because rowdies, colored persons and children were religiously excluded. The first for obvious reasons. The second, because there was a "mourners' bench" exclusively for them immediately in the rear of the stand. And the third, because at that time children were supposed to know nothing about religion. There was a fence across the camp-ground and running straight to the preachers' stand; all the space in front of it was for the white people, all to the rear was for the negroes. Hence only the semicircular rows of tents in front of the stand were occupied by white people, all the others were for the darkies.

On this particular afternoon there was a large congregation, but not an oppressive crowd. At the usual hour for afternoon service, a minister took his place in the stand whose appearance was in perfect keeping with his surroundings. His clothes were of the plainest fabric, nor was any care manifested as to their fit or suitability for the person who wore them. The only indication of special attention bestowed on his apparel, was observable in the very high "choker" which the minister wore, whose long, pointed ends protruded on either side beyond his chin. This collar, with the white neck-cloth which surrounded it, tended to give him a very solemn appearance as, after the preliminary service was over, he arose to announce his text. The theme selected was one that gave full opportunity for a stirring and personal appeal.

Sixty years had passed over the head of the speaker and they had left him rich in experience of men. He knew but little of the superfluities of "polite society," but having, in his youth, enjoyed the best educational advantages the times afforded he had supplemented the same by a careful study of the lives of the "Christian Fathers" and had obtained in one way or another by studying the well-worn books in his saddle-

bags by the light of light-wood fires in humble cabins under the pine-trees of Virginia, a pretty thorough knowledge of polemics and of systematic theology. The extempore sermon, turgid in style and intensely earnest, was entirely suited to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the audience. As the speaker warmed to his work, the brethren in the stand responded with ever-increasing vigor. Soon the congregation caught the spirit of the hour and cries and shouts of praise were heard on every side. But the preacher was not done yet; accustomed to such work for many years, he did not propose to waste his energy in mere generalities that might end only in awaking the sympathies of his hearers. He became tremendously direct in his denunciations of sin and his delineations of the doom of sinners.

As these burning utterances fell upon the people, the very forest trees appeared to their excited imaginations to sway in unison with their own tempestuous emotions. Amid cries of contrition and ecstatic allelujahs, especially from the colored portion of the congregation in the rear of the stand, the sermon closed, to be immediately followed by an exhortation from another preacher, who invited all penitents to enter the inclosure and bow at the "mourners' bench."

While many were accepting the invitation and flocking to the altar, John Elton turned to his fair young friend who had maintained a reverent silence during the entire service. "Suppose we find a seat farther from the stand," he said, "where we may converse without disturbing the meeting."

As the congregation broke up, some leaving the ground or retiring to their tents, others gathering round the stand, our friends arose and passed out of the tented circle.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAIR CRITIC.

HAVING visited the spring and refreshed themselves from its abundant supplies, we find them, half an hour later, seated under a large oak, through whose gnarled limbs the slanting sunbeams fell, forming pretty pictures, suggestive little designs of light and shade that rested upon the various groups of friends and lovers, who had lingered, like John and Alice, about the confines of the seated enclosure to enjoy the spell-like influences of the summer afternoon, heightened by the effect of such picturesque surroundings.

"Now, Alice," remarked her companion, "that I have a chance to ask you, I should greatly enjoy a fuller account of the strange subjects that claim the especial study of yourself and father. You were about to tell me a few weeks ago, when we were interrupted. This 'secret' that you speak of, may I ask its nature? Be sure I do not wish to pry into the private matters of your family, but then, anything that concerns you is of interest to me, Alice, and these nightly vigils and 'experiments,' as you term them, will, I fear, impair your health. I trust, darling, you will not think me inquisitive, but you remember you informed me that your father was not searching for the mystic substance that transforms into gold——"

"Why, John, what ever put that idea into your head? It is so amusing to have you imagine papa guilty of such nonsense."

"But do you know, Alice, dear," was the reply, "that most people in the valley believe him bent on just such a quest?"

"I had no idea," said Alice, "that they held any such silly opinion of him."

"Well, they do; and some think that in his investigations he makes use of means that are not quite such

as a Christian gentleman should use. Still others—but they are for the most part the ignorant portion of the community and the negroes—believe that he is in direct league with the evil one."

A sad look crossed Alice's face.

"And I suppose they associate my name with all this?"

"Oh, no," was the reply. "I never heard your name mentioned in connection with the affair except as some one sympathized with you on account of the strange infatuation of your father."

"Let them keep their sympathy for the hour of their own necessity," exclaimed Alice, while a suspicion of scorn slightly elevated the corner of her lip. "I would not——"

"Hold, Alice, darling," said her lover, at the same time drawing nearer to her, "do not make any harsh remark about your neighbors, for it is quite impossible to find any one in all this valley, whether high or low, white or colored, who has ever known you, but that esteems and loves you. Now if you will not consider it too great an intrusion upon your confidence, will you not tell me something of this strange matter that has such power to hold and engross your father, even when it would seem other and more important interests demanded his attention? You will forgive me if I have spoken freely, Alice, but you know the deep interest I feel in the welfare of one so dear to me. And you will, will you not, permit this deep interest in the welfare of my darling to condone the fault of any curiosity I may manifest?"

The look which Alice returned him was an all-sufficient answer.

"Then may I ask if this investigation or research—for I scarcely know by what name to call it—in which your father is engaged is scientific, historical or religious?"

"The studies of my father embrace all three of these important fields of human investigation," was the reply. "Our critics suppose, as you have just informed me that we are in quest of a substance that will transform into gold every baser metal that touches it, and in a measure they are right, for we are endeavor-

ing to construct such a crucible as shall transform and recombine the misconceptions, absurdities and superstitions of this age into a pure substance which shall reflect only the white light of truth."

"I do not understand you, Alice," said her companion.

"You do not? Then let us take the first subject that you mentioned, take science; what a disagreement is there in the opinions of its most eminent exponents! Statements that ten years ago were thought to be above a peradventure are ridiculed to-day. And thus it has been through all the past. Yet if a person in the ordinary walks of life ventures to question one of these mighty scientific dictums which was born ten years ago, is questioned to-day by the wise and will be utterly repudiated five years hence, he is sneered at, regarded with distrust and covered with opprobrious epithets. Then consider the next subject, history; who can tell as he ponders over the stories of the nations—reads the records of a century in the exploits of five tyrants, and the fulsome adulation of a horde of slaves—whether he is reading real history or only the clever romance of some inventive fancy? How these accounts contradict one another! Much that was written even by the most reliable of the ancients, belongs entirely to the realms of fable. Now suppose we take the history of our own land, who knows from whence came the Red Men? Have we any reliable account of those strange peoples, who lived and worshipped the Great Creative Energy under the shadows of primeval forests ages before the *protégé* of Isabella pushed his adventurous prow through unknown seas?"

John Elton was simply amazed. Alice Davis was revealing a phase of character which he never dreamed that she possessed.

"Well," he exclaimed, as soon as his astonishment would permit him to reply, "I do not see why we should give ourselves so much trouble about matters of this sort. Certain it is we are all the children of Father Adam, no matter to what part of the earth we may have wandered or what color our faces may wear."

"Indeed," said Alice, "and will you please inform me how we know so much?"

"Well," replied her friend, with mingled wonder

and embarrassment, "are we not all descended from Adam, or at least from Noah? When he left the Ark was not his family——"

"Yes," interrupted Alice, "but have you never thought how near that event was to the morning of the epoch of history? Now in all the thousands of years covered by historic records more or less reliable, how many changes in color and race peculiarities have we observed among the nations?"

"Few, if any," was the reply.

"And if we consult the oldest monuments erected by barbaric power, we shall find impressions on enduring stone which manifest these race peculiarities just as sharply defined as they exist to-day. Have you ever thought how far these monuments push their revelations back toward the Deluge? And what a very little time is left us for the development of the race peculiarities which all the ages of the historic era have not been able to materially alter?"

"Great heavens, Alice! then what becomes of the unity of the race? Do you really doubt the fact of our common origin?"

"I did not wish to cast doubt upon the subject, John, but only to show the necessity for free and independent thought on these great matters. It seems to be the special weakness of the people in this section, that they leave others to do their thinking for them. They are perfectly willing to accept any thing or swallow any theory, no matter how ridiculous or absurd, provided it be ancient and have numbers who have already received, or at least have never questioned, it. And if one declare the right of free thought and the privilege of free investigation, as father and I have done, immediately there is a hue and cry of 'Superstition' and, as you have said, even the charge that we are in league with the evil one."

"My darling, I trust you will not be unjust to your many friends," said Elton; "the chief concern on the part of all your father's neighbors is with regard to his material interests which he allows to suffer. And now will you please make it a little clearer what relation these historical and scientific matters, of which you have spoken, sustain to the secret of which you say your father is in search?"

"My father," said Alice, "believes in the unity of the race, but believes that the trouble is with our histories. I will give briefly his views on this point. He imagines that had not Mahometan superstition caused the destruction of the library at Alexandria, and had it not been for the destruction wrought by ancient wars, our records of the past would have furnished sufficient evidence of changes in race, color and customs, changes which have at times been very rapid, as during the period immediately following the Deluge. In fine, he is greatly interested in the aboriginal races of this continent. Believing that the remnant of the "Lost Tribes of Israel" were at one time on these shores, he thinks that even with such light as history gives upon this subject, coupled with the remnants of Indian tradition, it would be possible to prove this hypothesis."

"Then is this the secret?"

"Pray do not jump at conclusions," said Alice. "Father does not expect to demonstrate the accuracy of such a theory by recourse to any history or tradition now extant. It is by another and occult process that he hopes to obtain the knowledge which he seeks. He believes, I may say, is sure, that as mind and matter are united during our lives by invisible ties, that after the dissolution of our bodies, our minds, being indestructible, would still be free to act on and control the bodies of others, if the hidden link by which they could be connected with us could only be discovered. Now this strange impalpable something, depending more on condition than substance, he believes he has discovered, and he therefore proposes to bind the spirits of the remotest inhabitants of this hemisphere to his own spirit, become filled by them and possessed of them until they shall speak through his lips, and write with his fingers, and through him make known to the world the wonderful events on which the past has closed its hitherto impenetrable doors. Oh, will it not be a joyous day for father, when all those who have scoffed at his incapacity and laughed at his investigations shall be forced to accord him the praise for wisdom, and his judgment and skill shall be manifest to all mankind?"

During these last remarks the face of Alice Davis was all aglow. John Elton had never dreamed her

capable of such an intellectual and enthusiastic transformation.

"But, my darling," he remarked, "what proof have you after all your labors, that such revelations can be made? You must have found already that no voice has ever answered your questions. No shape will come out of those voiceless caverns from whence you try to conjure it, to impart the knowledge you so vainly seek. Who has ever found this mystic link that connects the material with the immaterial? Besides, Alice, it is as I feared; this strange, unhealthy study is not only imparting a feverish, nervous spirit that already finds expression in your eye and voice, but, worst of all, it will, if you persist in it, sap and undermine the strength and purity of your faith in God. It is said that your father has expressed himself as being directly in opposition to every creed in Christendom; and it cannot be, Alice, darling, but that his belief should influence you in many ways. I pray you, for your own sake, make one more earnest effort to persuade your father to relinquish all such dangerous and profitless employment. And, above all, resolve that you will no longer be a party to that which, even if it does not injure you, can only result in bitter disappointment."

A strange smile played over the face of Alice Davis while her lover was delivering himself of this burden of advice. When he finished, she allowed a little time to elapse before she made reply. Then, gradually the smile left her countenance and was succeeded by a look of the most intense earnestness, not to say solemnity, as she said:

"You are wrong at the start, John, when you say it is impossible to find the connecting link between the immaterial and the material, or, in other words, between mind and matter. I told you it was not so much a question as to the sort of instrument employed as it was of the temperament and condition of the investigator. But I now tell you that there are a half-dozen contrivances or toys—call them what you will—in my father's study, that will give intelligible responses to any question I may ask. You fancy that no voice has come out of the eternal silence that fills the spaces

round us; yet, I do assure you, that by placing myself in a certain attitude, remaining entirely motionless, at the same time gathering up the energies of the mind and turning them inward, focalizing the mind upon itself, so to speak, the soul's ear will hear voices and the soul's eye will see forms that could never be apprehended by the physical organs. Out of the storm, and from the murmurs of the wind through the forest, voices have come to me, uttering the sublimest truths and making the most important communications." Seeing the look of incredulity with which her statements were being received, she added: "I do not expect you to believe all this just now, John. I only ask you to trust in my sincerity; you do not doubt that, do you?"

"No, I do not doubt the fidelity with which you represent your own impressions, but I can conceive of them as being only impressions after all. Alice, I never imagined that you possesssed so nervous and impressionable a temperament until to-day. I fancied you were made of sterner stuff."

"I will show you some day that your first impression concerning me was the correct one," she replied. "I can give you proofs in the way of occult manifestations, and will do so in the near future, that will shake even your incredulity. But, regarding the last statement you made, viz., that this research will undermine my faith, let me ask you, what faith? Two hours hence the pine knots on those fire-stands will be lighted, and their uncertain light will fall on a spectacle as little in keeping with the civilizing influences of Christianity as would be an exhibition of the dancing dervishes across the sea."

"Alice, it pains me to hear you speak thus," said her companion. "I fear that you have already bid adieu to your Christian faith."

"Not so," said Alice, "but you were speaking of superstition a while ago, and I simply desire to impress you with the fact that my father is not the only one afflicted with it. I do not share his ideas about the future. I do not believe that our spirits reincarnate in a tabernacle of flesh and blood every two thousand years. I do not believe in his strange ideas of

'Karma' and the 'astral body,' and the Supreme Negation which he terms God. I do believe in the strange revelations that are made to us as we together push our inquiries beyond the border line of the visible. But, above all, I do believe in my mother's God, whose Providence and Fatherhood are taught in the Christian's Bible. I only wished to show you that superstition and excess were liable to find their way even into the highest creed, and as I say, two hours hence you will see sufficient proof of it in the service of this camp-meeting; nor do I wish to condemn the emotional display to which I refer. Its more crude aspects are chiefly confined to the negroes, and are, of course, entirely due to the excitement of ignorant and superstitious natures, and not in any sense to the religious emotion which may accompany it."

"Well, dear, I am, believe me, entirely grateful to you for the confidence you have seen fit to repose in me. It will not, I assure you, be in any respect betrayed. I notice the people are assembling in their tents for supper; suppose we take our places at the table over in the boarding-tent.

CHAPTER VI.

"OUR LOVE WAS KINDLED AT THOSE URNS DIVINE."

AT the table of a boarding-tent, in the primitive days of Virginia camp-meetings, a student of human nature would have found much to amuse and instruct him. The institution was a new feature, it having been the custom for the "tent-holders" not only to entertain the preachers, but also all visitors who might desire to remain upon the ground; but only a few years before the time of which we write, it was found that the number of tentless visitors so increased, that it was necessary to have accommodations for them apart from the hospitality of the "tent-holders." Hence the introduction of the boarding-tent.

This "tent" consisted of four posts settled into the ground, connected at the top by boards; pine and oak boughs were thrown on, and the "tent" was ready for the table. This was formed by driving stakes into the ground and nailing boards across for the frame, then three planks were added and the table was complete. Slab benches were the seats provided.

If one, however, should expect that the fare would be homely and scant because he found the table rude, he would speedily find himself agreeably disappointed. No pains were spared in providing all that the most exacting palate could demand in the way of food, which, rich and plentiful as was the supply, received its chief charm from the skilful manner of its preparation and cooking.

But it was not the primitive tent or the abundant supply of food that would attract the attention of the student of human nature (unless he chanced to be very hungry), but the people who gathered at the table. Here all classes were represented—saint and sinner, refined and ignorant, rich and poor; young persons with loud voices and flashy jewelry sat by the side

of representatives of the first families of the valley. Young bloods, reckless in speech and manner, elbowed at the table some of the most pious people who attended the camp.

John Elton and Alice Davis enjoyed the meal with that zest which health and an appetite sharpened by a horseback ride and stimulated by a visit to the green woods, never fail to give.

While they were at the table, the lace-work of sunlight and shadow gradually crept up the trunks of the forest trees around them, until its last design vanished from their summits; only the tops of the loftiest pines still received the favors of the declining sun, and a moment later they, too, shared the universal twilight.

On each side of the seated enclosure three posts had been settled in the earth—six in all. On these posts were nailed large, shallow boxes made of plank and filled with earth. These fire-stands were the sole dependence of the camp-meeting, so far as light was concerned.

Just at sunset a man employed for that purpose, began to build the fires upon them.

Very light and dry pine wood, intermingled with knots especially "fat," was heaped upon the earth in the centre of the stand and the fire was kindled. Later in the evening, as darkness gathered through the forest aisles and more light was needed, a plentiful supply of rosin was thrown upon the fires at intervals.

As John and Alice finished their supper and entered the circle the fires were being kindled on the stands. It was yet a full hour before the first blast of the "trumpet" would call the people to the circle for the evening sermon.

While this was the hour especially pleasant for the youths and maidens who assembled at the springs, or promenaded round the circle, it must not be supposed that all were thus engaged. In fact, there was very little time, either during the day or night, that a meeting was not in progress at some point on the camp-ground; meetings at the stand, in the tents at various points about the circle, or under some large tree outside the rows of tents; and every meeting accompanied by the loudest exclamations of prayer and praise and

the fullest physical exercise by way of demonstration. Such a meeting was in full progress at this time.

"Had you not best order the horses, John, and let us be going?" said Alice. "This is a very pleasant hour for our return, and I do not care to remain longer."

"We will not stay much longer, dearest," said her companion, in a low tone, "but I have a desire to see something of this 'superstition,' which you say mingles with true faith in this Christian worship."

"Very well," was the reply. "You will find plenty of it exhibited in the worship of these people, but remember I do not charge it as a fault of the Christian religion. I only affirm that there is no religion on the earth without its concomitant superstition; hence resent the charge that only they who investigate the darkened avenues of the occult are superstitious. Look yonder for instance."

While they were talking they had approached the fence that divided the circle, and as Alice spoke she lifted her hand and pointed to a group of negroes that had assembled.

There were, perhaps, eleven of them standing in a circle while one stood in the centre. They were singing and beating time by clapping their hands, their bodies half bent, swaying in accompaniment to the song.

The man in the centre would improvise a verse of rude rhyme and all the others would join in the chorus, which was:—

"Stan' de storm, stan de' storm,
Winter 'ill be ober bime by.

Several times John Elton attempted to reply to the last statement made by Alice, but each time by a gesture, she enjoined silence and attention to the scene before them.

They stood looking on for quite a long time. The fires on the stands burned brighter, and threw their lurid glare up among the branches of the trees. Meantime the singing had grown louder and the demonstrations more impassioned. Occasionally the leader would be carried utterly beyond himself by his superstitious emotions, and with hand pointing upward would become perfectly rigid. Again, the whole com-

pany would start suddenly and march round the half circle allotted to them, only to pause again at the spot from which they started.

Presently one of the number, with a great shout, sprang into the air and fell prostrate, his rigid body and twitching features having every appearance of one in a cataleptic fit.

The others gathered round him, as though inspired by the sight, and began to leap into the air and utter inarticulate screams of ecstasy. This continued for some time, until fully half their number had been seized with "the power" and were stretched prostrate upon the earth, while over the little group the red light from the fire-stands threw fitful gleams and shadows, as it alternately flared up brightly or grew dim amid the volumes of smoke and showers of sparks which resulted from fresh fuel being placed upon it.

"But surely, Alice, you do not intend to judge the service of this camp-meeting by the superstition of a few negroes?"

"I do not judge," was the reply, "I simply desire that you see for yourself, in order that you may feel the force of the arguments I use. Now observe the service on the other side of the fence, among the enlightened people of our own race. While not so objectionable in many of its features as that which we have just witnessed, yet you will find that there are abundant evidences that superstition is not foreign to it."

"I have no need to observe it now, Alice, as I have seen many instances that give sufficient warrant for the statements you make, but what do you wish to prove by it—that Christianity is a false religion, or that this particular form of service is exceptionally degrading?"

"Not at all. The civilizations of the world are the best test of the value of their respective religions; by this test our own religion stands pre-eminent. And in the case of these poor, dusky children of nature, even a superficial examination of the matter will show what a blessing Christianity is to them; how much better, even in a temporal sense, is their condition with it, than it could possibly be without it?

"But this is the statement I wish to make in defence

both of my father and myself—superstition seems to be native to the human mind. Hence every system devised by the genius or inspiration of man has been tainted by it. And we find that it has filtered through the ages and tainted the various creeds, even of the Christian faith. Therefore my father believes that the accretions of time and the rubbish of superstition darken and pervert religious truth, in the same way and to the same extent that they do truth historical and scientific.

"While, as I told you, I do not share all his opinions on these subjects, yet I have felt the force and truth of so many of them, that I become justly impatient when I hear of people who forget the divine precept, 'Judge not,' and accuse my father of superstition, as though he possessed a patent right on all that commodity."

Just here the echoes of the forest were awakened by a blast from the trumpet which proclaimed the hour for evening preaching. Gradually the noise from the various groups of worshippers subsided and from every direction people began to gather in the circle.

"Have the horses brought, John. It is time for us to go now," said Alice; "it has been quite dark for the past half hour."

Leaving her near a particular tree so that he might not lose her in the crowd that was fast gathering, John went after the horses and soon returned announcing that they awaited them just outside the outer row of tents.

As they turned to leave the circle, the prayer-meeting was drawing to a close, the preachers having already entered the stand; and from the side of the ground occupied by the white people the last hymn they heard ran something like this—

"She's a great city as she moves along,
An' King Jesus is her captain as she moves along."

As they mounted their horses, the dying refrain from the colored worshippers reached their ears in the words:

Makin' up numbers bime by."

It was indeed a pleasant time for a ride. Alice called it "a divine evening" and like all such seasons, it was an inspiration to the diviner elements of the human soul.

For some time after leaving the camp-meeting, the horses were permitted to trot along in a leisurely way, but gradually and insensibly perhaps to the riders, this pace moderated to a walk.

The influences of the hour were at work on John Elton, and he was fast feeling that sentimental emotion, born of love and moonlight, which makes us ready to accept many things as credible which would be rejected as nonsense in the more sober moods of the day.

"I fear I was rather harsh in my judgment of your views this afternoon, Alice, darling," said her friend, in a subdued voice. "I think we are all rather slow to admit the novel, and your statements with regard to the wonders you had seen in your experiments with your father, did seem, at first, a little beyond the range of possibility.

"But you must not think, even for a moment, that I doubted your word in the matter. I only believed you to be resting under an hallucination; but since I have thought the matter over I am ready to think that there may be something in what you say, apart from any influence that your imagination may have upon the subject. Every thinking mind must be aware that there is an unknown influence ever round us. Most people admit that there is a spirit world somewhere; but may it not be a fact that its influence interpenetrates our own atmosphere, and its inhabitants touch and stimulate our lives at every point?

"Since love is the cause of life, and life renders love possible, may not this endless chain which seems to be fastened to the very throne of God, run on through all intelligent beings as well after, as before, that dread change which we call death? If so, then there comes no voice out of the distance, nor any manifestation, either of a material or immaterial nature, but what is a representative and a product of that all-pervasive and everlasting love!"

The darkness hid the amused twinkle in the eyes of Alice, as she replied:

"What about the principle of evil, John? that active agency of a powerful and malignant spirit, of which the preacher made so much this afternoon? Do you still hold that portion of the creed?"

John did not reply to this, for a moment, and Alice heard him draw a deep inspiration.

"Yes, I believe it, Alice, and so do you; else why should love so often end in bitter disappointment, yea, even in hatred. And oftentimes, our love is made the very agent of our own undoing. Were it not for our love, for instance, you might be obedient to the wishes of your father and marry Walter Desmond and——"

"For instance nothing of the kind," interrupted Alice; "if you can find no better demonstration of your theory than that, I fear it must stand without support. If I had never seen you, I would not have married Walter Desmond, because I do not love him: and no matter what may be the attractions or character of any man, I will not marry him unless I love him; I am resolved to marry no man that I do not love."

It is perfectly wonderful what an absolute revulsion a single statement will sometimes make in one's feelings. For the next moment it seemed to John Elton as though he had never seen the moon present to view so beautiful a crescent, and that the stars had never been so sympathetic as they appeared to be just then.

The air of the Luray Valley, as it touched his cheek, fragrant with the sweet breath of the pines, was, to him, the very breath of Paradise. And yet it was nothing more than he had given her credit for. His faith in Alice was such that he had never doubted for a single moment, that her pure heart cherished the very sentiments that he had heard her a moment since, so nobly express. But oh, the unutterable joy of hearing her express them! To hear those red lips utter a sentiment that he knew, by implication, bound her to him for all time! But he did not intend that a cup whose contents were so sweet, should be dashed from his lips when he had only tasted a few delicious drops; so he made haste to say:

"Suppose, Alice, that your father is successful in his efforts, and wealth or a scientific fame—the equivalent

of wealth—is his, do you think then, with the doors of the highest social circles in the nation open to you, that you would waste a thought upon the poor overseer of a Virginia plantation ?"

"You seem to be troubled with a great many suppositions to-night, John," said his friend; "I thought you just concluded that love was the greatest thing in this world ; yes, in all the universe. You made it co-extensive with life, in this world and in the next. I now tell you that I hold my love dearer than I do my life. I believe that it is an emanation from some bright centre in the heavenly world. As it is the source of life, it must be akin to every bright thing in the universe, for love, life and light is the triune ruler of the earth and spirit, therefore I know—" here she pointed to the stars—"that our love is sister to the starlight, and every bright and holy thing above the earth and on it. Yes," she exclaimed, while her voice quivered with empassioned pathos, "our love was kindled at those urns divine."

For a moment John Elton was silent; his emotions were such that he could not trust himself to speak.

The day had been one of revelation to him. It had revealed the full strength and beauty of the character of the noble girl beside him. And the sentiment to which she had just given utterance was so lofty, and withal so sweet to the man who loved her with all the strength of his soul, that it is not surprising that he should have been unable for a time to express the emotions which surged up within his heart. When he did trust himself to speak, his voice was very tremulous and uncertain, as though filtered through a veil of smiles and tears.

"Then, if lighted at those heavenly altars, our love will live, Alice, when those sacred altar-fires have ceased to burn. And I want you to know the fact that your words have warmed my heart with an encouragement to which, of late, it has been a stranger. I feel now, that for your dear sake I can face and conquer all things. I shall be able to subdue poverty, and overcome the opposition of your father to our marriage; and as for this Walter Desmond——"

Here John Elton's words were drowned by the sound

of a horse coming down the road, and approaching them at a full gallop. A moment later, horse and rider dashed into view, and the light from the new moon was sufficient to reveal to our two friends the form and features of Walter Desmond.

The latter checked his horse a moment, as he passed by Alice and with a scowl of anger that was perfectly visible, in defiance of every rule of politeness, exclaimed:

"We had hoped, Miss Davis, to have had the honor of your presence at our little party, but it appears you found more agreeable company elsewhere. I regard it as a sad day when our ladies withdraw their favors from the gentlemen of Virginia in order that they may bestow them upon *menials!*"

As Desmond drew in his horse, our friends also halted, supposing he had some important statement to make, and as he hissed the last word, "menials," his spur touched his horse's flank and he was gone. His remarks had been addressed entirely to Alice; to Elton he had spoken no word, nor had he deigned to look toward him. With this bitter insult lingering in their ears, John and Alice found themselves at a standstill in the middle of the road, utterly bewildered by the suddenness of what had occurred.

"The scoundrel," said Elton! "to insult a lady in such a manner! Oh, the contemptible coward, to speak such a word and then dash away just at the moment when it should have received from me the only sort of reply of which it was worthy! Were it not that I must not leave you alone, I would put whip to my horse, overtake the villain and give him the punishment he so richly deserves. But I will accompany you home and then go on to his house and await his return. We must settle this matter before I sleep. And remember, Alice, dear, this is the man who has presumed to address you with matrimonial intentions! This is the man whose suit your father favors! Oh, his very presence pollutes the pure air you breathe! To think that he should venture to insult you right in my presence. He must and shall suffer for it, and I will make him answer for it, this very night."

"Now, John, do not act hastily in this matter. I beg

of you, that you will not do as you have said; Mr. Desmond is heated with anger, possibly with wine also, else he would never have used such language to me."

"But, Alice, it is now a question of honor. His sordid mind imagines that because I am not his equal in fortune, that therefore he can insult me with impunity; but I intend to call at his house this night, invite him out and demand an explanation. Yes, he shall apologize for this insult before he sleeps. I might possibly overlook it, had he addressed himself to me, but to insult you and then dash off in this cowardly manner; he shall be taught, however, that there are emergencies known to gentlemen where courage and a trained hand are worth more than gold."

For a little while Alice said nothing; she wished to give her friend a chance to recover his composure somewhat. Gradually she reined her horse nearer the one her lover rode, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"John," she said, "believe me, your ideas on this subject are all wrong, even though they be advocated by the leading people of Virginia. To fight a duel is just as disgraceful as to engage in a brutal fist fight, and the fact that it is engaged in by gentlemen, makes it no more really honorable than though the parties to it were the lowest rowdies. I know this is not the accepted theory with regard to 'the code,' and perhaps you may consider it only another strange idea of mine, but the time will come when advancing civilization will put these false ideas of honor under the ban of a more enlightened public sentiment. However you may look at this phase of the question, I want you to promise me, John, not to see Mr. Desmond to-night. All I ask is, that you sleep over the matter, and not seek an interview while your blood is hot from the recent insult."

"But don't you know that this is a hard thing to ask, Alice?"

"Yes, I know it is," was the reply, "but I ask it, notwithstanding. I desire to inform my father of the language Mr. Desmond used, and I want you to promise to take no steps in the matter until you hear from me. Now here I am at home; do you promise, John?"

"It is pretty hard to do, but I am in no condition to refuse any request you may see fit to make; so take this as a token that I shall not break my word," saying which, he gave Alice a tender kiss, as he lifted her from her horse.

CHAPTER VII.

A VOICE FROM BEYOND.

"So this is the course you intend to take, is it, Alice? Then it would indeed seem as though my wretched struggle with an unkind fortune might as well be abandoned. You were not content to oppose my wishes with respect to the lawn-party at Mr. Desmond's, but you took the occasion to go riding with a gentleman, whom it would be well for your peace of mind if you were never to meet again."

Mr. Davis had awaited the return of his daughter from the ride described in our last chapter, with a mind which was far from being in a pleasant frame. He had returned from a walk, after dinner, supposing that Alice would be ready to accompany him to the party, but on entering the house Aunt Chloe had informed him that "Missus done rode off wid Mistah Elton, only jes' a little bit ago," and she believed "da' war boun' fo' de camp-meetin'."

This information was a shock to Eldridge Davis. Not that he really objected to his daughter taking a ride in company with John Elton. He certainly did not object to her attending the camp-meeting, but that she should select this day of the lawn-party for her ride, seemed to her father especially exasperating.

Nor was this all; he knew that Desmond would feel it quite a slight that his invitation should be treated in this way, but when he learned—as he felt sure he would learn—that Alice had spent the afternoon in company with his rival, he was certain that Walter Desmond would look upon the whole affair in the light of a premeditated and deadly insult. Not that there were any just grounds for such a view of the matter, as Alice certainly had a right to select her own company and spend her time as she chose; but the question was, would Desmond be inclined to look at it in a reason-

able way? Although he tried to hide it from himself, yet he knew the man to be a spoiled and somewhat dissipated child of fortune, full of whims, and of ungovernable temper; therefore it was a question with him whether or not the matter could be settled without a quarrel.

The hours of the afternoon were no pleasant ones to him. Nor were his apprehensions quieted when he saw a horse dash up the lawn, a short time after sunset. He was standing in the front door at the time, in order to enjoy the cool air, as the afternoon spent in worry had told upon him somewhat, and the quiet gloaming seemed to soothe his irritated nerves. Hearing a sound, as of a horse approaching at a high rate of speed, he raised his eyes just as horse and rider darted through the gateway, and almost immediately he found himself face to face with Walter Desmond.

"So this is the way you keep your engagements," said the latter, with a sickly attempt at a smile, although Davis saw by a glance at his pale face and drawn lips, that he was very angry.

"Dismount, and I will have your horse taken," he said, with quiet dignity.

"No, thank you," was the reply, "I do not think it would look well for me to intrude upon your hospitality, when I left home almost before my guests had departed. I trust you will not think me rude, but may I ask the reason why you failed to attend our little party this afternoon? We were certainly disappointed when you did not come."

It was very evident that Desmond was doing all in his power to control his feelings and deport himself as became a gentleman.

Eldridge Davis felt a sort of pity for the man, whose affection for his daughter would lead him to take a step like this, so he again politely insisted on his dismounting and entering the house, at the same time calling a colored boy and ordering him to care for the horse. But this Desmond would not permit. He, however dismounted, tied his horse to a post, and entered the house.

"We have just had tea, Desmond," said Mr. Davis, "but if you will——"

"No, thanks," interrupted the other. "Of course we had tea before the party broke up, and as soon after as I could possibly get off, I did so. I wanted to know why you could not come over. You have no idea how disappointed I felt."

Here for the first time during the interview, it became evident to Mr. Davis that Walter Desmond had been drinking.

"Well, I regret your disappointment, Mr. Desmond," was the reply, "but you will remember that I told you I should not come unless I could induce my daughter to accompany me. This she refused to do because, as she said, of an engagement for this afternoon, made some time ago. I mentioned the matter to her afterward and was rather under the impression that she would change her mind; in fact, I had forgotten about the engagement, until returning from a short walk after dinner, I asked Chloe about her and was informed that she had gone riding in company with Mr. Elton——"

But here he was interrupted by the strange conduct of Desmond, who, as soon as he heard the name of his hated rival, sprang up and walked back and forth across the floor several times. It was impossible to see the expression on his countenance, as it had now grown quite dark in the parlor where Davis and Desmond were conversing, but from the deep breathing and slight sound of clenched teeth, it was evident that he was struggling with very strong emotion.

"And what spot in the vicinity, may I ask, did your daughter find of such vast interest, that she must select this very afternoon to visit it?"

For several moments the sleeping honor of the Virginian gentleman had been stirring restlessly in the breast of Eldridge Davis, and struggling to awake, but at this last remark it awoke to the fullest extent.

"Mr. Desmond, I must beg leave to remind you that my daughter is free to follow the dictates of her own will, to go where she pleases and when she pleases. To hear you speak, one might imagine you were referring to some slave girl, who was bound to give an account of all her doings. I am frank enough to confess that I desired my daughter to accompany me to your party, but it seems she had other plans, hence, while I regret

the disappointment you seem to feel, I can only remind you, that in such a matter my daughter has naught to consult but her own will."

After this manly statement no word was spoken by either for several seconds. Just as the silence was growing painful, Chloe came in, bringing candles. Not until then was Eldridge Davis aware of the perfect storm of suppressed fury, that was sweeping through the soul of the man before him.

Chloe set down the candles and left the room. As she did so, Walter Desmond turned his face toward Mr. Davis and the latter then saw that it was deadly pale. His eyes were aflame with mingled anger and intoxication, and it was evident that the man had only one course left him, which was to refrain from speech altogether, for should such a torrent of passion once begin to break through the gates of self-control, it was easy to see that it would sweep everything before it; and Eldridge Davis saw it too, so standing behind his chair he watched the other striding back and forth across the room with clenched hands, and knew not whether this interview was to end in a violent and disgraceful quarrel and possibly worse, or whether Desmond would get the better of his passion.

Affairs could not go on like this for many seconds, or—here Desmond turned abruptly, as he crossed the floor, and with a smile so forced as to be almost ghastly, said, in a half-smothered voice,

"Pardon me, Mr. Davis, I meant no insult, either to you or your daughter. Will you kindly tell me where she went? I particularly desire to know."

Davis named the camp-meeting and instantly was sorry he had done so, as it was certainly no affair of Walter Desmond's where his daughter chose to go. However, the information had been given, therefore he could only say, "Will you not be seated, Mr. Desmond?"

With a curt "No, I thank you," and "Good-evening, Mr. Davis," he strode from the room, sprang upon his horse and rode away.

It would be difficult to describe the feelings of Eldridge Davis for the next half hour. The man whom he had considered as a friend, and of whom he

had thought as destined, possibly, to hold even a nearer relation to himself, had behaved in a manner that could scarcely be called gentlemanly; and which, under ordinary circumstances, would have proved a serious strain upon their mutual friendship.

But then, the present circumstances were not *ordinary*. Fortune must come to the family from some quarter. Financial matters, in the Davis home, were fast reaching a climax of a very dismal sort. And here was the richest man in the vicinity ready to lay his heart and wealth at the feet of Alice, while she, with apparent disregard for all the embarrassments which surrounded her father, calmly turned her back upon the opportunity and seemed to show a decided inclination to bestow her hand—where she had already bestowed her affections—upon the penniless John Elton.

Yet, was not Alice right, after all? Did he not secretly approve her good sense and moral integrity in bestowing her favor upon chivalrous John Elton, rather than upon one whose chief adornment was the inherited wealth, of which he chanced to be possessor? Had not Walter Desmond, that very evening, given him a practical demonstration of his unworthiness, and shown how unfit he was to possess such a treasure as his darling Alice?

But then—and here he bent his fevered brow upon his hand—suppose she did not marry Desmond, Elton was surely in no condition to support a wife; and as for her remaining in her present condition—well, he knew that the financial crash could not be delayed much longer, and then it would be a serious question as to whether she would have a home left her.

We are very apt to censure a man who adopts the policy of Eldridge Davis, and we do well to do so; but then, we must remember that his mistake was born of love for his child, and for the rest, it is a terrible predicament, and one whose best outlet is, in most cases, a most forlorn and unsatisfactory one. Of one thing he was resolved, he would not cease to use his influence with his daughter and persuade her to adopt a different course, while there remained even the faintest hope of that influence or persuasion changing her mind.

So deeply was his mind occupied with the many difficulties of his situation, that he did not heed the arrival of his daughter, although he plainly heard the tramp of the horses as they approached the house.

When Alice entered the parlor, her father was sitting with bowed head, and did not see the flush upon her cheek, nor the steel-like gleam of her eye. Had he done so, we would not have had to record, at the opening of this chapter, the words with which he greeted her.

But to these words there was no answer. With his head still bowed on his hands, Davis again addressed his daughter:

"Perhaps you can at least tell me how you propose to live, if you neglect all your chances and marry this John Elton, of whose society you seem so fond?"

"I would live as the wife of a *gentleman!*"

The voice in which this was spoken was almost a hiss, and as her father raised his head and looked at his daughter for the first time that evening, the consciousness flashed upon him instantly, that there had been some very unusual and exciting occurrence, to work his daughter up to the point of indignation manifest on her countenance and in her voice. In fact, the indignation and anger which she had felt, on hearing the insulting remark addressed to her by Walter Desmond, was but little short of that experienced by John Elton. But she expressed little of this to her friend; as she felt that a sacred duty rested upon her, and that it fell to her lot to make peace, if possible, between these two men, or at the least, to prevent present bloodshed.

So she had, with the ready tact of true womanhood, masked her real feelings while her lover was by her side, and by her better counsels soothed the rising tempest of his anger; but now it was done, and he was quietly wending his way homeward; hence, to hear him spoken of disparagingly as soon as she crossed the threshold of her home, at the same time being reproached, herself, for failing to attend the lawn-party of his rival, the man who had insulted her so recently, was more than she could tamely endure; nor could she find a sentence strong enough to resent the reproach to which she had just listened.

Mr. Davis arose, went over to his daughter, and took her hand.

"What has occurred, Alice? Something unpleasant surely must have taken place, to have aroused and excited you like this. If my words seemed harsh to you, I trust you will pardon them; and now may I ask to whom you referred, in your strange remark a moment since? I did not wish to imply that Mr. Elton was not a gentleman, and I hope you did not so understand me, but surely Mr. Desmond——"

"Is *not* a gentleman, whatever else he may be," interrupted Alice. "His conduct and language, this evening, were of the most outrageous and disgraceful character."

"Pray, where have you seen him," said her father, "you did not go to his party? Of course not"—he instantly corrected himself, as he caught the flash of Alice's eye—"but where then, could you have seen him? But do not let me keep you standing; come over to the sofa and tell me all about it."

The whole story of the meeting and the insult was then poured by Alice into her father's ear, with the result, that, as her anger noticeably decreased, his correspondingly increased, thereby giving another illustration of the fact, that, in telling our troubles, we relieve ourselves by harassing others.

"The scoundrel," muttered Mr. Davis between his teeth, "he shall apologize for this. I never dreamed he would be rude enough to insult you in this way."

These and other like remarks were made by Mr. Davis and then he seemed to recollect himself, and with eyes bent upon the carpet, spent several moments in deep meditation. He was recalled from this by Alice saying,

"You are right, father, there must be an apology. I shall expect you to bring it about, but you must remember that I am not the only one insulted. The full force and venom of the remark was aimed at Mr. Elton through me, and in case there is not the fullest retraction, I will not answer for the result. It was only my persuasion that prevented Mr. Elton from paying him a visit and demanding satisfaction this very night."

It was in a very modified tone of voice that her father replied to this statement; his air, in fine, was that of one apologizing for a wrong done by himself.

We must not judge the man too harshly, however; he was not exactly in a responsible condition, when he used the words you speak of."

"What do you mean, father?" asked Alice; and then Mr. Davis informed her of the visit that Desmond had paid him; of his partial intoxication, and the reproof which he had felt called upon to give him.

"And that was why he came to seek us," exclaimed Alice. "I wondered how it all came about, only it is strange that he did not address himself directly to Mr. Elton, rather than to me. If he desired a quarrel, surely I was not the one to speak to.—But then," she added, while a singular expression of complacency, almost bordering on pride, crossed her countenance, "perhaps he acted in precisely the manner that he thought most conducive to his personal safety."

"But, my daughter," said her father, who appeared to be growing momentarily more uneasy, "the intoxication was at least partly excusable, as Mr. Desmond had spent the afternoon entertaining his friends, and had been forced to do so under the depressing influence of, what seems to have been, a severe disappointment; then add to that, the fact that he left this house smarting under a sharp rebuke from me, and it should palliate the affair, I should think, to a considerable degree. However, I do not intend to let the matter drop. Desmond must apologize for his rudeness, which I have no doubt he will gladly do, when he awakes in his right mind in the morning. As it is useless to discuss the matter further, I will go to my study, as I have some important calculations to make this evening. I shall not need your assistance to-night, I am glad to say, as I have no doubt you feel weary after your ride. I hope, daughter, you will not let the unpleasant events of this evening trouble you; due amends shall be made for the wrong done, and for the rest, believe me, I have no thought or wish but that has your happiness as its very centre."

Was it nervousness, or tenderness, that caused the strange quiver in the voice of Eldridge Davis, as he

spoke these last words to his daughter? Whatever the cause, he certainly manifested considerable emotion as he pressed a kiss upon the brow of his child, saying as he did so, "Good-night, Alice, may heaven bless you!" and as he went slowly up the creaking stairs to the strangest study to be found in all Virginia, he might have been heard saying, had there been ears to hear it, "The answer! The answer! Oh, if I could only get the answer!"

There was a very odd silence, preserved by both father and daughter, at breakfast next morning. Something had evidently occurred to draw away their minds from the subject of their conversation the previous evening. Mr. Davis' face was slightly pale, while in his eyes was that curious, blank look, as of one who sees an object invisible to others. Every now and then he would look sharply at his daughter as though on the point of speaking to her; then he would appear to change his mind as though he read something in her countenance which puzzled him.

Still more marked was the appearance and demeanor of Alice. Her face was flushed, almost fevered, and in her eyes there shone a certain brilliancy, as though she had recently enjoyed a great triumph.

What did it mean? Surely, the conversation of the previous evening was not of a character to prove so inspiring?

These and other thoughts flashed across the mind of Eldridge Davis as he sat opposite his daughter and tried to eat his breakfast.

Could it be that the token he had received of an Invisible Presence had found its way to her also? And if so, in what form had it come, or what communication had she received that was able to so arouse and enthuse her?

At length, he asked a question.

"Alice, why did you call me last night?"

"I did not call you, father, I never left my room after I retired. You must have heard some one else."

"I heard no one else, Alice, nor did I say that you left your room. I sat up very late; it must have been near one o'clock this morning and I was finishing a cal-

culation to determine the date of an obscure historical event, after which, I intended to retire, when suddenly I felt as though I was sitting in the cellar, so chill became the air; and right over my shoulder, as though from one standing just behind me, I heard these words in *your* voice—'Father, I have found it, I have found it!' Now, daughter can you give me any reason why such a thing should have happened?"

Two or three times while her father was speaking, Alice changed color, her face turning from red to pale only to flush again, but the triumphant look never left it, but grew and deepened until he ceased to speak. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she replied:

"No, father, I could not give you a direct answer, if I were to try; but this I will say, a strange influence must have been at work under this roof last night, and you were not the only one to feel its presence. I also spent a strange night, and although not in the habit of paying much attention to such things, yet I must say that I feel encouraged by what I experienced; and what you have just told me only augments the feeling. However, I should feel grateful if you would excuse me from making any statement respecting the matter this morning; you shall know it all in good time. May I ask how you expect to spend the morning?"

"Certainly," replied her father, "I shall call on Mr. Desmond and ask him to explain the remark he made to you last evening."

Saying this, he arose from the table.

The time intervening between breakfast and noon was not an unpleasant period to Alice. She gave her father's errand but little thought, her mind being almost entirely absorbed by the strange influence that had so impressed her the previous night.

As we have said, her chief reason for making occult experiments was the sympathy she felt for her father, and a desire to please and assist him. In this way she had experienced enough to impress her with the fact that there is a mysterious spiritual potency, and that by experiments it can be made to exhibit certain phenomena. But in these, of themselves, she ordinarly took but little interest, and had even been listless and unconcerned, in her father's study, at times when he

was all excitement at the strange nature of that which claimed their notice. Hence it must have been an unusual occurrence along this line that could so arouse her.

About an hour after Mr. Davis left the house, the colored house-boy might have been seen riding "Rex," the favorite horse of Miss Alice, briskly down the lawn. His errand was to take a note to Mr. Elton, which requested him to call that evening, and desired him to return his answer by the boy.

About noon, "Rex" and his rider returned, and the sable youth bore a brief missive, from the contents of which Alice found that her request would be complied with.

Mr. Davis returned in time for dinner and evidently in the very best humor. Alice saw, from his expression, that the olive-branch had been held out to him, and that she would probably have to listen to a sermon on the subject; but happily for her, it was postponed until after dinner. Mr. Davis had no sooner finished eating, however, than he asked his daughter if he might see her in the parlor.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENING STROLL.

"MR. DESMOND regrets his rudeness last evening and desires that we both pardon, what he is pleased to term his 'nervous irritability.' I had a lengthy interview with him, and while he seeks to justify his conduct somewhat, yet he said to me all that I could have asked a gentleman to say, respecting his behavior here last night, and as for his remark to you, he only desires an opportunity to make his apology in person."

"Did he send no note of apology?" asked Alice, indignantly.

"Well, no," said her father, rather gingerly; "you see he desires to make it all right by a personal interview, believing that it will be more satisfactory to both."

"Indeed, it will not! I consider any such suggestion as impertinent. Then to make the request through you verbally!—surely he must add to his other commendable qualities a vast knowledge of the rules of social etiquette," said Alice, ironically. "What did he have to say about the insulting allusion he made to Mr. Elton?"

"My dear," replied her father, "with that side of the subject I had nothing to do. Let the gentlemen settle that matter to suit themselves."

"Do you mean to say, father, that Mr. Desmond made no allusion to the fact that he had, wholly without cause, insulted Mr. Elton? I supposed he would express himself as being willing to apologize, if at all, to those whom he had insulted, so have taken the liberty to send a note to Mr. Elton, inviting him to call this evening.—There is a matter of special interest to me about which I wish to consult him," she continued, taking no notice of the horrified look on the face of her father, "and I considered it a good time for him to

hear that Mr. Desmond regretted the base reflection which he made regarding his social position."

"So he does, daughter; he says he will call and make any concession for his rudeness to you that you may see proper to require."

"For his rudeness to *me!*" said Alice, scornfully, "call and make any concession that *I* may require! Father, last night I persuaded Mr. Elton not to seek a quarrel with Walter Desmond; let me tell you, this evening I shall use no such persuasion. Nor will I accord Mr. Desmond the favor he seeks. If he has not the manliness of character to prompt him to write a note of apology, then he is not a proper person for me to favor with an interview. It appears that your call on Mr. Desmond has been in no sense a success, but believe me, he will be favored with a call shortly, which, if not so mutually pleasant as the one just made appears to have been, will, I trust, be productive of more satisfactory results. If you have nothing more to say to me, I infer that I am at liberty to leave the room."

Alice felt sorry for having made these caustic remarks to her father, almost immediately; but then she felt almost as though she had been speaking to the representative of Walter Desmond; and that, therefore, it was an occasion when choice words might well be dispensed with. After all, she had spoken no more than the truth, and no more, perhaps, than her position demanded.

As his daughter swept out of the parlor, Eldridge Davis was conscious of a very uncomfortable sensation. He felt, somehow, that he had managed to "make a mess of it." He had evidently failed to make his daughter feel any better toward the man who had insulted her, and beside, it appeared he had managed to bring about another visit from John Elton. And worst of all, this visit was to be made at the special invitation of his daughter, which she had put herself to considerable pains to communicate to him.

Mr. Davis did not like the situation at all. Had he known that his daughter intended to send such an invitation, he would no doubt have seriously objected. Such things were compromising. When Alice came to

her senses, as no doubt she would some day, she would find such a thing as this invitation, a strong link in the chain which she would then find it convenient to break.

Much earlier than Alice supposed possible, that evening, her lover was at the door. He had evidently made haste to conclude his daily duties on the plantation in order that he might have tea and reach the home of Alice early, so that there might be time to hear all that she had to say.

After a few moments in the parlor, it was proposed that they stroll down over the rustic bridge and along the brook where we found them at the opening of this story. The evening being superb, there was an inspiration in a ramble amid such surroundings, that gave richness and poetry to whatever Alice might have to say.

"We have an unpleasant matter to speak of, Alice," said her friend, after they had crossed the bridge, "so perhaps we had best discuss it at once and have it out of the way. Have you heard anything from last night's episode yet? Has Desmond done himself the credit to send you an apology?"

Then Alice told him the story of her father's visit to Desmond, and its result.

"Well, of all cool, presumptuous impudence, this takes the lead. I would never have believed the man so utterly devoid of principle; he presumes to imagine that he can insult you at his own pleasure and then that you will be eager to grant him an interview.—The scoundrel," he continued, "I feel like dragging him before you and forcing him to beg your pardon on his knees. What does your father think of it? I am surprised that Mr. Davis was content to return to you with a statement so little in keeping with what the offence demands."

"I cannot understand papa," said Alice; "on all other subjects he is so jealous of his honor, yet in this matter he is all submission, and seems to think that Mr. Desmond has made all necessary concession."

"I think I understand him quite well," said her lover, with contracted brow. "When you agreed not to become publicly engaged to me, Alice, your father knew

then, as he knows now, that we were substantially engaged ; and he must be made to understand that we sustain this sacred relation to each other. He must be brought to realize that we hold this private engagement as sacred as we hold our lives. I think if he only understood this fully, as he surely will some day, his admiration for Walter Desmond would rapidly diminish, and he would not be so particular to please him.—I will say no more on that line," he quickly added, as he saw the look of distress on Alice's face, "but I trust you have no further objection to my paying a visit to Walter Desmond. I consider that such a visit has already been too long delayed."

"No," said Alice, "I desire that you shall go and demand the retraction which Mr. Desmond owes you, only I trust you will speak and act as judgment, not passion, may dictate."

"Thank you ; I shall go this very night, and I think that Desmond will scarcely find it so easy to settle the matter with me, as he seems to have found it in the interview with your father this morning."

As he uttered the last sentence, Alice raised her eyes and he, looking into their blue depths, read such an expression of trust and confidence, that the harsh feelings in his breast were dissipated. In a very subdued and tender voice he said :

"Let us talk no more of this disagreeable subject. Suppose we sit down a little while on this log, and see if we cannot find a more congenial topic than the one we have just discussed."

So there by the little brook they seated themselves and exchanged those glances, and spoke in slow and soulful accents those same words, with which lovers, through all time, have been wont to revivify the earth and restore to it, temporarily at least, the joys of the lost Paradise.

At last John released the hand of Alice which he had been holding, and gave her a very quizzical look.

"You hardly seem like yourself to-night, Alice. Now that we have talked over that disagreeable matter that you wanted to see me about, I trust you will forget it and not let it cloud the brow of this pleasant evening."

"I was not even thinking of it, John," was the reply,

"nor did I send for you for the purpose of discussing anything relating to Walter Desmond; I intended to mention the matter only incidentally and then drop the subject altogether. But I did have a matter of which I wanted to speak to you, and I am quite sure you will laugh when I tell you what it is."

"Try me, and see," said Elton.

"It was only a dream that I had last night," said she, "and had it been of the ordinary kind, I would never have presumed to send for you; but then I knew you would call on Mr. Desmond shortly, so that matter served as some little excuse for the trouble to which I have put you."

Here Elton made a gesture as though to crush out of existence the idea of it being any trouble for him to call on her.

"But really, John," she continued, "I passed through such an experience last night, and received so wonderful a vision, that I am absolutely certain, in my own mind, it portends an important event of some sort, about to happen in our family. You need not smile, said she, as she saw an amused look upon the countenance of her friend, "I know you are skeptical on such subjects, but while we may not agree at every point, in our views of the supernatural, in this matter of dreams we do agree; for I have ever been as skeptical as the veriest unbeliever could desire. But this matter last night was——"

"The result of that incident on the road, followed by the exciting conversation with your father, of which you spoke," interrupted her friend.

Alice looked at him for a moment, with an expression on her face which it puzzled him to understand.

"Do you suppose, John, that I have never had nightmare?—feverish dreams, born of previous excitement or impaired digestion?—and do you think, with the experience father and I have had in experimental occultism, that I would be likely to make a fuss over an ordinary dream? How would you account for this?" —and then she proceeded to tell him of the statement made by her father at breakfast.

"So there evidently was a very unusual Influence or Presence—call it what you will—at work under our

roof last night; and it was because I felt its force and believed that it was portentious of some great event about to happen to me—whether of good or evil fortune I know not—because of this, I say, I sent for you, desiring that you, and you alone, might hear it."

"Do you mean to say that you have not told your father about it?" asked her friend.

"I have told no one," was her reply, "nor am I likely to, unless you show more interest in the matter than you have shown thus far. How is it, John, that if I should speak of a physical experience you would never think of putting the least discount upon it, yet as soon as the experience passes over into the realm of the psychological you are so prone to doubt the reality of it?"

"Well, darling, dreams are confessedly a fit subject for jest and skepticism, but since, as you say, you have had an experience of an extraordinary nature, I see no reason why you should refrain from speaking of it, because of my apparent incredulity. Something singular must have happened, or why should your father have heard your voice speaking over his shoulder at a time when you were doubtless asleep in your own room? Pardon what appeared to be a lack of interest on my part, Alice, I am really deeply interested; and more than that, I feel greatly honored that you should take the trouble to send for me in order to speak of that which you have not communicated even to your father. Please tell me all about it."

While the darkness began to gather over the Luray Valley and gradually change to violet the azure of the sky above it; and while the little brook at their feet rippled a sort of accompaniment to the narrative, John Elton heard a recital of the strangest dream or vision, to speak more properly, that had ever been revealed to mortal mind.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VISION.

"I AM sure that my experience was not a dream," began Alice, "because I had not slept at all. Our adventure on the road and what father said when I reached home, had so wrought upon my nerves that after I retired, I found that sleep was out of the question. I lay awake thinking of our singular situation and trying to imagine how it would all end, until, I should think it must have been past midnight.

"At length I chanced to look across the room, impelled to do so by I know not what influence, and there before me, gleaming from the wall, was a single ray of very bright light. At first I thought it must be a light shining through the key-hole of my door, and was about to call, supposing that father was outside with a candle. A moment later, however, I saw that it did not come from the door, but seemed to shine right out of the solid wall. As I became aware of this, the light appeared to concentrate and to intensify until it seemed as though a star was shining in my room.

"I could not, for my life, have taken my eyes off it, but continued to gaze until a strange thing happened —the bright star-like lustre gradually assumed the outlines of a human face, and to my infinite wonder, the countenance of my mother, all glorified in heavenly light, looked down upon me from the wall.

"I felt no fear, not even a superstitious thrill passed through my frame, only a dreamy sense of wonder and a sort of fascination that held me like a spell.

"As I continued to look upon my mother's face, which bent upon me a look of the tenderest affection, her well-remembered voice spoke these words to me, 'Daughter, come with me, I have many things to show

you and will give you the key wherewith to unlock the Past and the Future.'

"I endeavored to arise, but even as I did so I felt a change come over me; I seemed entirely independent of the body, and felt that I was not bound by any of the limitations that belong to a being of flesh and blood. How the change was effected I do not know, but I found myself standing in a strange land; I knew it was not Virginia, at least I had never seen any part of our State that resembled it. A flat country that stretched away on every side, altogether without hill or undulation; this was all that I could see, for it was night, but the stars looking down in innumerable multitudes from a cloudless sky, revealed that much, and also made it possible for me to see the outlines of a great structure before which I stood.

"My mother stood beside me, her countenance still beaming with the star-like radiance that I had seen at first. 'Daughter,' said she, 'we stand before the greatest work of man; a work which the wisdom of the present imagines was intended to pander to the vanity of an Egyptian monarch; but it was not simply a monument to Cheops that those old Egyptians erected, but a monument to perpetuate Egyptian wisdom, and hand the rich mysteries of their religion down to the very latest times;—but let us enter.'

"We stood in what seemed a vault, at least I judged it were such because of a certain chill which seemed to penetrate my very soul, for bodily sensations I had none; only the powers of the spirit were left me. I was able to make out something of the outlines of the place in which I stood, which fact seemed singular at first, because no light entered the chamber from without, and the brightness of my mother's face, while tending in part to dispel the darkness, did not produce the soft light that lit up every part of the crypt.

"Presently it occurred to me to look for the source of this illumination, and then I saw a strange thing. In the centre of the crypt was a huge stone chest, or crib, and as my eyes fell upon it, I saw that the stone appeared to be perfectly luminous as though the chest had been of thick glass with the full moon shining through its centre. By this light I was enabled to see that the

walls of the chamber were covered with curious devices and pictures of important personages, dressed in a fashion which, at present, has not its like upon the earth.

"My mother's voice broke the silence again. 'My child, more important work is before us than a study of these old inscriptions. I have only brought you here to show you that the light, which your father is attempting to follow, had its source in this vast pile; see—' and as she spoke, I beheld what I had not observed before, a rocky way, like the entrance to a tunnel, which led from the vault, whither I knew not. 'In the lights of Egypt,' continued my mother, 'we will now proceed from the dominions of one great builder to those of another—and wonder not at the light which follows us, for we are taught, thereby, that however much the Great Religions of the world may differ, there is one Great Light that flashes from them all. Let us enter.'

"As we passed into the tunnel the whole scene changed; we stood upon what seemed a point of rock and looked down upon a vision of such loveliness that its very appearance almost made me weep for joy. I cannot say why I was so affected; what I saw appeared to fill me with a sort of religious awe. It was as though a voice came from it and called to the very depths of my spirit, bidding me engage in worship.

"And this is what I beheld:—A mount of snow, transfigured by the softest moonlight that ever fell from Syrian sky. As soon as my eyes could bear the vision —for at first, a sheen, as though flashed from burnished silver, seemed to dazzle them—I saw that it was no snow-crowned mountain that I looked upon, but a structure reared by human hands; yet what skill and wealth were able to congeal a dream of loveliness in such lasting form! High above the wondrous structure great towers shot heavenward, as though to give the stars a kiss from earth's extremest purity.

"Then first I saw, as my eyes grew accustomed to the scene, great tongues of flame dart over the snowy surface and wrap themselves about the marble mountain. Spears of fire sprang from pillar to column; and from battlement to tower invisible hands hurled darts of flame.

"Yet it did not seem like real fire, after all; only a reflected brightness as of flame, and looking more intently, I saw that the great structure that swelled so grandly upward in mystic whiteness, was ringed, starred and crowned with plates of glittering gold. And as I still looked, the moonlight and gold became enamored of each other until all the snowy height flashed fire beneath their married glories. Never shall I look again on such a vision, or behold a sight so calculated to fill the mind with awe.

"My mother, who stood beside me, here asked if I knew on what I looked. I made an affirmative motion, for I seemed utterly bereft of speech. 'Yes,' said she, 'it is the work of the Great Jewish Builder, and as we have visited the crowning work of Egyptian wisdom, so must we enter this, for the end of that thread which your father has sought so long, must be found here.'

"At this point I made a struggle to call to mind some of the many things which I felt I ought to ask my mother—for instance, why she had appeared and from whence? But I was so stupefied by my experience that every effort to turn my mind in that direction long enough to ask a question, was followed by a curious sort of mental paralysis, so I had only power to look on and take in what passed before me, with no ability to speculate or question about it.

"As mother ceased to speak, a shadow fell upon us and shut out all the moonlit glory which I have been attempting to describe, and ever the shadow became darker until it settled over us, a black, impenetrable wall. Suddenly the same light that I had seen in the heart of the great pyramid flashed around us—at least from its subdued radiance as of moonlight shining through water, I judged it to be the same; although I could not now discover whence it came. This light revealed the fact that we were again standing in an apartment whose walls, floor and roof were of rock, but I observed a marked difference between this and the last one we had visited. Whereas that appeared to have been *constructed*, this seemed to have been hewn out of the solid rock. I could discern no seams in the wall, as of block joining to block.

"Another thing I noticed, or rather *felt*, was that

this time I was not standing in a tomb. I knew it was a rock-hewn chamber, excavated for what purpose I knew not, yet was it a room, not a sepulchre; a place for the living, not for the dead.

"'We now stand, my daughter, in a chamber under the far-famed temple of the great Solomon; many such, honey-comb the live rock round you. While the skilled workmen of the favored monarch erected the temple, far up on the moonlit heights above us, as a place of worship for the people, they excavated these chambers, down here in the live rock, in the very centre of the mountain, to be a home for Wisdom and a place where the wise ones of the earth might study those great secrets which the vulgar were not able to approach unto. And after the lapse of time, when the spears of strangers were grounded in the temple corridors, the passages leading hence were closed up by those who knew the secret, and thus was their wisdom entombed and saved.'

"Thus spoke my mother, and continued: 'Now am I about to show you a great secret, my child, but it did not originate with Solomon; with all his wisdom he was fain to borrow it from Old Egypt, from whence comes all the light and wisdom of the world; even as this light surrounding us streams through the distances from the sarcophagus of the dead Pharaoh. Only a little of it may I show you, so look while you may.'

"On saying this, my mother passed along the side of the apartment and came presently before a tripod that appeared to stand against the wall. Over this she slowly passed her hand back and forth a few times, when, without the least warning, from the bronze urn upon the top of it there sprang forth a bright blue flame. I did not see mother put anything into the urn, nor did I see her do aught that could have kindled a flame; but there it danced and flared, like some uncanny spectre, and still mother passed her hand back and forth over it.

"'Come near, daughter, and behold the thing for which your father seeks,' she said; 'for I know that he has sought long to discover a knowledge that is hid, and would converse with a people that have long since perished from the earth!'"

Here a sigh was born and died upon the lips of

Alice Davis, and she drew nearer her lover, who sat upon the log beside her.

"But do you know, John, in spite of all the strange things that were going on before my eyes, I felt no fear, not the least particle, only one idea held me with the force of a conviction—it was a certainty!—these strange things were *not* being *dreamed.* They were being *seen!*

"I approached the tripod, and as I did so, was startled by a change in the appearance of the fire; from blue, it changed to a vivid red, and as it leaped toward the roof, the smokeless flame covered nearly the entire side of the chamber against which the tripod stood. Immediately it sank down and appeared to die out, but I noticed that the wall back of it was not as it had been. It was slowly becoming transparent before my eyes; a wall of glass reaching from floor to roof and from side to side.

"But what was it that I was looking on? At first dim and indistinct, gradually the view cleared and I saw a vast desert—rather it seemed a jungle, for grass, interspersed with bushes, swayed as if under a gentle breeze. Beyond this, I saw a sandy plain stretch away in dreary monotony to the horizon. But what company was this that was struggling through the jungle? Were they captives, or fugitives? They might be either, were they judged by the weary, spiritless look upon their faces.

"I have had occasion many times, in my father's study, to examine the peculiar features of the different races of men. I could make no mistake as to the nationality of this band of wanderers. Clearly they were Jews; not only did a single glance at their features reveal this, but their garments and general make-up were all distinctly Jewish. It was as though the personages in a portrait that I had seen, representing a procession in ancient Jerusalem, had stepped from their frame and gone marching through a jungle.

"I could not rid myself, however, of the unpleasant consciousness that I was not looking on a picture of human happiness; there seemed to be such an unutterable weariness stamped on each face, as the party struggled and fought its way through the brush and the

tangled grass, on toward the sandy plain. Then I noticed that each man carried on his back a heavy pack, and, although their garments indicated hard usage and were rent in many places, they were of rich material and were fastened, in front and on the shoulder, with clasps and buckles of gold. I saw many ornaments set with jewels that flashed in the sunlight, as their wearers toiled along their weary way.

"What was this that I looked upon? Evidently, by some sort of magic, I was looking upon the exodus of a people. Through my confused and half-benumbed mind flitted the thought that almost every branch of the human family had migrated, at some time in its history, from one country to another; some of them many times. But where were we told of such an exodus on the part of the Abrahamic stock? The one record of an event of that sort, which remains to man, gives no intimation of the possibility of a scene such as I beheld. I wanted so much to ask this question, the desire became a burning longing, but as I have before intimated, I seemed to be deprived of almost every faculty, except the power to see, hear and remember. It appeared, however, as though mother could understand something of my wishes, whether I expressed them or not.

"'Your desire shall presently be gratified,' she here remarked, 'only be patient and above all, observe!'

"When my mother spoke, I involuntarily glanced toward her, immediately looking again at, or rather *through* the wall. But the whole picture had changed during the instant that my gaze had been diverted from it. The plain and jungle had disappeared; and in their place there now rolled before me the boundless sea. Although I looked intently, I could see no shore, only black cloud-wreaths threw their fantastic circles above the deep, and ever and anon some huge billow, more ambitious than its fellows, strove, with hands of foam, to clutch and drag them down.

"As I continued to look upon the wild scene, I suddenly perceived a ship, if it deserved that name—at least it was a strange sort of craft, the like of which I never saw before. In shape it was something like a Chinese 'junk,' except that it was not so high at the prow,

more like a raft I should say, and was fitted up with one immense square sail. It was also propelled by oars, a row of which I saw along the vessel's side, their wet blades gleaming in the garish light which streamed down through the ever-changing clouds. I could see little groups of men huddled together on the deck; but could distinguish nothing as to their features or apparel, because the ship rapidly diminished in size as it sailed on over the illimitable sea.

"I felt that I was looking on the same travellers that I had seen a moment before making their painful way across the jungle. I cannot say why I thought so, it seemed more like an intuition than anything else, but I was sure that it was the history of a people that was being unfolded before me in this scenic way, and gradually the conviction seized me that it was a history which was, somehow, to affect *me*. I could not see how this was to be, yet I *felt* it.

"Just as the ship became a blur upon the far off line, where sky and ocean met, I noticed what seemed a mist arising from the surface of the sea; a moment later, all was indistinct, and then, little by little the mist cleared away and I saw that still another change had taken place. Tall forest trees shot skyward from a level shore, along the margin of a placid stream. Round a great fire that threw fitful rays of light athwart the gathering darkness of the forest, there was a group of people. As soon as my eyes rested on them I saw that they were those same Jews that I had seen at first, but what a change there was!

"In the first place, but a handful was left of all the company that I had seen, and in the second, their distinctive dress, of which I have before spoken, had been exchanged for clothing that consisted chiefly of the skins of wild beasts. This, and the fire round which they gathered, caused me to infer that they were not in so sunny a clime as when I first saw them. But what especially pleased me, was the expression on their faces; they looked like people who had returned home after a long journey. The generous fire and those who surrounded it there, under the shadows of the primeval forest, formed a picture of perfect rest and peace.

"I had time to see no more, for my mother waved

her hand and the wall instantly became the solid rock that it had been before.

"'My child, you have already seen much, but there is much more that you should see; I find, however, that it is too much for you, so I must hasten; a little more will I show you, and afterward your father's skill, and the strength of your own spirit shall find out the rest. Let us return to our native land.'

"As mother said this, the mellow light that had shone since I had found myself in the chamber,—except when the blue flame flashed from the urn upon the top of the tripod, when it died away—this light grew dim, so dim at last, that the only light I saw came from my mother's countenance, and presently that seemed to fade away and we were in total darkness. I next heard a crash as of a thunder-bolt, and looking up I saw the stars shining above me. A single glance around showed me that I was here in our own Luray Valley; the country seemed familiar to me, but just where I was, I could not tell. In fact, the experiences which followed were misty and dream-like, whereas they had before been as clear as anything that had ever occurred to me in the light of day. I am not sure that what I am now about to relate was not a dream, yet it most wonderfully accorded with what I had already witnessed, and may have been thus imparted lest my strength should be too much exhausted. At any rate, I can only tell what followed, and leave the explanation of it to others who may be better versed in the philosophy of such matters.

"I thought, at first, that I stood upon the side of a low hill. I was certain that the ground formed a declivity beneath my feet; but presently the moon emerged from a cloud and I saw that what I had mistaken for a hill, was in reality one of those curious mounds, a number of which, you may remember, are to be found a few miles down the valley. Mother was still near me, and presently she stooped down and touched the earth, which opened into the very heart of the mound.

"How shall I describe what followed? One after another, there came trooping forth the strangest company of men—if it be proper to call them men—that I ever saw. Their stature was only about half my

height; while such a breadth of shoulders I never saw belong to human kind. They were hunch-backed and bow-legged; but it was their faces that were especially repulsive. I noticed that they were wholly *without foreheads*, while the shape of their skulls indicated a solidity of bone that could have resisted a blow from a sledge. Yet their expression was not ferocious; in fact, they seemed to be a peaceable folk, despite their forbidding physical structure. They were, however, greatly excited and came trooping forth clad in skins, that whirled and fluttered round them in the most fantastic fashion. Of my mother and myself they took no notice, but seemed eager to hurl something from the entrance to the mound.

"'These people,' said my mother, 'are of the prehistoric races who came northward from their homes in the far south. They visited this valley and threw up these mounds, while as yet there was not a sword upon the earth, nor any instrument of iron; here also were they buried. Catch that which they hurl forth, for they cannot suffer the relics of an alien race to invade their resting-place and disturb that which is of such vast antiquity!'

"As she ceased speaking, I saw them about to hurl that which was held by one of them, and as they did so I threw up my hand and caught it. I found in my hand a roll of parchment, evidently very ancient, for it was all blackened and decayed in places; but in the full moonlight, I could make out these words, written in the English language:—'Records of the Sons of Israel, who were placed in Halah and in Habor!'—It was then, that putting forth a mighty effort I cried aloud 'Father, I have found it; I have found it!' And these words, as I told you before, father was able to hear, just as though I had stood behind him and spoken over his shoulder.

"As I cried out thus, the parchment unrolled, and I saw that there was quite a number of leaves rolled together—unlike the custom of rolling ancient manuscripts—but I had no time to reflect over it; for each leaf at once became a copper plate, and one after another they slipped from my grasp until only one remained.

"This remaining plate I glanced at, and in the moonlight I fancied that I saw characters raised upon it, something like the Chaldean letters on some old manuscripts that I have seen in father's study. But about that I will not be sure, for just then another cloud passed over the moon, and the plate, slipping through my fingers, fell with a loud crash upon the stones at my feet.

"Where was I? Surely not where I had been! My mother was no longer with me and I stood alone; but whether on the earth or under it, I could not tell. By means of a faint light that came from whence I know not I could make out huge pillars which stretched away into the vasty space above. Of these, some were white as snow, while others glittered as though bespangled with gems. Then on all sides were strange groups of figures; trees grew, flowers bloomed, and altars of silver waited to receive their sacrifice; but the second look revealed the fact that trees, flowers, and altars were of stone. I seemed to have entered an enchanted palace; the home of fairies, or gnomes. And this is why I have so little faith in the reality of the last part of what I saw last night, everything was so terribly mixed up, it was like the troubled ending of a dream.

"Little could I see of the place I seemed to stand in, but what I did see, surely could have belonged to no portion of this globe. Lakes of molten silver! A forest of spears, and each spear of alabaster! Great fissures that ran sheer down to the centre of the earth, and rainbows of vivid hue spanning the black jaws of each. I could not see the roof, if roof there was, but as I stood and wondered, suddenly, from a cavern at my right, there crept forth a dragon of most monstrous length; of the alligator family it seemed to be, but its eyes were fire, and as it opened wide its mouth I seemed to be looking through the entrance to the infernal regions. But take my eyes from it, for my life I could not, as slowly it crept forth and ever with its glowing orbs charmed and transpierced me; and thus I stood and looked upon the dragon, as if my whole soul were centred in my eyes, and as I stood thus, the thing before me changed and became a gleaming mass of

treasure! Golden plates and wedges. Chains of priceless workmanship. Coins, like none that I had ever seen before. And, oh, the gems; rubies, pearls, diamonds—handfuls of them flashed and blazed before my eyes! I was dazzled by the splendor of the wealth before me. Involuntarily I put my hand out to grasp the glittering store. It closed on—nothing; I was sitting bolt upright in my bed, trembling in every limb!"

CHAPTER X.

JOHN ELTON'S VOW.

As Alice finished her narrative, her lover gave a gasp of amazement.

"Well, of all the strange dreams that I ever heard, I think this takes the lead. Why, Alice, there is nothing stranger in 'The Arabian Nights.'"

"So you still believe it a mere dream?" said Alice.

"No," replied her companion, in a voice of deep seriousness, "I believe as you do, that the latter part may have been a dream, but whether dream or vision, I think that it is nothing less than the shadow of some strange event that is to come. The fact that your father heard your voice and was able to repeat the very words you uttered when you saw the records, is, of itself, proof to my mind that you were subject to some great psychic influence that caused you, temporarily, to be more out of, than in, the body.

"Yes, undoubtedly a brighter day is to dawn for you, and while I am slow to believe that Jews or mounds can have anything to do with it, yet, evidently those things were but figures of the real blessings that were to come. "The wanderers over jungle, plain and sea, who finally found a peaceful haven; and the treasure glittering in the mystic cave; these, to my mind, are only types of the peaceful home that shall be yours, and the prosperity that is to come to it."

As he finished the last sentence, John Elton gently pressed a kiss upon the brow of Alice, as though to put the seal of perfect candor on all that he had said.

Is it not strange how the influence of a great love will change a man either for good or evil? Only a little while ago John Elton was ready to laugh at anything like a vision, or an occult experiment, and call it superstition. But to hear the wonderful vision to which he had just listened—and which seemed like

a prophecy of the happiness of the girl he loved—related as a personal experience by the sweet lips of his heart's idol under the gentle light that fell from heaven's lamps, which, one by one, were being lighted in the sky, to have all the periods in the story filled in by the gurgle of the brook—well, this was quite a different thing from hearing such a story under ordinary circumstances; hence it is likely that John Elton felt just about as serious and awe-struck as Alice herself.

"I felt that I wanted you to hear all this, John," said Alice, "and I resolved that you should be the first to hear it, but now I feel in duty bound to repeat it to father. It will be such an inspiration to him; so, as it is getting late, perhaps we had better return to the house. Don't you think it would be better to postpone your call on Mr. Desmond? Not that I would dissuade you from your purpose," she added, quickly, "but these summer evenings are so short, and as the hour is late, he might consider it more polite——"

"Pardon me, Alice, dear, but I shall not trouble myself as to the opinions of Walter Desmond, respecting politeness," said Elton. "Any man who would be capable of acting as he did last night, can have but feeble notions of politeness. I shall see him to-night and demand at his hands an unconditional retraction; his simple apology will suffice for me, but to you he must write a note, retracting the intimation that you sought the society of 'menials.'"

It was with a very determined spirit that John Elton mounted his horse and turned his face toward the residence of Walter Desmond that evening. He would not have cared to confess how much encouragement he had received from the narrative with which Alice had favored him. Then the attendant circumstances had, perhaps, quite as much to do with his present mental elation as the story itself. Had not Alice sent him a special invitation to call that evening, and throwing all hesitation to the winds, in spite of the fear of possible incredulity and ridicule from him, had she not told him her strange story even before she had told it to her father? These, and many such thoughts, burned in the breast of Elton, as he rapidly made his way

toward the Desmond plantation. Each moment his heart grew warmer and stronger, and he became more and more determined that Alice Davis, "his Alice," should suffer no insult, or injury, from Walter Desmond, or any one else.

He had something over four miles to ride before he reached his destination. While he rides that distance let us take a bird's-eye view of the Desmond plantation.

The home of Walter Desmond was one of the finest mansions in the Luray Valley, and the thought of it had made the heart of more than one ambitious maiden throb with a desire to be its mistress. The estate comprised nearly nine hundred acres of cleared land, forest and meadow, fully two-thirds of which was in a state of the most profitable cultivation. Round one portion of the plantation, ran the Hawksbill, a picturesque stream that wound its way through the valley and emptied itself into the Shenandoah, a few miles below.

Desmond Hall was built on a slight elevation, which looked as though it might have been of artificial origin. In fact, there was a rumor that some remote owner had caused his slaves to wheel earth to the spot in wheelbarrows, and so form the small hill on which the house was situated; but however this may have been, Desmond Hall was as beautiful in itself as it was in its situation. It was constructed of brick said to have been brought from England in the early Colonial days. A house of many gables, with broad porches running all round it; the porch-roof being supported by large, round pillars. The steps, in front of the entrance, were so easy to ascend that the scions of Virginia's aristocracy would sometimes, when heated with wine, ride their horses up them.

Standing on the broad porch and looking down on the curved drive that, with its borders of maples, ran through the spacious grounds out to the road beyond, one could well understand how the feverish and unhealthy mind of Eldridge Davis might long to have his beloved Alice the mistress of such a home; more especially as he felt that she was likely soon to be without one.

But as John Elton dismounted from his horse he

was troubled by no such thoughts. It never once occurred to him whether Desmond Hall would prove a happy home for Alice or not, but he *was* thinking how basely its owner had insulted her the night before, and he had no intention of leaving these beautiful grounds until he had received ample satisfaction for it all.

After tying his horse he took the precaution to look at his pistol and assure himself that it was loaded and in perfect order—not that he expected to have use for it, at least, not that night; but he knew the master of Desmond Hall to be a passionate man and if aroused, tormented by jealousy as he doubtless was, he might prove desperate. Hence in being thus prepared he was only using a commendable prudence, as we shall shortly see.

In response to his knock, the door was opened by a colored servant, of whom he inquired if Mr. Desmond was at home. The servant looked the least bit surprised, for a moment, possibly at the lateness of the call; then answering in the affirmative, invited Elton to walk into the parlor.

"Who is it dat wishes to see Massa?" he asked.

"Tell Mr. Desmond," was the answer, "that John Elton desires to see him on a matter of the gravest importance."

In a very short time the man returned saying, substantially, that Mr. Desmond declined to be seen that evening, owing to the lateness of the hour; and also because he felt unusually fatigued; and he hoped that Mr. Elton would be pleased to call again, at a more seasonable hour.

It was with very white lips that John Elton received this message; but he managed to keep voice and temper both down as he said:

"Please go again, and tell your master that he can see me to-night, or receive my respects, second-hand, to-morrow, just as he prefers; and that I await his pleasure in the matter."

With a serious countenance the slave again sought the presence of his master. He had been too long familiar with the ways of Virginia gentlemen not to know how such a matter was likely to end. And one glance at the sturdy form of John Elton did not leave much

doubt in his mind as to who was likely to get the worst of the ending.

It was but a few moments later, although it seemed much longer to Elton, when the sound of foot-steps in the hall announced the approach of some one. Our hero knew very well to what his course was likely to lead, and in the second left to him his whole life came up in review. All his early troubles; the bereavement and disaster that had visited his home. Then this great hope and inspiration which had dawned upon him in the person of Alice Davis—an inspiration that had smitten the shadows of his life and made them burst in bloom—how was it all to end?

Was the sun of his young manhood destined to go out in darkness even before it had reached its meridian? Was its glory to be stained by the blood of his fellow-man?

The footsteps were at the door now; he raised his eyes expecting the entrance of the slave—they rested on the master.

"Although your demand, made here in my house, and the rude message that followed it, was very much of the nature of an insult, yet I am willing to overlook the fact and should be pleased to know your business with me. Pray be seated."

These were the words of Walter Desmond, as he entered the room and lazily cast himself into an easy chair, near its centre. No shake of the hand; not a word of greeting to the man who had arisen at the sight of him. John Elton seated himself upon the sofa again, and calmly regarded the man before him a moment, before he made reply.

It was evident that the careless, lounging air of the master of Desmond Hall was all assumed. In fact, by the nervous movement of the hands, the shifting glance and twitching lips, embarrassment and apprehension were only too manifest. Yet was there a dare-devil spirit at the bottom of it, and a certain glare of the eye betokened the possibility of a sudden fit of fury which might even be near akin to madness.

All this John Elton thoroughly comprehended in far less time than it takes to write it. He even felt a thrill of pity for the passion-driven man before him. It was,

therefore, in a carefully modulated, and even kind tone of voice, that he made answer.

"I certainly had no desire to insult you, Mr. Desmond, either by call or message, but as a gentleman, it becomes my duty to ask an explanation of your strange words last night."

"My remarks, sir, were addressed to Miss Davis, and she has already received sufficient explanation as to their import. To you, sir, I said nothing; therefore I deny your right to meddle in the matter."

This impudent and false reply very nearly broke down the self-control of Elton; but he managed to choke down his indignation by an effort, as he replied:

"I chanced to be the escort of Miss Davis and have a right, under all the circumstances, to demand that you say whom you meant when you used the term 'menial' last night, and I must beg to correct you, when you say that Miss Davis has received a sufficient explanation of your words. I called on Miss Davis this evening, and she said sufficient to convince me that you have done nothing of the sort."

As Elton demanded to know who was meant by "menial," Desmond arose from his chair; but when he spoke of his call on Miss Davis, and of what she had told him, the face of the other grew perfectly livid with fury.

"You infernal hound!"—he exclaimed—"right here in my house to dare insult me with your insolent demands. I will give you my answer without delay."

Snatching a knife from his bosom he stood in the centre of the room; his face pallid and working with frenzy, his eyes glaring like those of a wild beast.

"I suppose you came expecting an apology from me"—he yelled—"now it is *you* who will apologize for your intrusion here and for your insult. Apologize, I say, or I swear I will bury this knife to its very hilt in your base heart!" Saying which, he took a step forward, and so great was his rage that his lips were actually covered with slaver, like the mouth of a mad dog.

Elton quietly arose, as the other drew the weapon from his breast, and as he started toward him he suddenly cocked his pistol and leveled it at the form of his foe.

"One step nearer, Mr. Desmond, and you will lie dead upon your own floor! I did not come here to-night to be trifled with. Without any provocation whatever, you grossly insulted two persons who never wronged you in any way and, I say, you shall apologize for it this very evening, before I leave this house."

At sight of the pistol, Desmond had paused and lowered his knife; and while the last words were being spoken, he stood quivering like an aspen, under the influence of his impotent rage. It was easy to see that murder was in his heart, and doubtless had not John Elton taken the precaution to come armed on this visit, he would have been forced to the alternative of a humiliating apology or—death. But, fortunately, he was now master of the situation, and even Desmond was not slow to see this fact.

"You think that because of your pistol you can bully me in my own house," said he; "I will soon show you your mistake."

Here he made a motion as though to call for help, but Elton was quick to frustrate any such design.

"Hold, sir," said he; "I do not intend to be hurled, like a dog, from your house by the hands of slaves. I tell you there has been enough of this. You have, in your insane rage, doubled your insults of last evening and gone so far as to attempt my life; now I say to you that the first person who enters that door in response to a call of yours, gives the signal for your death. Call if you dare!"

A scene of this kind could not last long. Had Walter Desmond been able to plunge his dirk into Elton's breast on the first attempt, his rage would, no doubt, have furnished him the stimulation necessary for the deed. But now it was evident that he was fast weakening. Foiled on every hand, the passion-born courage he had exhibited was fast ebbing away; and he turned uneasily this way and that, as though seeking a way out of it; but apparently finding none he moodily put up his knife and sank into a chair. Elton towered over him, with the light of a righteous determination in his eyes.

"I had no intention, Mr. Desmond, of forcing an apology from you at the point of a pistol; especially

would I not do such a thing here in your own house; but since you have forced me to draw my weapon in defence of my life, I must insist upon a retraction of the language you have just used."

By this time the face of Walter Desmond wore a sickly smile.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Elton, we will talk the matter over."

"No, sir," thundered Elton, "an apology, an immediate apology for all you have said; I demand it."

"And I render it—now will you be seated?" said the other.

John Elton returned his weapon to his pocket and resumed his seat. For a few seconds there was an awkward silence which Desmond was the first to break. His manner in the last few moments had undergone a complete change, and he appeared thoroughly cowed; nothing of the bravado remained about him.

"What is it you want of me, Elton?" he asked. "I confess my words last night were rude, nor did I mean them at all; but, to tell the truth, I had been drinking rather too much during the afternoon, and was quite disappointed that Mr. Davis and his daughter should have absented themselves from our lawn-party. I rode over there, as soon as my guests left, and Mr. Davis and I had some words; you should not be too hard on a fellow, under such circumstances."

This statement was received with dignified silence by the man who sat upon the sofa, but presently he said,

"You had not been drinking to-night?"

"No," was the reply, "but there have been recent events that rendered your call especially unpleasant—hang it all; what do you want, anyhow?"—with some show of temper.

"Simply this," said Elton. "I want an apology for your conduct last evening. As the insult was not a public one, what you have already said in the way of retraction is sufficient, so far as I am concerned; but you must write a letter to Miss Davis and make an honorable retraction in her case as you have done in mine."

"I'll see you hanged first!" cried Desmond. "See here, I want you to understand that this is my house

and no man shall demand in it more than I am willing to grant. You have drawn a weapon here and threatened my life, and you shall suffer for it, so surely as there is a law in Virginia."

"I think you will find, Mr. Desmond, that the law of our State permits a man to defend his life anywhere, so I am not uneasy as to what I have done. For the rest, I understand you to refuse to write to Miss Davis? Then we must settle this matter as becomes gentlemen; you shall hear from me to-morrow."

The turn affairs were taking was not at all to the liking of Walter Desmond; intemperate habits had unnerved his hand and hence he was a poor shot; and, while "the code" would give him the choice of weapons, there were none with which he could hope to stand successfully against this bold young man, noted as being one of the crack shots of the valley. So just as his rival was about to bow himself out, the master of Desmond Hall exclaimed:

"Hold on a moment. What are you so deuced fast for? You remind me of a whirlwind. It strikes me that you are particularly hard and unreasonable to-night. I have no objection to writing Miss Davis a letter of apology for anything offensive that I may have said to her; but, confound it! I don't care to have the humiliation of having you take it, as though I were not man enough to send it myself."

"I did not ask that," said Elton; "all I ask is, that you agree to send her a written apology and that you afterward keep your promise."

"I am in the habit of keeping all my promises," said the other, stiffly; "but if it will give you any comfort, you have my word of honor that the note shall be sent. Pray be seated a moment, Mr. Elton; I have, so far as I know, given you full satisfaction in this matter; now I wonder if you would do me the kindness to return the favor?"

Elton stared at the man in surprise—whatever could he mean? But the other met his stare with a very quizzical, though somewhat embarrassed expression. "Pray be seated," he repeated; "I will not detain you very long."

Elton obeyed the request and took a chair.

"Now," said Desmond, "our talk has all been of personal and private matters, so in my remarks I trust I shall give no offense. It is useless to deny the fact that we are rivals, rivals for the hand and heart of the truest and best lady in all Virginia; yes, in all the world. Now I admit that up to the present you seem to have the best of me, and——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Elton, "but I cannot discuss such a matter with you, or with any one. Such a subject as the one you have named I consider far too sacred to be lightly discussed."

"But you did not give me a chance to come to the point," said Desmond. "Trust me, Mr. Elton, I shall not disgust you with what I have to say, and it may be of mutual advantage to all parties concerned—please hear me through."

A motion of assent was the only reply.

"We both love the daughter of Eldridge Davis, and it is clear, from present indications, that she does *not* love *me*, whoever she may love. Now, John Elton,—solid business you know, solid business,—suppose you *are* the lucky fellow, what are your prospects?"

Elton looked perfectly amazed at the impudence of the man, but said nothing. Apparently encouraged by this silence, Desmond continued:

"You are perhaps aware that Mr. Davis is in exceedingly straitened circumstances. It is, indeed, very doubtful if he can hold his affairs together for another year. I happen to know that every foot of land he owns is heavily mortgaged and his creditors threaten publicly to foreclose and sell him out. He needs a friend, and I am his friend; I would willingly stand by him in this emergency, but the cold pride of his daughter is but poor encouragement for a fellow to undertake to help her father out of trouble."

"Excuse me," said Elton, "but I cannot understand what the 'cold pride,' as you term it, of Miss Davis has to do with the matter. If you are a friend to Mr. Davis and can help him——"

"Oh, you do not understand me," was the reply. "I am a friend to both father and daughter and would like to make their troubles mine, and would be more than happy if Miss Davis would only give me the right

to do so. If I could only claim her hand in marriage——"

"I understand then, Mr. Desmond, that your friendship for Eldridge Davis is so disinterested, that before you can do him a favor you must first *be paid for it* by receiving the hand of his daughter? Sir, call your passion by any name you please, but never disgrace the holy name of *love* by applying it to a sentiment so selfish."

"Well, what have you to offer, John Elton, that you should presume to press your troublesome suit in opposition to the wishes of Mr. Davis?—for I chance to know that it is in opposition to his wishes that you do so. It really seems to me that *you* are the selfish one, after all. Here I am, able to offer Miss Davis a home second to none in this valley; and to provide a refuge for her father, where he might pursue his witchcraft undisturbed for the remainder of his life; and you must come in with your fine figure and attractive ways, and act the part of the dog in the manger. You are not so situated as to provide suitably for a lady with the tastes of Alice Davis, and you know it; and most likely if you had remained out of the field she would already have been the honored mistress of Desmond Hall, and the fortunes of the family would have been safe.

"Now it is all different and who is to blame for it but you? Despite your sneers, John Elton, I tell you that I *do* love Alice Davis; most truly, tenderly, do I love her, and it is nothing but my love for her and interest in her welfare that goaded me on to speak the rash words I used last night. I assure you these views of mine are most heartily indorsed by Mr. Davis; if you doubt my words ask him for yourself and you will find I speak the truth. Now I repeat, what have you to offer in exchange for all these benefits of which Miss Davis and her father have been deprived by your most foolish suit?"

It was his last question that night! With one bound, John Elton sprang to his side, his face as pallid as the dead and his eyes like living coals of fire. With his clenched hand stretched over the head of the man who cowered in the chair beneath him, he cried out, in a voice of passion which rang like a clarion through the house:

"You coward!—*you*, to talk of disinterested motives and pure love! Now hear what I have to tell you, for by my life I swear it shall be the truth! You shall never marry Alice Davis! All your boasted wealth, be it great or small, could not buy so much as her little finger: for rather would she be the wife of the poorest man in all this valley, so he were worthy of her love, than to be the wife of one like you. And now I tell you that although you have taunted me with my poverty, yet I am *rich;* I am possessor of a treasure that you can never own; and although I shall not name it, yet well do you know what I mean! I hope you fully understand me, Walter Desmond. I vow that you shall never marry Alice Davis! I vow it and I swear it!"

Without another word he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE THEOSOPHIST'S STUDY.

As John Elton rode homeward he had ample opportunity to reflect on all that had occurred. The cool breeze fanned his burning brow and soothed him into a calmer frame of mind. Removing his hat he drew his horse down to a walk in order the better to collect his thoughts and enjoy the refreshing breath that was breathed upon him by the Spirit of the Night.

Truly in the last few hours his experiences had been varied—a conversation with his best friend, and with his most deadly enemy. The sweet words of love and the bitter threats of hatred. A scene of passion with which the world has been familiar from the beginning, and the story of a vision such as mortal ear had never heard before. All these antithetical occurrences had been pressed, with great rapidity, upon him in the course of a few short hours; no wonder if he was a little "off his head!"

To speak the truth, now that he had time to reflect over it, he was ashamed of himself for the vow he had made just before leaving Desmond Hall. He had no cause to reproach himself with anything but that; for the rest, although he verily believed had it not been for his pistol, Desmond would have killed him, yet thanks to that, his errand had succeeded to a charm. Desmond had apologized for his insult, and would probably be more careful of his words in future. He had no doubt but that he would also keep his promise and write the apology to Alice.

So far, it was all well; but he felt that he had given the man cause for additional and deadly hatred against him, by his rash and foolish vow. But then, was he not driven to it by the purse-proud assurance of Walter Desmond? Was not his vow true, after all; and was he not, under the circumstances, justified in making it?

Could he have seen the face of Walter Desmond as he recovered from his surprise, he might have been still further persuaded that his last utterances were unwise. That gentleman sprang to his feet as the door closed behind the form of Elton, and shook his fist at the door through which he had passed. "Curse you," he yelled, "curse you I say—you scum, beggar, *menial!* Yes, fool that I was ever to retract the truth, you *are* a menial, John Elton, and no better than the negroes in my kitchen."

Then, as he sank back in his seat, his features worked almost as though he had been seized with a fit. "Swore I should never have her, did he?—the miserable pauper. Well, *he* shall never have her, at any rate; I'll ruin him, if it takes every dollar I am worth—yes, I'll *kill* him!"

Lowering his voice, his eyes shone with a dull, red light, terrible to see; while he kept clenching and unclenching his hands. And as he sat thus, his face appeared to glitter with the white light of anger, and his lips were wreathed in deadly smiles as he continued to mutter, "I'll *kill* him; yes, he shall die."

Such scenes of human passion are not pleasant to contemplate; so we gladly turn away from this, in order that we may visit a spot that we shall find of vital interest in the progress of this story.

As our hero was about to enter the home of his rival, Mr. Davis and his daughter repaired to the study, as Alice had expressed a desire to speak with her father in private. We will take the liberty of accompanying them. The room was nearly square and of good size; although it would not be considered large if compared with the ample dimensions of most rooms in Virginia mansions of the old style. The walls were whitewashed over the plaster, but so many years had elapsed since the last coat was put on that they were quite yellow. A rag-carpet covered the floor; but numerous holes and thin places indicated that it had long since passed the days of its youth. A round mahogany centre-table; two rockers; three "stool chairs" and two small stands completed the customary and strictly necessary furniture of the study. Across

the centre of the room, near the ceiling, a wire ran from side to side; and from it was suspended a red curtain, reaching to the floor and dividing the room into two apartments; one being the study proper, while the other served as Mr. Davis' bedroom. In the north end of the room there was a spacious fireplace;—so much for the ordinary furniture and appearance of the study, now for the extraordinary!

In a corner of the room stood a crystal globe. It was about the size of the larger globes used in school-rooms, was mounted on a pedestal, and was noticeable chiefly because of what was *in* it. As one entered the study and his eye first rested on the glass, it appeared to contain the image of a beautiful young girl. Approach a few paces nearer and the globe contained a boy, in all the flush of youth. Draw near the crystal, in order to see how this strange transformation had been accomplished, and as you bent over it, you would be horrified to see therein neither girl nor boy, but in place of them, you would be confronted by a grinning skeleton that on the least touch of the hand upon the glass would swing, swirl and toss its limbs in an apparent ecstasy of ghostly joy. And should the observer chance to walk around the globe, strange to say, the fearful spectacle would revolve, as he moved, so that its eyeless sockets might continually stare at him.

In fact, every part of the room contained articles that demonstrated the peculiar weakness of the owner of the Davis homestead. He evidently lived in an enchanted land, and increased these mystic and ghostly sensations by all manner of unnatural and horrible devices. For instance, on the wall above the fireplace there hung a skull; and through the eye-sockets was twined a serpent, as though it had crept out of the one and into the other, while both the head and tail of the snake protruded through the teeth of the skull.

Between the front windows, hung a picture that evidently was intended to represent the incantation of the Witch of Endor; for there was a shadowy form in the distance that might have been Samuel or—any other person or thing, according to the imagination of the beholder.

Besides the chairs, already mentioned, there was

another, designed wholly for ornament—if we can apply the term to anything so ghastly—for it was composed entirely of bones; those of men and of beasts being mixed together indiscriminately and attached one to another probably by glue, or some other cement, to form the horrible resting-place we have described.

Then, at either end of the curtain that separated the sleeping apartment from the study proper, were the stuffed skins of two hyenas; and each hyena was loaded down with chains. It was probably the clank of these chains, as Eldridge Davis chanced to brush against the stuffed beasts, that had aroused the superstitious fears of Uncle Ned and his fellows, which fact we mentioned in a previous chapter.

A bookcase stood against the wall, beside the door, well filled with volumes; nearly all of which bore the stamp of great age; and they were, almost without exception, of a spiritualistic or occult character. Exactly opposite, and beside the chimney, stood another bookcase, containing mostly scientific and historical works.

The mahogany table, in the centre of the room, though large, was crowded quite to its capacity by an almost indescribable mass of parchments, papers covered with calculations, sundry mirrors of odd shape, and a singular arrangement of lenses. Among the manuscripts there could be seen, here and there, one written in Greek, another in Latin, while a few were covered with Hebrew characters; this fact, together with the contents of the bookcase near the chimney, gave sufficient proof that Eldridge Davis, whatever weakness he may have had on certain lines, was a scholar of no mean attainments.

For the rest, there were a few busts of mythological heroes, on brackets in the corners and on the bookcases. Two or three bronze bas-reliefs representing scenes from the siege of Troy; and a few pictures of the same mystical character as the one already described, hung about upon the wall.

Such a study would scarcely prove attractive to the average student, even in the light of day; but when we remember that it was during the hours of darkness that Eldridge Davis performed most of his literary labors, and that the only artificial light known in the

Luray Valley, sixty years ago, was the uncertain candle, we can easily imagine more cheerful places in which to spend an evening than the study in the Davis homestead.

Alice and her father seated themselves on either side of the centre-table, on which burned three candles in tall brass candlesticks that had been polished by Aunt Chloe until they shone like burnished gold.

"I am now ready, father, to speak of the matter that you mentioned at breakfast," said Alice. "I do not know that I can give you any satisfactory explanation of the words you heard; I can only relate the strange experience through which I passed."

Here she proceeded to give her father as full a version of her vision, as she had given her lover a few hours before.

As she proceeded with her narration the face of Eldridge Davis was a study. Great excitement, blended with hope, spoke from every feature. Especially did this excitement manifest itself when Alice mentioned what she had seen through the wall of the temple vault, and began to describe the travellers on the plain.

"Ah, yes," said he; "the Merciful Powers have at last granted an answer to my prayers. The revelation has begun, Alice, and, for myself, I do not believe that it will cease until we have been made acquainted with the whole truth which we seek; but pray go on with your story."

As Alice described the last scene, where the wanderers appeared to have found a home, the face of her father grew very pale and his eyes glowed with a suppressed excitement. But when she spoke of the exclamation which burst from her lips when the plate dropped from her grasp, he could contain himself no longer, but arising from his chair, came and stood by her side.

"Go on, Alice, and tell me everything; be sure that you do not omit even the smallest detail. This is truly wonderful, for as I live, those were the very words I heard spoken by some one apparently just behind me, and I tell you, Alice, it was your voice; it was you! But please go on."

He said no more, until the last word was spoken;

then he sighed as one will do who has been almost overcome by some strong emotion.

"I believe it all, Alice, every word; and it transcends my wildest hopes; I imagined we should one day find these records and possibly some little treasure with them; for as you well know, the records themselves would have been treasure sufficient for *me;* but this priceless store of gold and jewels will make us rich, Alice, even beyond our wildest dreams."

"But, father," interposed Alice, "you must remember that even if all this be true, and not some strange delusion of my fancy, we are not sure that we will ever find it all; and besides what I have told about the treasure was seen in the last part of the vision which I suspect was but a dream, and in which I should not put the least confidence, were it not so peculiarly related to what I had seen before."

"Never mind that, daughter," said her father, "you have said sufficient to revive all my hopes and to make me firmly believe that in a very short time, by some means, these revelations will all be made plain to us. I am sure, from the unusual interest which you manifest, that you are cheered by the same hope, and the very fact that your dear mother was your guide on your strange journey, makes me the more certain that the matter is not destined to end in a disappointment."

Here Mr. Davis resumed his seat, and as Alice glanced at him, after a moment of silence, she perceived from his attitude and expression that he was indulging in some tender reflection. Presently he spoke, and she noticed a pathetic cadence in his voice, as he did so.

"Your mother never caused me the least sorrow or disappointment in her life, Alice, and I don't believe she would wish to do so now. True, she always opposed my devoting my time to occult studies; but when I insisted on doing so against her wish, she manifested no displeasure, but went right on attending to matters that should have been my care. Ah, it was a sad day for us both when your mother died. But there, I did not intend to speak of that," he added, as he saw a tear in his daughter's eye; "I only wanted to show you why I could not think this matter a delusion,

even apart from the proof afforded by my hearing supernaturally the words you spoke."

"Well, father, what do you make of it all?" asked Alice. "My mind has been so confused that I have not been able to see clearly to what it all may lead; yet I will confess that, somehow, strange hopes have been awakened in my heart which grow stronger the more I contend with them, or try to regard them as unreasonable or absurd. I can only pray that the whole thing may not turn out a delusion."

"Rest assured, daughter, it will turn out no such thing; and now if you will listen, I will give you my opinion," said her father. "Of course I can only give my views in a crude way; as I have not had time to reflect upon the matter and bring out all the points. Evidently your vision was given to assure you of a prosperity that was to come to the family. The fact that your mother led you, with the light of joy and peace upon her face, indicates that quite plainly. Then I take it that the whole tenor of the vision is a corroboration of my views with regard to the 'Lost Tribes of Israel.'"

The smile upon the face of Alice, at this point, was not lost upon her father.

"Yes, daughter," he exclaimed, "I know you have always smiled at my opinions on that subject; but come now, can you see anything else in the vision as you have described it, but just the corroboration which I claim? Did you not say that the dress and appearance of those pilgrims left no doubt in your mind as to their nationality? Tell me again, Alice, of what race did you say they were?"

"They were Jews," was the reply. "I have no doubt as to that."

"Then, although you have always made light of such opinions, I trust now that you are willing to admit a strange coincidence here. You know we differ in our views of the different manuscripts which compose our Bible—yes, I know you venerate your mother's Bible—" said he, quickly, as he caught the look of pain upon the countenance of his child; "and so do I, in a way, not only because of its hallowed associations, but also because of its sublime precepts and lofty ethics; but most

of all, for its great historical value. I wish to say nothing, Alice, that will give you pain, but you know that I regard the sacred book of the Jews just as I regard the sacred literature of other nations; except that it is superior to most other books in the points I have named. I believe that the writers were generally accurate in their narration of facts, and honest in relating the wonders they believed to have occurred both in the past and present. With this opinion, you cannot wonder that I dissent from those who made the present canonical compilation of these sacred records. I think much has been left out that should have been given a place with the other manuscripts; and I, of course, regard those books called 'Apocryphal' as being of equal value with the rest, because of equal historical interest.

"Now these records leave us in no doubt as to the fact of the invasion of the land of Israel because we are expressly informed that Israel was carried away captive and placed in Halah and in Habor by the river Gozan and in the cities of the Medes. So completely was this done, that one of the ancient writers compares it to 'wiping out a dish and turning it upside down.' Josephus says that the king of Assyria 'transplanted all the people.' Nor are we confined alone to our sacred records for a knowledge of this event, for Assyrian tablets have given us the testimony of Sargon, king of Assyria. 'Samaria I looked at, I captured. 27,280 men (or families) who dwelt in it I carried away.'

"So much for the invasion of Israel and the capture of its inhabitants. Where are they to-day? History gives no answer to this question. We find it impossible to lose the Two Tribes; their customs and countenances betray their origin in every land under heaven whither they have wandered. But where can we lay our hand upon a man and say, 'Lo, a descendant of the Ten Tribes?' The question is, 'What became of them?' Now, holding these records as equally truthful, we turn to the book of Esdras——"

"But, father, are they equally truthful?" interrupted Alice; "or admitting, if you will have it so, that they are of equal authority, do you think that the description

of a vision such as Esdras had, or such as I have had, should rank with sober historical truth backed by the strongest corroborative evidence? And just the difference between the two, is the difference between the capture of the Ten Tribes, and their subsequent history—provided I admit your theory of the records. But, if I do not admit your theory, there is a still greater difference."

"But, Alice," said her father, "if you have any faith in your own vision you must see in that the strongest corroboration of the statement made by Esdras."

"What is his statement?" said Alice; "I have often heard you refer to it, but do not remember to have read it."

"Well," said her father, "as I have it written off here, on the table, so as to be able to *ask questions* relative to it the more quickly, I will read to you what Esdras says."

Here he read the whole passage that refers to the Ten Tribes, but during the reading of the five most important verses, Alice might have been seen to tremble and turn pale.

"'But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt, that they might there keep their statutes, which they never kept in their own land.

"'And they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river.

"'For the Most High then shewed signs for them, and held still the flood, till they were passed over. For through that country there was a great way to go, namely, of a year and a half; and the same region is called Arsareth.

"'Then dwelt they there until the latter time.'"

As Mr. Davis ceased reading and returned the paper to the table, he glanced at Alice, who had all the while intently gazed at the floor.

"Well, daughter, how does that accord with your vision?" he asked.

"I shall have to confess that it is all very strange," she said. After a moment's thought, she asked: "Have any prominent men, or historians, held views similar to yours respecting the Lost Tribes?"

"Why, yes," was the reply; "and to prove that my theories are not necessarily opposed to the reverence due the Bible, I will show you that those who first held and defended them were clergymen. Wait a moment."

Going over to the book-case, near the chimney, he took two books off a shelf and returning placed them before Alice on the table.

CHAPTER XII.

"OUIJA."

"THESE books were both written by clergymen, and beside them I have still others on yonder shelf," said Mr. Davis. "They comprise a treatise on the Lost Tribes and make an attempt to prove that their descendants are the Red Men of the American continent."

"But, father," said Alice, "I was not aware that you held that view."

"Nor do I," was the reply; "I am only answering your question as to whether any prominent men or historians have held the theories I advocate; and in these books, written by Stiles and Smith, you will find that not only my theories, but as I have intimated, others still more radical are held. The missionaries, Mayhew and Elliot, firmly believed them; in fact, it was the prevailing opinion of theologians generally, about forty years ago."

"But, father, how could they have reached this country?"

As the girl made this query she exhibited considerable interest, which fact was not lost upon her father.

"Why, you seem unusually interested, this evening! Generally, I have noticed, when I mentioned the Lost Tribes, or spoke of a probable visit that they might have paid our valley, you have always tried to change the subject; or else have shown such a lack of interest that I felt inclined to let the matter rest. And do you know that I have more than once attributed our lack of success in clairvoyance to your indifference when uninfluenced? But I think that I now see the cause of this: you believed that my views were contrary to the teachings of your mother's Bible. Is it not so, daughter?

"Ah, I thought so," he added, as Alice smiled and

blushed. "Well, at any rate, I have set your mind at rest on that point.

"Now let us take the map and see if we cannot trace the route taken by these poor wanderers in their search for a home, and for the privilege of religious freedom. Is it not wonderful how history repeats itself? Here we are about to look into an event that occurred ages ago, while but yesterday, comparatively speaking, the same thing took place again, *viz.*: a voyage to these shores by the Pilgrim Fathers in search of the liberty to worship God as they pleased. Perhaps a similarity to events in their own history may have been the cause of the great faith that Mayhew and Elliot put in those verses of an apocryphal book. However, let us turn our attention to the map."

Proceeding to the same book-case from which he had taken the volumes, Mr. Davis took three or four rolls from the top shelf and brought them to the table.

"We shall have no trouble, daughter," said he, "in tracing every possible route that lay open to them on these maps, as I have already spent much time in examining and marking them. Now it was about the year 740 B. C. that the Tribes were led captive, and history also tells us that these places spoken of in the records as the spots where they were 'transplanted,' were somewhere in the countries about the Caspian Sea. So much for our first data. Now this gives us great latitude; quite enough to get lost in, were it not for a friendly indicator just here. I refer to the river Euphrates.

"And that is what makes the writings of Esdras so remarkable; he refers to the narrow passages of the Euphrates river as the channels through which they started on their journey; and if we look at what you might consider a more authentic portion of Scripture, we shall find that the people of Israel were placed in 'Halah and in Habor'; now where is this Habor? Let us refer to the map that gives us the course of the Euphrates.

"What a history that river has," said Mr. Davis, as he unrolled the map, and, pushing the candles to one side, spread it over all the other articles on the table. "Mentioned in the first part of the very oldest record known

to man, it has figured in song, story, and history ever since. Well, here we find this wonderful river, rising in the mountains of Armenia and starting out on its southerly journey of fourteen hundred miles, to empty its waters through two or three mouths into the Persian Gulf.

"Now see what a country it runs through; deserts for the most part and uninhabited wastes, where the only indication of vegetable life is the fringe of reeds and grey osier willows along its banks. It is this river that forms the eastern boundary of the 'Promised Land.'

"Look here, Alice, this red dot represents Habor; now judge for yourself in which direction these fugitive Jews would have been likely to journey, in order to avoid the heathenism of which they complain."

"Surely, not northward," said Alice, "as that would lead them up among the Armenian mountains eventually, and I can see, in no part of the country intervening, any indication that there would be an improvement in matters relating to religious freedom."

"You are right, daughter," said her father; "if we may judge from the history of the nations that lived in these regions at that time, it would have been far better for the remnant of the Ten Tribes to have remained in Habor than to have attempted a settlement among them."

"But what of the regions westward? They are all desert, are they not?" said Alice. "Father, I believe they went down the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf, thence into the Arabian Sea and out into the Indian Ocean."

"Yes," said her father, "but I have had hints unmistakable in their character, as you well know, that these people finally made their way in that remote age, to our own shores and even visited some portions of what is now Virginia. If so, they must have crossed the Atlantic."

"Well," replied Alice, "may they not have passed the Cape of Good Hope and thus, by rounding the sonthern end of Africa, entered the Atlantic Ocean? Remember, the records inform us 'there was a great way to go, namely of a year and a half.'"

"I know," was the reply, "but the records say that

the 'great way to go' was 'through that country,' besides, just look here at the map again, and you will find I have dotted a way that is so much shorter, I wonder you did not observe it at first. Here through the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb they could have passed from the Arabian to the Red Sea, then they would have had only the sixty miles of country, known as the Isthmus of Suez, crossing which, they might have embarked upon the Mediterranean, passed between the pillars of Hercules and emerged upon the broad waters of the Atlantic.

"And note this fact, daughter, those pillars are quite on the same parallel of latitude as the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, which, I have every reason to believe, offered at least a part of them a haven. By sailing due westward from the Pillars of Hercules, I say, they could have entered the Chesapeake Bay and found their way to our shores. Think how different must have been their course had they stretched away westward from the far off point of Good Hope; and even had they steered for the northwest, how interminable must have been their voyage ere they rested on the waters of our queenly bay.

"Besides, you saw them journeying by land, when, had they followed the course you indicate they would have had no chance to do so after they once embarked upon the Euphrates—oh, there are many objections; the sort of craft made necessary by the shallow waters indicated by the records, would never have conveyed them over the sea. Nor could they have made adequate provision of victuals, at any one time, for such a voyage. It is very plain to my mind, that I have pointed out the only possible route by which those fugitives could have reached the region called Arsareth, which, I believe, represents no other country than our own United States."

"Yet you do not believe the American Indians to be descendants of theirs; I have heard you say as much often, but I wonder that you do not. How then," continued Alice, "could these shores have been peopled in the first place?—and as you believe the Jews came here, what do you think finally became of them? I confess I am more inclined to agree with the theo-

logians who wrote these books—" referring to the two her father had placed on the table. "If they found their way to a 'further country, where never mankind dwelt,' it would naturally follow that the inhabitants found in that land, in later times, must be their descendants." And Alice looked at her father with a very triumphant air.

"Yes, daughter," said he, as he smiled at her logic, "but you must not interpret too literally. Other proofs aside, for a moment, what did you see in your dream? Were not the wanderers seated by the banks of a stream, on a virgin soil and under the branches of a primeval forest? Did not that appear as if they were in a land, so to speak, 'where never mankind dwelt?' But when you stood on the side of a hill, or whatever it may have been, and saw the plates hurled out by a swam of ferocious beings, the like of which you had never seen before, did that impress you with the fact that, besides your wanderers, no people had ever *visited* Virginia before?"

"But, father, my dream could hardly be looked upon as proof in such matters," said Alice.

"Nor do I regard it as such," replied her father, "but only as a wonderful corroboration of proofs which I already have. However, I trust in the near future it may lead to the discovery of something that will be a proof; as, for myself, I have no doubt it will.

"Daughter, although the hour is late, if you are not too weary I should greatly like to *influence* you, just for a few moments, now that your vision has awakened an interest on your part, relative to these oriental pilgrims. I should like to know what you would be able to make of it when entranced."

Without reply, Alice arose and arranged one of the rockers in the most comfortable manner possible and seated herself in it; her father, meantime, arose and stood in front of her. Neither spoke a word, but the eyes of the girl gradually grew dull and in a few moments, under the look of concentrated strength which her father bent upon her, she seemed to fall asleep. Very gently did he pass his hands back and forth before the face of his daughter and then in a low but strong voice exclaimed:

"The Jews, Alice, the Jews. Find me the records left by those wanderers from 'the cities of the Medes.'"

A slight shiver passed over the form of the sleeper, but she gave no other indication that she heard the words addressed to her. A few more passes were made and the question was repeated.

Slowly, very slowly, came the words and, oh, in such a changed and hollow voice—nothing like the musical, ringing tones of Alice Davis:

"The wanderers from the lands of the Great River, have left their words in the habitation of the ancient dead."

This was a decided encouragement.

Eldridge Davis had frequently hypnotized his daughter, and had long since found her capable, on such occasions, of entering into a state of clairvoyance, when, if he would ply her with questions, she would give him correct information about objects known only to himself, and describe buildings with which he was familiar, but which were wholly strange to her. He had found her able to trace out any ordinary event in the past, provided she were put upon the right track by proper questions.

Only at times was she able to do this, and her father frequently found it impossible to drive her into a clairvoyant state, even after she was hypnotized. He had, however, satisfied himself as to the reliability of her powers in this direction, as he had caused her to read whole pages with which he was reasonably sure she could have had no acquaintance, and that, with the book locked in another room. Then, when he would go over the page a few moments later, so far as he could remember, he always found that her efforts had been successful.

The great thing was to get her to talk at all. Recently he noticed that the occasions when she was capable of entering into the clairvoyant state were becoming more rare; and that it was becoming more difficult, each time, to start her talking. Once get her started, however, and she would go on, perhaps for an hour, answering all sorts of questions relative to places, or to past or present events—with one singular exception—if the answer to any question involved a fact locked in

the breast of the dead, Alice would show signs of immediate distress. Her lips would twitch and she would either refuse to say more, or else go off in rambling, disconnected talk.

This had nearly always been the case when her father had tried to discover the secret he sought by questioning her when in a hypnotic trance. He had to be very guarded in the form of his questions, and not demand from her a knowledge that could only be obtained from the dead. From some cause—probably, as Mr. Davis intimated, from the hopeful condition of her mind—Alice was surprisingly quick, this evening, in her reply; and it also contained a directness that her answers to questions on this subject had never before shown.

It is not to be wondered at, that Eldridge Davis should seek to get all possible information, now that Alice seemed in so favorable a state, therefore he continued:

"Where are they, Alice? Speak, girl! I ask, where are they?"

"I—see—them—in—the—house—with—earthen—walls," was the slowly worded reply.

"But who built the house?"

"It was made so long ago!—I see men fighting!—How strangely they make war on one another!—Huge clubs are swung on high, and those who receive the blows do not appear to mind them!"

The eagerness of Eldridge Davis, at this point, almost overcame him; the man trembled from head to foot, and this fact began to have a very noticeable effect upon Alice; manifestly he was losing his control over her.

"The records, Alice, who hid them? You *must* tell me this! Find out who hid them!"

Instantly the mesmerist saw his mistake, he had asked the fatal question—fatal, at least, to the hope of further information that evening;—there was a start, a tremor, and the eyelids unclosed, revealing two perfectly expressionless orbs; then closed again. Just for a moment the limbs became fixed in a rigidity as of death; then the muscles relaxed, the head fell back against the chair, there was one long, full respiration

and Alice appeared to sleep. Her father was very well aware what it all meant. She had been in the best psychological condition that he had ever known; had responded readily to his most important questions, and he had permitted his own carelessness and lack of self-control to prevent him from obtaining the knowledge for which he longed with all the intensity of his nature.

He had left the main question unasked.

Still he would not surrender without an effort. He would strive to gain this knowledge now with all the strength of utter desperation.

Stepping up so close to his daughter that his outstretched hands almost brushed her face, he made several rapid passes. As he did this, so great was his mental concentration that he trembled like an aspen and great drops of perspiration beaded his brow.

"Oh, Alice, you *must* tell me! That house you spoke of, with walls of earth, where is it?"

But there was no answer. With breathings, deep, but regular, Alice appeared to be calmly sleeping in her chair.

The consciousness of having made an utter failure, came home to Mr. Davis so clearly that it made him heart-sick. Very reluctantly he made the necessary passes and as Alice opened her eyes they rested on a face, the hard, set expression of which she never forgot.

"Father, what is it?" she said. "Surely I have said nothing that has disappointed you in your expectation of discovering traces of the Lost Tribes, have I?"

"Never mind, Alice, what you have said; I wish this whole thing were ended. Oh, if I were only sleeping by the side of your mother it were well. I do not see why I could not have died when she did."

Alice was accustomed to seeing her father in these melancholy fits occasionally, but seldom indeed, if ever, had she known him to give way so utterly. What a wonderful love and pity glowed in her eyes, as she bent them upon him, as he seated himself at the table, and bowed his head upon his hands! A moment of silence, and then she spoke:

"Father, the way you are travelling is a hard way.

You have turned aside from the religion of your fathers; forsaken the simple faith in mother's God, which was the crown of her pure life; you seek to make a way for your feet through the swamps and blackness of a forbidden land. You are only paying the usual penalty. Even the greatest masters of these black arts you practice, have acknowledged that they tend to fire the brain with madness and always end in disappointment; yea, frequently in utter ruin. Yet I blame myself largely for this evening's work. Had it not been for that silly vision—doubtless the creature of an excited fancy—you would not have attempted this experiment. I am so sorry! Now let us both resolve to pass no more beyond the ethical boundaries of knowledge. Let us banish all these horrid, unprofitable things"—pointing to the globe and skull—"and have a grand bonfire of all those trashy occult books of yours. I will see to it that you shall then have a study, the very atmosphere of which shall be sweet and healthful."

"Pray do not speak of such things, daughter," said her father, as he sprang to his feet and began to pace the floor. "We have, this night, come so near the object of our quest that I could almost see it. In fact, you doubtless *did* see it. Oh, there is no reason why I should despair; you have within the week, twice looked upon this coveted treasure but it was so exasperating. I never knew you to be so easily influenced, or so ready to speak on this subject, which is of such deep interest to us. You found the proofs and told me how they were hidden, but in my excitement, Alice, I failed to ask you where, until it was too late. Think of such stupidity! But you must pardon my gloomy words, they were only the result of a momentary depression. The strangely hopeful thing about it is, that so far as you went, your words in the trance exactly corresponded with your vision."

Here Mr. Davis repeated what his daughter had said.

"Never mind," said he, "the matter is only deferred a little, that is all; meantime we must possess our souls in patience. However, let us try another agent for a little while; not that I have much faith in it, but we may get a few hints that will at least, give additional encouragement."

Mr. Davis went over to one of the stands in the room—the one that stood beneath the picture of the Witch of Endor—and pulling open a drawer in it, drew forth a singular looking affair. It was a piece of thin oak, cut in the shape of a heart, about eight inches in length by seven in width, furnished with three short, brass legs, the ends of which were covered with felt. This contrivance stood upon a board, about two feet long, and a foot wide on which were stamped the letters of the alphabet, the words, "yes," "no," and, "good-bye."

This innocent looking apparatus was nothing less than the spiritualistic toy known as "Ouija," destined afterward to be so largely employed by mediums and mind-readers in all parts of the country. At the time of which we write, however, its use was not generally known. Indeed, Eldridge Davis knew nothing of it, until about three years before the opening of this story, when he met a gentleman in Richmond who made him a present of the toy, saying that he had purchased it from a quadroon girl in New Orleans. In fact, Mr. Davis had never put much reliance on "Ouija," as a means to the end he had in view. While he had often succeeded in making it talk—or spell, more strictly speaking—yet its answers to his questions would be vague, often frivolous, and generally very unsatisfactory.

But Alice, on the contrary, seemed to take quite a fancy to the thing, and would watch its motions with great interest. Very often she would consult "Ouija" respecting the trival things connected with her household duties, and frequently would receive a reply of a very amusing nature. One afternoon she had thought something of ordering one of the boys to saddle "Rex" and bring him to the door, that she might go out for a ride; yet hesitated, because she had a new novel that she desired to finish.

"Now which shall I do?" she said to herself. "I will run up to the study and ask 'Ouija.'"

Ten minutes later, a merry peal of laughter rang through the study, as Alice stood by the window holding in her hand a piece of paper, looking at the letters she had written down, as they were pointed out by the

toy. She read these words—"You had better go to your room and do your sewing."

But Alice did not always seek "Ouija" for amusement alone—for instance, a friend of hers had married and gone to the West. For a time the two ladies corresponded regularly, but, as new cares came into the life of each, the correspondence fell off, until at length it ceased entirely; next, a rumor reached Alice that her friend had removed to a distant section, and thus she lost all traces of her. Quite a long time elapsed, when, one day the thought came to her, that she would like to know where her friend was. She resolved to consult "Ouija." Shortly after placing her fingers on the board it began to move beneath them, when, strange to relate, the letters indicated formed the names of a town, county and state. Sitting down she wrote to the address so mysteriously given, and in a short time, received a reply from her friend.

But we shall weary the reader with no further account of this strange toy, other than what belongs legitimately to the development of our story. Doubtless all are familiar with the excitement over this matter, which agitates the American mind. Lengthy articles on this, and kindred contrivances, have been written for our reviews, and opinions on the subject, both *pro* and *con*, have been freely given.

Some claim, that when fully charged with human magnetism, "Ouija" becomes a medium, through which disembodied spirits write such information as they desire to give the living.

Others hold that the contrivance is a sort of connecting link between mind and matter, and that the words spelled out are nothing but a statement of facts already consciously, or unconsciously held in the mind. A reflection of the contents of the mind, so to speak, just as the countenance is reflected in a mirror! But with all this we have little to do, it being our business to state the facts that occurred in connection with our story, leaving the realms of opinion to be explored by others.

The table being so much encumbered, Mr. Davis drew a stand close beside it, placed "Ouija" upon it, and they were ready for the experiment. Drawing

their chairs on either side the stand, they rested the tips of their fingers lightly on the toy, having first placed paper and pencil close at hand. No word was spoken; both gazed earnestly at "Ouija."

Perhaps ten minutes had passed thus, when the thing they touched appeared to become instinct with life. It cracked as though the legs were being broken off it; sundry little quivers, that could be *felt* but not seen, ran through it and gradually it *began to move!*

"Question it, father," said Alice.

"'Ouija,' where is the thing I seek?" said Eldridge Davis. With ever-increasing rapidity, the insensate bit of wood began to move; over and around the board it went. Across and again across. Each instant it moved with increased rapidity, until both the persons whose hands were on it were forced to arise from their chairs, the more easily to follow its motions.

"Just see how it behaves," said Mr Davis. "It intends to point out nothing, only to race round and round for the next half hour like something wild. Alice, will you please ask it something? I am out of patience with the thing."

"Come, 'Ouija,' stop this foolishness," said Alice, "and answer my question. Where is the treasure we seek?"

After making another half-circle, the toy grew slower in its motions until it reached a point near the centre of the board, where it came to a dead stop. Resting motionless for a few seconds, it began presently to crack and snap worse than ever, and at the same time commenced a sort of vibratory movement.

"It is working," said the father, as he raised one hand and grasped the pencil; the daughter made no answer, and they both continued to hold their hands lightly on the board.

This motion continued, perhaps for three minutes, Mr. Davis all the while writing down, with his disengaged hand, the letters indicated—then it ceased to move.

"That will do," said Mr. Davis, "let us see what we have here."

Placing "Ouija" over on the table, he raised the paper to the light; evidently there was an answer to

Alice's question—but *such* an answer! These were the words written.

"*Where it may be found.*"

"Now," said Mr. Davis, "that is a sample of the exasperating answers given by that thing. Sometimes I am almost tempted to break it up. The very nature of the answers show that there is an intelligence, somewhere back of all this, and if an intelligence, then why not a definite and satisfactory answer? Sometimes I am almost led to the belief that there is a deluding demon in the thing, disposed to cause all the trouble and disappointment possible."

"Why, father," said Alice, "it really appears to me that you take too dark a view of it. The answer was not so bad, after all. If the treasure, whether it be in the shape of records or gold, is 'where it may be found,' then there is at least a possibility that we may find it. I must say, I am far from being so skeptical about 'Ouija.' It has answered so many questions that I have asked about ordinary matters, that I believe, if we only knew how to go about it, we should have from it all the information we desire. Possibly we do not frame our questions right, although I hardly think the trouble is at that point."

"Where, then?" said her father. "Suppose we give it another trial?"

"Not to-night, father," was the reply; "it is Saturday night you remember; and as it is already very late we must be careful not to trespass upon the Sabbath. Let us suspend our labors for this time; I do not think we have any reason to be despondent over the results of this evening's work," she said, as she saw the weary, discouraged expression upon her father's face, and oh, how she pitied him!

"Well, perhaps not," was the reply, in a tone that made her heart ache. "Perhaps we have made some progress in the desired direction, but do you know, Alice, I begin to feel a presentiment that I shall never reap this harvest? There *is* a harvest; I never felt so sure of it as I do this moment; too many are the voices, omens, indications, that we have received of late, for me to have any doubt upon this subject now. But, somehow, I have a feeling that it lies just

beyond me; just out of reach—however, I must not trouble you with such fancies. You are a good girl, Alice, and I do trust you may be blessed of God all through your life. Kiss me good-night, dear. I have already kept you up too long."

"Good-night, father," said Alice, as she pressed the kiss he asked for upon his brow; "now I want you to promise me that as soon as I leave the room you will retire. You are sadly in need of rest and I want you to try to compose yourself and sleep."

Somewhat reluctantly the promise was given, and Alice retired to her room with a headache that nearly drove her wild; having struggled for the past hour to conceal her suffering in order that her father might not know of it.

Alice saw no more of her lover until the Thursday evening following the events just related. In the meantime there had been occurrences of which she very much wished him to know. Two men had called upon her father, to ask what he intended to do in the matter of a mortgage upon the Davis homestead, that was due. He was informed by them that unless the matter was shortly attended to, there would necessarily be a foreclosure. Of course, Alice did not intend to tell John Elton all about this, yet she did propose to give him such hints as would not only show him, pretty clearly, to what a pass affairs were drifting, but would also, she well knew, cause him to extend that manly sympathy—too delicate to be expressed in words—which is such a strength to us when it comes from those we love. Not a noisy babble of words, but a sympathy that can be *felt;* that warms the heart like a prophecy of coming triumph.

She had also received two letters from Walter Desmond, both of which reached her at the same time. One of these was a concise and gentlemanly apology for the insult on the highway; the other, a politely worded request that the writer be granted "the pleasure of an interview with Miss Davis on next Friday evening."

Now it was this last letter that especially troubled Alice. Of course, had she known all that occurred at

Desmond Hall on the evening that her friend called there, she would, on no account, have granted the request. But of that Alice did not know. Then, it was her father who brought her the letters, and as he recognized the writing upon them he hinted a desire to know their contents. After a glance at his face, which appeared to have aged perceptibly in the last few days, she felt that she could refuse no wish of his, if it were possible to grant it. So she read him both the letters, and he was so pleased that she really had no heart to say "no," when asked if she intended to give Mr. Desmond an affirmative reply.

"I do hope this trouble about the insult can be fixed up in some way," he said; "I have never known Walter Desmond to act like that before." Alice was about to make an impatient rejoinder when she chanced to look at her father. As she did so she observed a pathetic quiver of the lip and saw a look in his eyes that touched her heart like the point of a dart.

With an affirmative gesture, she went straight to her room and wrote a note to Desmond, granting his request.

Now, "had she done right, or wrong?" This was the question that troubled her, and this was the question she wished to submit to John Elton.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TWO INTERVIEWS.

On Thursday evening Alice had a chance to ask her question, and the answer John Elton gave her, was of such a nature as to leave no possible doubt in her mind as to his opinion on the subject. This visit occurred one week after Elton had paid his respects to Walter Desmond and demanded an apology for his misconduct. Elton and Alice were again strolling by the brook, which had become a favorite resort for the lovers, and for the first time Alice was listening to a recital of what had occurred at Desmond Hall.

"Do you think he would have killed you, John, had it not been for your pistol?" she asked, anxiously.

"I believe his intentions, in that direction, were bad enough. I have my doubts as to whether he would have been able to put them into execution, as there was a chair or two near my hand and he would probably have found one of them quite a barrier between his knife and my body."

"And you braved all this danger and abuse in defense of me, even when my father had practically failed to do it?"

As Alice said this, there was a side-glance of the eye, and a touch of gratitude in her voice, that made Elton feel that he had not only been doubly compensated for what he had done, but in her commendation had received reward sufficient to induce him to face a hundred Walter Desmonds, though every one should breathe out rage and threatenings. Then, very awkwardly and with many blushes—for truth to say, he feared the displeasure of Alice at this point—he proceeded to tell her of his rash vow.

It was an amusing thing to see the hesitation and confusion of this strong man when speaking of this matter. He appeared to imagine that what he was saying would offend the girl beside him, when every word of it was, to her, the sweetest music. Such is the ignorance of the masculine heart!

"Now, dearest," said he, as he finished this part of the story, "I hope you will pardon my rashness in making such a declaration respecting you, to that man, but really, his insufferable impudence drove me to it."

"I do not see that I have anything to pardon," said Alice, demurely, as she bent her eyes upon the ground. "I am sure you said no more than the truth; for I never will marry him, and I most certainly resent his implication that I must pass into his keeping through sheer stress of adverse circumstances. Oh, it was noble of you to give him such a rebuke. I thank you for it more, if possible, than for anything else you said that night."

Oh, how honey-sweet were these words to the heart of the man who heard them! He had made a declaration in the very teeth of his enemy, that was virtually an avowal of his determination to marry Alice and, while perfectly aware of her love for him, yet he feared her displeasure at this bold, public, and wholly unauthorized statement. Now instead of displeasure, praise and thanks! So they continued to converse as they strolled along by the brook. Presently Elton bethought him of the promise of his rival.

"Have you received a letter from Mr. Desmond, Alice?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "two of them; and do you know, I have done such a foolish thing. If I had only known how you had been treated, I never would have done it." And then Alice proceeded to tell her friend about the contents of the letters, and the wishes of her father; she finally said: "But if I had only known, I never would have consented to meet him again. Why did you not let me know, John?"

For the last few moments, John Elton had walked along in moody silence, and ever as he listened to the words of Alice, his face grew more resolute and stern.

"We have been very busy on the plantation this

week, Alice," he said; "I have been unavoidably kept there; you may be sure it was not from inclination that I remained away. If you have no objection, I should like to hear this letter, if you happen to have it with you, which I presume isn't likely."

"Yes, I have them both," said Alice, "which did you wish to hear?"

"The apology," was the answer. "I care nothing for the other."

The tone of bitterness in which this last was said, was not lost upon Alice, but she made no reply other than to take two letters from her pocket, glance at them and put one back again. By this time they had reached the log spoken of before, and Elton proposed that they seat themselves upon it while Alice read her letter. It ran as follows:—

"DESMOND HALL, VA., July 28, 1830.

"MY DEAR MISS DAVIS:

"A few evenings since, on the road leading to your home, I chanced to meet you and another. At the time, I was laboring under a mistake and had just passed through circumstances of a very irritating nature; excited by all this, I used an expression in addressing you, the full weight and meaning of which, I had not fully considered. Believe me, there is nothing further from my mind than a wish to offend you in any way. Therefore I most sincerely beg your pardon for the words I used, and trust that the friendly intercourse that I have enjoyed so much at your house may not be interrupted by this unfortunate incident.

"Very respectfully yours,

"WALTER DESMOND."

"I notice that he makes but scant mention of me," said Elton, as Alice finished reading the letter. "Well, I do not know that I can blame him for that. At any rate, the apology, as far as I can see, is full and complete, so there is no more to be said about that. But I certainly do not like your holding interviews with this man. He is not fit to enjoy your society for a single moment. The more I see of him the more I am convinced of it.

"Alice, dear, what is the matter with your father? Is he blind to the character of Walter Desmond, that he should be so earnest in his requests to have you

favor him? I confess I cannot understand it. One thing is certain, matters cannot long continue thus. I feel, in fact, that we are doing your father absolute injustice when we fail to make him fully aware of our intentions."

"Oh, you do not understand," said Alice. "If father saw any chance for us he would never object to our engagement, but he is, I greatly fear, in very critical circumstances financially, and he has only my best interests at heart. Of course we will let him know soon, and every one else shall know, what a few have already begun to suspect, that we are engaged; but not just yet. Father has so many things on his mind. Why, in the last few days, he seems to have endured a year of suffering, such a stamp of care has it left upon his face."

Here John Elton set his lips hard together and looked as though he knew more about the matter than Alice did.

"That was my only reason for promising Mr. Desmond that interview to-morrow night," she continued, "because father wished it so much, and I could see no harm in permitting the old course of things to continue. But had I known what I now know, I would never have consented to the interview. As it is, however, I intend to see him. No one shall say that I fail to keep my promises, or am false to my word. I shall, therefore, hear what he has to say and tell him frankly that he must consider our acquaintance at an end."

"Well," said Elton, "I cannot see but that is the best course to take, as long as you have written the note; but since your father seems to have such a strong desire that you should tolerate the man, will he not be greatly displeased when he learns what you have done?"

"I intend to tell him the whole story," said Alice, "just how Mr. Desmond behaved when you called upon him, and also how he threatened your life. I hope to have sufficient influence over father to induce him also to give up all social relations with the man. I think it would be much better for him."

"I know it would," said Elton, "and now, Alice, dear, as you have told me about the trouble that your

father seems to be in, would you consider me inquisitive if I should ask the cause? You intimated that it was financial embarrassment. Is any one especially pressing him?"

Alice then spoke of the visit that had been paid her father two days before, and the purpose of it.

"Ah!" said her friend, "I thought so; it seems the hound has lost no time, and already the hare is made aware of the pursuit."

"I do not understand," said Alice.

"It gives me great pain, darling, to tell you the plain facts in the case," said her friend, "but it seems that Desmond is so enraged by what has recently occurred, that he is making a deliberate and desperate effort to turn your father out of doors. Mr. Hopkins, my employer, told me on Sunday, that he heard, down at one of the village stores the night before, that Desmond had been trying to buy up all the paper he could get on Mr. Davis. It seems he started right out on the morning after my call, on this infamous business; the visit made by the gentlemen to your father was probably due to offers made by Desmond. Mr. Hopkins said he was offering very fair prices for all paper on him that was to be had, especially mortgages, and he seemed to be at a loss to understand his motive."

"Oh, dear," said Alice, "no wonder poor father is in trouble."

"I fear that my interference in your behalf has proved an injury to you, Alice, rather than a benefit," said her friend.

Then it was that the full strength of character possessed by Alice Davis was revealed. She arose from the log and stood before John Elton, with her hands clasped before her, and her countenance bearing the impress of a high resolution.

"Mr. Elton," said she, "never use such words to me again, no matter what occurs; do you think I shall shrink from being turned out of doors? I care much more for my father than for myself, but in his case I know the suffering will not be endured long, for it will kill him; but as for myself, I shall find friends somewhere; a kind Providence has seen proper to endow me

with health, and I feel that I have strength sufficient to bear the ordinary burdens of life. But as for enduring insult, that I never will; and I wish you to distinctly understand, that if Walter Desmond were to turn me out of my home to-morrow, I would still thank you for your brave defence of me, and for the fact that you forced him to apologize for his base insult. There are things on earth that I do fear, but, thank God, poverty is not one of them!"

John Elton was lost in admiration at the incarnate courage and queenly womanhood that stood before him. Springing to his feet he grasped the hand of the noble girl and begged her to resume her seat, at the same time seating himself beside her, but forgetting to release her hand.

"Forgive me, Alice, darling," he said; "I meant to insinuate nothing that was inconsistent with your highest sense of honor; but when you talk in this heroic way, of battling with the world, I must remind you that there is one now by your side whose only prayer is, that he may be granted the right ever to remain so. Oh, Alice, I know I am unworthy even to touch the hem of your garment, but I *do* love you; and now, in this unkind stress of fortune that has come to your house, I feel that it would be my highest bliss to be able to offer you a home worthy of you. But if this wretched lunatic, for I can call him by no better name, persists in his persecutions, then, darling, will you not let me fit up a home for you;—humble I know it will be, but the best that a poor man can afford,—and in it you shall reign a queen, yes, and your father shall share it with us; and I will use my best endeavor to make him see that true happiness and true love can dwell together, even in a cottage."

It was the same old story that thousands have told under the stars of Virginia, since the days when the Indian breathed his vows to the dusky maiden floating with him in the bark canoe upon the bosom of the Shenandoah—vows spoken in jest, and vows spoken in earnest. Promises made to be broken, and promises spoken with the Tongue of Truth, destined, like the stars, to live and shine forever.

It was in a voice so full of tears as to be almost

inaudible that Alice made reply, yet were they the tears of a perfect happiness. Now by what wonderful magic was this girl lifted out of the black gulf of her grief into this "Beulah Land" of ecstatic joy? Simply by the magic of a true love, that was loyal enough and strong enough to make her forget poverty, for the moment, with all the calamities attendant on it. "I take you at your word, John," she said, "and whether we are forced to leave the roof that has sheltered me from infancy, or not; whether my father discovers that which will make him rich, or not—myself I believe he will—I promise to be yours. And, although you need no assurance of this kind, as we have understood each other for a long time; yet I now tell you, that your lack of wealth will be no barrier to our union, so far as I am concerned. Well enough do you know that I had rather live amid the humblest surroundings, crowned with your love, than possess all the wealth Walter Desmond could lay at my feet."

Meantime the moon had arisen above the surrounding treetops, and as Alice ceased speaking, John saw that the moonlight had transformed her countenance until it shone like the face of a seraph. Bending toward her, he looked deeply into her eyes, where moonlight mingled with the light of love, and the kiss that he pressed upon her lips was a pledge to her that their destinies were one; that in future, whatever of fortune or misfortune might come to either would be shared by both.

"And now, Alice," said her lover, "it is not proper that this determination on our part should be longer kept from your father. Let us give him all the facts in the case; tell him what Desmond is trying to do; overcome his objection, if possible, and have our engagement made public."

"No," said Alice, "father must not be troubled with this just now; at present he has all that he can possibly bear; but the result will be the same. As soon as I see that the right moment has come, he shall know my determination, and I promise you that he will come to regard you with all the respect that your character merits."

"Yes, dearest," urged Elton, "but it really seems to

me that you do not rightly appreciate the situation. If Desmond succeeds in his evil designs against your father—against you, rather, for he is only seeking to strike you through your father—you must give me the right to defend you in every possible way; therefore I repeat, our relations cannot too speedily be known. Would it not be best to end all this at the altar?" he continued, earnestly. "It is only the lot of a poor man's wife that I have to offer, Alice, but oh, believe me, with it I give you all the love of which my heart is capable!"

Alice looked up shyly. "Then I am not poor, John," she said, "for I consider your love a greater treasure than any that my father could ever find, even were he to discover all the buried wealth of the Orient."

"Then why not name the day that shall make us one, and let the fact of our engagement be known throughout the valley? Let us be married within a month."

"Oh, you hasty man!" she said; "who ever heard of such a thing?" Then instantly growing serious again, she continued, "While I cannot name the day, John, I do promise to marry you within a few months; only father must not be disturbed with it just yet; heaven knows he will have enough to bear, shortly."

Thus the lovers sat and talked, while the light summer breeze whispered through the sylvan shadows round them; and the peaceful brook murmured softly at their feet. Little did they know of the foul and cruel thoughts that were being shaped into a plan to wreck their future. Even then, the vile plot was being hatched; but over their defenceless heads, flashed and burned the lights of heaven, like jewels gleaming on the fingers of those guardian angels, whose hands were spread protectingly above them.

"We had better return now," said Alice; "it is getting late and father will wonder what has become of me."

So they strolled slowly homeward.

"Will you not come in? I think father is somewhere about, and you might speak to him, unless he happens to be in the study."

"No," said Elton, in reply to the invitation of his

friend, "I think your father purposely avoided me when I came this evening. As the hour is late I will not trouble him now. I think it best that my calls should not be too frequent hereafter; we will write to each other and I will call occasionally; but I think it would be wise for me not to call often, until your father understands fully the relation that exists between us."

Alice said nothing, but it was evident from her manner that she fully approved the sentiments of her lover.

"However," he added, "I shall keep close watch on all that takes place here, and if that scoundrel attempts anything that will give me a just excuse to interfere, he shall find that Mr. Davis and his daughter are not so defenceless as he probably imagines. And, dearest," he said, as they reached the door, "I may be sure, may I not, that if you need me, you will let me know it? Any hour that I can serve you, either by act or counsel, I shall be only too happy to do it."

Alice let her silence give token of consent; there was a pressure of the hand, a word of farewell from John and a few words spoken by Alice in so low a tone that it was little more than a delicious murmur, and—he was gone.

The day following, as may be imagined, was a very anxious one for Alice Davis. She felt that she had, the night before, crossed the Rubicon and there now was no retreat even did she wish to do so. But she did not wish to. She was sick of the hateful efforts of Walter Desmond to force his addresses upon her, and sick of the attitude her father had taken in the matter. A few short hours should settle the question of her social relations with Walter Desmond; of that she was quite sure, yet she dreaded the scene through which she felt she would be called upon to pass.

What a strange paradox is the feminine heart! Here was Alice Davis, lost in the wilds of absolute poverty and with Fortune's highway reaching right down to her very feet, leading up to the pleasant highlands of Prosperity, yet would she not so much as put her foot upon the road. To do her strict justice,

we are compelled to say that never once during that day did she think of the fortune she was about to cast from her. Her mind was occupied with thoughts of the great joy she had felt the previous evening, when she became aware of the full extent of that vast fortune that had come to her, in the shape of the loyal love of a true man. How different would be her sensations this evening, when she met the man who, of all others, was the object of her dislike?

The summer hours passed slowly by, and at last the sun set up his standards on the mountains, and passed behind the curtains of his evening tabernacle. Alice put on a simple white gown, arranged her hair in a becoming manner, and awaited whatever might be in store for her. She had a prescience, somehow, that Walter Desmond would take this opportunity to force matters to an issue; and staking his last chance on a single cast would make the cast that night.

She had not long to wait after the sun went down; walking out on the lawn for a breath of refreshing air, she saw the object of her thoughts riding rapidly down the road. Hastily entering the house she hoped her presence on the lawn had not been observed by him, which it had not, as she had no desire that he should imagine her watching for him.

A few moments later, he was ushered into the parlor. Alice gave him a polite, but rather cool greeting, as she entered the room; and as he had arisen on her entrance, she requested him to be seated, at the same time taking a seat herself.

Desmond was dressed with uncommon care, and appeared to be in rather an elated state of mind. There appeared to be an insidious sort of triumph pervading every look and tone which, while Alice was unable to understand its cause, exasperated her intensely. She felt that somehow it boded her, and her friends, no good.

"I was very much pleased, Miss Davis," said Desmond, after a few commonplace remarks had been exchanged, "to receive your note granting me this pleasure. As the evening is so pleasant, suppose we enjoy a little stroll?"

"I must ask you to excuse me from anything of the

sort," said Alice, "as I prefer that our interview should take place in this room."

A dark frown came over the countenance of Desmond, and for a moment, an evil gleam shot from his eyes, but he evidently intended to be master of himself, so the old cynical smile returned almost as soon as it had gone.

"As you please, Miss Davis," he remarked, "whether indoors or out, I find it equally pleasant, if favored with your society. Miss Davis—Alice," he continued, passionately, as he arose from his chair and crossed over to where she was sitting, "may I not hope that you will, at least, give me a favorable hearing; I know that I used language to you, a few evenings since, that was rash, but I have made every reparation in my power; nor would I ever have so spoken to you, had I not been impelled by the mad love I felt for you. Alice, darling, I here and now lay my heart, fortune—my all, at your feet; only say that you will be mine,"—and kneeling at her side, he attempted to take her hand.

As he did so, Alice sprang to her feet, and drawing herself up to her full height, all the nobility of her nature seemed speaking from face and form, as she exclaimed:

"Arise from your knees, Mr. Desmond, and be a man! I am truly sorry that you have seen fit to regard me in this light. You surely speak the truth when you term your passion a 'mad love;' for it could only be a sort of madness, that would cause a man to act as you have done. You refer to the apology that you sent me, but you did not mention that the promise to send it was obtained from you at the point of a pistol, by one who risked his life, in order that I might receive from you the reparation due me. Do you think, Mr. Desmond, that I could ever regard with favor, the suit of a man who has proved himself such a slave to his evil passions? Do not think that I send you away with scorn," she added, as she noticed the pained look on the face of the man before her. "From my heart, I pity you; and I do trust that you will learn a lesson of self-government, from this incident. For the rest, I bid you good-evening, and farewell; as with this interview, all social intercourse between us must cease."

Walter Desmond stood gripping the chair before him, until his nails seemed to sink into the wood. Every emotion that had found expression in his countenance gradually merged into one stamp of desperate anger. White was his cheek as the driven sea-foam, and his eyes seemed like the open doors of a furnace.

"It shall be good-evening, Miss Davis," he said at length," until you choose to send for me. I am one of the few men who do not take 'no' for an answer. I do not consider myself rejected by you, please remember; "—here the light from the furnace doors smote across the pallid face;—" I shall be happy to receive a note, either from your father or yourself, any time in the next few months, inviting me to call again. And I have no doubt but that I shall receive just such a note. Is my statement a surprise to you, Miss Davis? In that case it will afford me great pleasure to pursue such a course as will best serve to make it intelligible;" saying which, he turned on his heel and left the room.

A moment later her father entered the door, exclaiming excitedly, "What is the matter, Alice? Desmond just passed through the porch where I was sitting and scarcely deigning to speak to me, sprang upon his horse and dashed away."

CHAPTER XIV.

"JAKEY THOMPSON."

WE must now ask our readers to accompany us on a visit to Philadelphia. Nearly three months have elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapter, and it is at the close of a rainy day that we find ourselves in the top story of a tenement house in one of the lowest parts of that city. The house we speak of stands in a court where only the most unfortunate children of poverty find a home. As we pass up the creaking stair and along the cheerless hall, with its noisome odors, we learn a still further lesson of the extremities to which a person of ordinarily decent habits must be reduced before he could bring himself to take up an abode here.

We pause, at length, before a door that stands slightly ajar, and as we do so, from within there comes the sound as of one in a violent fit of coughing. We enter the apartment, and in the faint light of the dying day—rendered fainter still by having to struggle through the dirt upon the panes of the one narrow window which the room affords—we see the form of a man lying on a rude pallet in the corner.

We can discern, in the gloom, that his face is almost ghastly in its emaciation, his eyes very bright as though from the effects of fever, while from his chin there falls down over his ragged shirt, a long, white, but very thin beard. His nose and cheek-bones are prominent, but whether made so by nature or by long affliction, the scant light does not permit us to determine. One hand is stretched out over the rags, which serve as bedclothes, and as it picks and twitches at every shred and rag within its reach, we notice that it must once have been both large and strong, though now it is nothing but a flabby piece of skin and bone. In fact, a second look at the man will convince us that we are

looking on the ruins of what must once have been a vigorous and powerful human organism.

One sweep of the eye around the room, will serve to satisfy us—if not already satisfied—of the deep poverty of the occupant. One broken stool stands in the corner propped against the grimy wall. A single iron pan, minus a handle, hanging over a miserable apology for a fireplace ; and a well-battered stand placed against the wall opposite the bed, which we have already mentioned, completes the contents of this human den—for it seems almost a satire on human habitations to give it a better name.

Just as we finish the inspection of our surroundings, the form on the pallet is seized with another fit of coughing which seems to rack every bone in his attenuated body. His eyes start from his head, and during a temporary respite in the paroxysm he gasps for breath like one about to suffocate ; then he is clutched again in the remorseless grip of the cough only to suffer still more terribly, until at length he falls back purple-faced, exhausted and apparently almost ready to expire.

" No food, no clothes, no fire ; ah ! ha ! but I am rich—yes, rich in wealth that none shall touch, until he can come and claim his own."

These words were mumbled, rather than spoken, by the *frame* upon the pallet, a few moments after the paroxysm of coughing had ceased.

" Poverty, wealth—wealth, poverty," he continued to mutter. "Who was it ? Was it not the wise man who wanted neither ? Well, I have both, yet neither rightly belongs to me. O Jakey, Jakey, will you never come ; it is so lonely without you ! Wonder how much the boy will bring home this evening ? Not much, I fear ; it has drizzled, drizzled all day long and no one wants to stop along the street long enough to buy papers."

The gloom grows denser and all that can be distinguished is the outline of the couch and the spectral outline of the face whose bright eyes shine, cat-like, through the darkness. Suddenly brisk steps are heard. The stair creaks under them and the frail floor trembles as they come down the hall.

" That's Jakey," says the form upon the bed. " Yes,

it's Jakey," he repeats as the door opens and a boy steps briskly into the room.

"Why pa, yer awake, ain't yer? I thor't maybe as how yer might be asleep, an so I come in kinder easy."

The boy who uttered these words appeared to be about twelve years old. He might have been older, but a rough life and insufficient food had evidently retarded his growth so that one would not imagine that he had seen more than a dozen summers. Such a guess would have fallen somewhat short of his real age, however.

The lines of the boy's face indicated a sensitive, and somewhat nervous temperament. A sunburned face, rather worse for lack of water—or lack of its proper application rather—out of which peeped honest brown eyes—hair of the same color, unkempt and tangled, surmounted by a ragged cap. A well-worn calico shirt, crossed by one suspender which served to hold in place a pair of tattered trousers—this was Jakey Thompson and all that belonged to him.

Crossing over to the little stand, he laid thereon a small bundle of books and papers; then going over to the corner he sank down upon the disabled stool and stretched his bare feet out toward the fireless hearth.

October was drawing toward its close, and there had been several cool days, followed by the cold rain that had set in the night before.

"Well, Jakey, how much did you make to-day? Come, bring your money to your poor old father, Jakey; that's a good boy," said the old man, in a "whiney" sort of voice.

"I've done nothin' much to-day, pa; it rained so, folks wouldn't stop to buy: besides, I had to keep ruther close in doorways and under awnings to keep the rain from spoilin' all my papers," said the boy.

"Bring it to me," said the man. "It is so dark I cannot see how much there is of it; how much is there, Jakey?"

"'Bout twenty-three cents, I should say," said the boy; "but, pa, yer had better let me light the candle and go buy some supper fer us; I tell yer neither on us is goin' to hold out much longer 'thout we has more grub."

"Oh, no," said the man: "we have—" here he was seized with another attack of coughing. Jakey said nothing while it continued, but stood upon one foot, rubbing the other over the floor to warm it; as the coughing ceased, the boy spoke again.

"Ar'n't yer goin' to lem'me take the money, an' git some supper fer us?"

"No, child," said the man; "you really must not be so extravagant. We have bread in the room and can make our supper very comfortably on that. You may light the candle, however, and I will see that you are not mistaken in the amount of money you have brought home."

"Yes, it *is* a supper fer us, now ar'n't it? Three old mouldy crusts that I could eat myself if they didn't break my teeth out."

Jakey muttered this to himself as he looked round in the darkness for the candle; presently he found it and went out of the room to find a fire at which to light it. It was not always an easy job to light a candle in that tenement, especially during those months when fires were only required for cooking food. However, on the present occasion Jakey was not detained long. Entering the room again, he held in his hand the bottle into the broken mouth of which was thrust the tallow dip that served to give them light.

"Come here with the candle, Jakey, and let me count the money," said the old man, eagerly. "Yes, twenty-three cents, that is right," and drawing from his bosom a dirty little bag, fastened round his neck by a strip of cloth, the old man put the few coins into it, where they jingled against others already in the bag.

Now that the candle throws its light upon the pallet and its occupant, we can make our observations to better advantage. While it would not be easy to determine the correct age of one who had subjected himself to so many privations, yet it would be safe to say that the man before us had but few days left of his wretched life. From the violent cough which every now and then racks him, we should suppose him in the last stages of consumption, a supposition that a closer inspection would tend to confirm. But looking at him still more carefully, one would find the belief somehow

fixed in his mind that the disease and consequent emaciation was caused more by lack of food, and other necessaries of life, than by anything else.

After the little bag had been returned to the old man's bosom, he laid down again and said, "Now take the pan and get it full of water and we will have our supper, Jakey."

The boy obeyed the order and re-entered the room bearing the water. Lifting the stool from the corner, he set it against the bed in such a way that it might be there supported as it had been by the wall, and placed the pan of water upon it. It was evidently the intention that both should drink from this vessel, as they ate their evening meal.

"Now get the bread, Jakey," said the man, "and you can then blow out the candle, as we will not need to waste it while we eat."

Jakey went to the rough box, something like a shoe-box, that stood near the chimney, and from it drew forth all that it contained, *viz.*, the three pieces of mouldy bread, of which we have previously heard him complain.

"Pa, is this all the supper yer goin' ter have ter night?" asked the boy, in a voice made impatient by hunger. "I tell yer it ar'n't fit to eat; you have money —folks say as how yer has yer piles o' shiners now in bank—an' here yer be a starvin' in this hole. I have a great mind I won't stan' it no longer. Yer need medicine fer yer cough, an' won't spend a copper ter buy yerself none. An' here yer lay an' shiver, an' cough, with no fire. Now, I say, let the candle burn, an' let me take some o' that money yer got in that bag, an' git some wood an' a nice warm supper fer you and me; that's what I say."

"No, Jakey, folks don't know what they are talking about when they say I have money; I have only got a little put away to keep the wolf from the door this winter, only a little. We are poor, Jakey, I tell you we are very poor and were it not for my smart, honest little Jakey, his poor old pa would starve. Now bring the bread here and put out the candle, it won't take us long to eat our supper and we don't need the candle to eat by. You don't need a fire either, Jakey, just as

soon as you are through eating, you can come to bed—don't you know a fire isn't healthy to sleep by?"

The boy said nothing more, but did as he was directed, and in the darkness they ate their crusts and drank from the broken pan; the man reclining on his elbow and the boy sitting on the end of the pallet. It was a task not so pleasant, even to the keen appetite of the lad, that he should desire to linger over it and it was not long before the father said:

"If you are through, Jakey, you can put the bread that is left, back into the chest—I guess you can do it without a light—and it will do for supper to-morrow evening. I intend to let you buy us some warm bread for breakfast. Have you managed to get it shut up, Jakey, where the mice won't get at it? Then you had better come to bed."

Tired as he was, it was a long time before Jakey Thompson could go to sleep. Coiled up on the foot of the couch, the few rags which his father could spare him were not enough to prevent him from feeling the chill of that damp October night, which penetrated every part of the miserable tenement that sheltered him. Then the terrible cough that every now and then forced his father to struggle as if for life, prevented him from sleeping.

While he lay thus shivering and trying to sleep, the past arose before him, and though only a small boy whose mind had been wholly undeveloped, he yet possessed intellect of more than ordinary capability. He thought of the time, so long ago, when he had lived in such a pleasant home, out in the country. He remembered the stream that ran by the garden trellis, and the sweet breath that came from the clover lots beyond. Then there came before him a vision of a white face lying in the casket—the face of his mother—who, they told him, had gone home to heaven, and would one day send for him to go and live with her, if he were a good boy.

And after that the hard times that came, and their removal to the city, and how he was taught to sell books and papers, and never could tell what became of all his pa's money; how they went from one house to another, but always to a poorer and meaner one; until

his father was taken with this cough, and of late could not go out to work; and people said he had enough money but was what they called a "miser"—a man who would starve himself, and let his little boy starve, sooner than spend a little of his hoarded gold.

Could it be that his pa was such a man as that! Jakey would not believe it, for he loved his pa; and now, since he had been forced to stop work and remain in bed, Jakey worked harder than ever and brought all he made home. No, he did not believe his pa was a miser; only there was something about it all that he could never understand.

Once a month, a fine-looking gentleman would come and pay his father a visit, after which, he noticed the little bag around his father's neck would invariably be empty.

These memories and conjectures floated through the mind of Jakey Thompson, until at last it was touched by the finger of all-merciful Sleep, when the memories of the past and the sufferings of the present were alike covered by oblivion.

Early the following morning, Jakey was awakened by his father's cough; and arose from bed somewhat refreshed, but far from being rested. His bones ached, and the pangs of hunger seemed literally to devour him.

"Pa, give me the money for the bread."

"What bread?" said the father, absently.

"Why, the warm bread yer said we should have fer breakfast."

"Oh, yes, I forgot it. Well, here it is, and be sure you get a nice large loaf."

Jakey waited for no more instructions about the size of what he was about to buy, but darted off upon his errand. He soon returned and went through the same show of "getting breakfast" that we noticed in his preparation for the evening meal.

From the way the boy ate one would imagine he considered this warm bread the most dainty luxury. Evidently it was rather better fare than was usually enjoyed in that apartment.

As breakfast was concluded Jakey arose and put the bread that remained—a very small bit of the loaf—

away in the box. Then, after hanging the pan up where it belonged, he said:

"Pa, let me make yer a fire; this is awful damp weather fer yer to be without one. Then let me go to the store, on the corner, an' git yer some medicine fer yer cough. I tell yer, ye need it bad; yer cough was worse last night than ever before. An', pa, I need a jacket—I was that cold yesterday, I didn't know what ter do. Won't yer please git me one?"

During these remarks the old man appeared to be very uneasy; especially when Jakey made his concluding pathetic appeal.

"Well, we don't need—that is, I want no medicine," he said. "I believe my cough gets better; at any rate, I shall not have a fire just yet. I tell you a fire costs. As for the jacket, Jakey, you will have to have that, but not yet. Why, there will be warm weather yet, before winter. You shall have a warm jacket and shoes also, after a while. If you are cold you can take something off the bed and wrap around you, there is more here than I need."

The boy looked scornfully at the fragmentary old quilt that was offered him, saying, "Now wouldn't I cut a jimmy figger in that thing? No, sirree, I'd ruther go cold."

Taking his papers from the stand, he started toward the door, then turning, with a kind smile upon his sad face, he said,—"Never mind, pa, it will be all right I guess; maybe there'll be better days fer us yit. It is not rainin' to-day, an' the sun is goin' ter shine rale warm when it gets up a little higher. Hadn't I better fill the pan with fresh water an' put it on the stool where yer can git it?"

Receiving an affirmative reply, he filled the pan and placed it within easy reach of his father's hand; then stooping, he pressed a kiss upon the brow of the sick man, and again taking his papers, went about his daily task.

Several days passed, and each night there occurred much the same routine that we have already described; the supper and breakfast of bread and water, with an occasional bit of salt pork; the repeated and urgent requests of Jakey that there be fire, medicine, and better

food, which were met by as persistent refusals on the part of his father.

Days spent in hunger and nights in almost utter sleeplessness—such was the life of Jakey, for he was correct, notwithstanding the contradiction of his father, when he said that the sick man's cough was worse. The dampness had entered the room during the late autumn rain, and, there being no fire to counteract it, the consumptive had grown rapidly worse for the past week. In fact, so severe had grown the paroxysms and so frequent during the night, that Jakey found it almost impossible to sleep at all.

Matters reached a climax about ten days after we first took the reader into the miserable room. It was a clear day, in the early part of November, but so cold that Jakey had to dart about constantly, as he tried to sell his papers, in order that his limbs might not become numb. His bare feet suffered terribly, but he felt that he could have endured all that, if his body had only been warm. He looked with envy at the warm clothing worn by other boys, and wondered how much colder it must become before he could have the shoes and jacket promised by his father.

As it drew toward evening, the air became cooler, until Jakey felt he could stand it no longer. True, it was not late enough yet for his best trade, but he felt that he could no longer endure the cold on the street. He intended to make a strong appeal, that evening, at least for the jacket, and if he could not get it he had about concluded to wrap up in the old quilt and brave the jeers of his friends. With his plea for the jacket all arranged and at the end of his tongue, he passed up the stairs and along the hall to the door of his room.

As he entered, his eyes fell upon the pallet in the corner, and he thought no more about the jacket that evening. The form of his father was stretched out at full length, facing the door; the countenance that had been growing daily more pallid now wore a sort of ashy hue, terrible to see. The eyes were closed; but what alarmed Jakey and riveted his attention upon his father, was a little stream of blood that was oozing from his mouth. The rags that covered him were all

stained with the same fluid and drops of it had spattered on the smoke-grimed wall—while from a little pool on the couch, drop after drop of the same red life-tide fell at regular intervals upon the floor.

Jakey's first thought was that his father was dead, that some one had murdered him. Then he remembered the cough, and it flashed across his mind, in a second, that what he saw was only the natural ending of his father's affliction. With great nerve, for one of his age, he forbore to make any outcry; but walked quietly across the room and laid his hand upon his father's head. It was warm—then his father was not dead. There was a movement beneath his hand, the closed eyes slowly opened, and a voice, oh, so weak and faint, said:

"Jakey, have you come? I did not expect you yet, but I am *so* glad. Your father is almost gone, Jakey. I feared I should die before you came."

This was almost too much for the boy. "Oh, pa!" he said, the tears beginning to trickle down his dirty face, "Yer ain't goin' ter die, be yer? Oh, I hope not! I hope not! Let me run fer a doctor; yer oughter had one long ago."

He was about to start at once, on this mission, when an emaciated hand reached feebly out and grasped him by the arm.

"Hold on, Jakey," said his father; "doctors and medicine can do me no good now; it is too late for that. I want you to be calm, my boy, as I have something to say to you, before I leave this world; something that will help to right the wrong that I have done; and that will, I trust, cause my soul to enter into rest in that world where I am so soon to go. But, Jakey, there is a gentleman who must be here and hear all that I have to say; go as quickly as you can to No. 149 ——— Street and tell Mr. King that I want to see him."

"Is he a doctor, pa?" said Jakey. "Oh! I shan't let yer die. If I make a big fire, an' have a doctor, an' lots o' nice medicine, an' warm things ter wrap yer up in, yer won't die. Let me git 'em first, an' then I'll go fer Mr. King?"

"No, Jakey," was the reply; "do exactly as I bid

you. Do you remember the street and the number?"—Jakey repeated them—"All right, now go as quickly as you can and tell Mr. King to come at once, that I am dying."

The full horror of the situation now dawned upon the boy for the first time and fear seemed to lend him wings as he flew down the rickety stairs. It was no great distance to the place named by his father, and it required but little time for him to go there. He was surprised, however, to find it a large building occupied by offices, and as he stood upon the stairway he scarcely knew whether he ought to ascend, or retrace his steps and look around upon the ground floor. Just then, a lad of about his own age—presumably an office boy—entered the front door and ascended the stairs.

"Can yer tell me if Mr. King lives in this building?" asked Jakey.

The lad looked suspiciously at him for a moment.

"What do *you* want with Mr King?" he said; then added, as though he thought better of it. "You will find his office on the second floor—to the left."

Jakey ascended to the second floor and stood confused; there were doors on each side of the passage, each with gilt letters on it. Where was the office of this Mr. King, and *who* was he, that his father should want him at such a time?

Although by this time the brain of Jakey was almost as numb as his bare feet, these and kindred questions would run through it; but he had little time for reflection—had he not been told to hurry, that his father was dying? In his perplexity the boy glanced up the passage and at the extreme end of it, on the left side, in the growing dusk he was able to discern, on a sign, the words—

"WM. L. KING, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW."

On entering the room, a gentleman sitting by a table opposite the door, raised his head from the manuscript over which he was bending. Jakey recognized him instantly; it was the fine looking gentleman who paid monthly visits to his father and always left the little

money bag empty. Very briefly he told his errand and the lawyer did not seem surprised at hearing it. In fact, it seemed to Jakey that his manner was that of one who had been expecting something of the sort.

"Well, my little man," he said kindly, "I expect you are sorry to lose your father, but I assure you times will be no worse for you than what they have been." Then glancing at the hunger-pinched face, and bare feet of the boy before him, he added, in a lower tone, "I hardly see how they could be."

Rising from his seat, the lawyer unlocked a drawer, and after fumbling among some papers for a little while, he drew forth some sort of a document rolled together and tied with blue tape. The boy heard him say to himself as he did so, "Best take it along, possibly he might wish to make some changes."

Putting the roll in his pocket, the man took his hat and put on a light overcoat, looking at the almost bare form of the boy sympathetically as he did so. "Well, I believe I am ready," said the lawyer. "If your father is as bad off as you say, there is need of haste."

"Ye know the way to the place where we live, don't ye, sir? I have seen ye there often," said Jakey. Receiving a reply in the affirmative, he said, "Then I'd best run on ahead, an' tell pa yer comin'."

Without waiting for permission, he darted out at the door of the building and was gone. Mr. King made his way along as rapidly as possible through the city, over which the twilight was rapidly changing to darkness. When he reached the tenement where Jakey and his father lived, he found evidences that the boy had made good speed in returning thither; as the candle was lighted, wood had been brought from somewhere and Jakey was in the act of kindling a fire as he entered.

The old man had just had a slight spell of coughing and was resting easier now, although it was evident that life was fast ebbing away. The lawyer perceived this very soon and calling Jakey from the fire he requested him to be seated on the foot of the couch. Placing the candle on the floor, he brought the stool near the head of the bed and leaning it against the wall seated himself gingerly upon it.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "I have come as you requested. Are you able to express your wishes?"

Very feeble was the response the sick man made; he was evidently struggling to regain strength sufficient to talk.

"Rest a moment," said the lawyer, "I will help you;" saying which he drew a small phial of some colorless liquid from his pocket and poured a small quantity between the parted lips of the reclining man.

The effect was noticeable at once; the breathing became easier and after a few seconds the man began to state the business that was on his mind.

"Jakey," said he, "I want you to hear and remember all that I say, for the words I speak to-night will be my last on earth."

A sob was the only reply.

"Do not cry, my boy," continued the father; "your lot has been a hard one, but, unless I am greatly mistaken in the character of the man into whose hands you are about to pass, your hardest days are over. Now listen:—

"In the olden days, when I was only about your age, I was indentured to a sea-captain and learned to follow the sea. This was my business for years, and, as I loved the sea and was fairly frugal, I began to be a prosperous man. At length, I was intrusted with as good a ship as ever sailed the Spanish Main. Through all these years, I had lived an honest life; and my intentions were honest enough still; but the wealth I saw roll in upon the owner of that craft aroused my cupidity and I began, in one way and another, to practice dishonesty upon him. This I was enabled to do by means of many unusual advantages, which the gentleman—who never doubted my honesty for a moment—gave me. It is a sad thing, in such an hour as this, to be forced to confess to being a thief before one's only child; but, thank heaven, I am able to say that I only wronged one man; and to him, or his, I am able, in great measure, to make restitution. I kept a correct account of the amount belonging to the owner of the ship which I annually appropiated to my own uses, and at the end of five years of such business, I found I owed him twenty thousand dollars.

"I never meant to be a thief, but expected to return all this in the same insidious manner in which I had filched it. I was using the money in a very promising speculative enterprise, and, on a fair calculation I estimated myself to be worth about forty-eight thousand dollars. The owner of the ship I sailed in had also invested largely in the same scheme, and as everything he touched seemed to turn to gold, I thought myself safe enough. One day the crash came and I found myself a ruined man. The whole scheme collapsed, like the fabric of a dream; and beside my own losses, I had the mortification of seeing my employer, whom I loved even while I imposed upon him, reduced to the most straitened circumstances. I estimated my total wealth and found, after the sale of our little cottage, that I had in cash, very nearly twelve thousand dollars.

"How I thanked an inscrutable Providence that your dear mother had been taken from the trouble to come; —she died three years after you were born, Jakey,— and I then vowed that I would get the other eight thousand and pay the man honestly every cent I had taken from him. So we came here to the city, and you know how I toiled and saved, Jakey. People spoke of your father as an old miser, but I was never that, my boy. In other days I was not even stingy; I was an erring man trying to atone for his sin. I had heard that deep adversity had come to the family of the man whom I had wronged, and that some of its members were dead. More than once I thought of taking what money I had and going to them, asking their forgiveness and making such restitution as I was able, but shame deterred me—I would pay it all, or none.

"So the years passed: by pinching economy I was able to add a little to the sum already saved, the interest of which continually augmented it. Then this sickness came upon me and, my boy, you will never know how pained I have been by your suffering for food, clothes and—everything. I did not mind for myself, but at times, when you plead with me for relief, I believe I should have yielded, had I not been sustained by one thought—when I was no more, I knew you

would love the man who would not spend another's money even to feed his child.

"You have my story, Jakey: Mr. King has my will. I have made a brief confession, and left the money to its rightful owner."

"Did you desire to make any alteration in the document?" said the legal gentleman. "I thought perhaps you might, so I brought it with me."

"No," was the reply; "it is just as I wish it. Would that I had the other two thousand to make the sum complete."

The long talk had been too great a strain upon the suffering man; a violent coughing ensued; the hemorrhage that had apparently been stayed, suddenly increased alarmingly.

"Run for the nearest doctor, my boy," said Mr. King; but even as he spoke, a strange, inexpressible look was stamped upon the peaked face of the dying man. By a gesture he summoned Jakey to the bedside.

As the boy approached, his hand was clasped in that of his father, and he instinctively realized that he was gazing on the last struggle through which the poor, starved being he had known as "pa" would ever pass.

A moment later it was over, and Jakey Thompson was in *name* what he had long since been in *fact*—an orphan.

CHAPTER XV.

"THE LAW, OR MY SOUL?"

FOUR months have passed since we last looked upon the Luray Valley. We left it in the full flush and glory of mid-summer; we now return to it amid the glories of another summer as beautiful in its way, if more chaste and less pretentious than the Queen of Seasons herself.

Thackeray is not the only novelist who has delighted to weave into his story the beauties of Indian summer in Virginia. Nor is his "Henry Esmond" the only lover who has found the subdued glory and sympathetic melancholy of the season, peculiarly grateful to his passion-torn and troubled soul.

Nowhere, perhaps, is our Indian summer so perfect as in Virginia. The mountains seem suspended by unseen wires, on which they appear to vibrate, as though the finger of the Life Spirit had penetrated their hazy envelopes, and given their dead hearts the touch of a strange vitality. The forest leaves, having received the chaste kiss of death from the early frosts, have exchanged their emerald monotony for a prismatic variety of bewilderingly beautiful hues. Sandwiched between the many-colored foliage of the forests, and the groves of pine, that retain unchanged their perennial hue, are fields of golden maize, that, having been long since divested of "top" and "blade," awaits the tardy processes of slave labor which, taking advantage of this pleasant season, will soon arrange it conveniently for the annual "husking."

This, of all seasons, seems to be the one when the earth is enveloped in the very peace of heaven. Much more was this the case some sixty years ago, when the primitive and peaceful habits of our fathers had not, as yet, yielded to the rush and hurry characteristic of these later years. In the peaceful before-the-war days,

of which we write, the Indian summer was the favorite season for the hunter; and the isles of the forest rang with the echoes of the sportsman's gun. The scions of Virginia's first families delighted, during this season, to follow the hounds, of which a large pack was kept on every well-regulated plantation.

Game in abundance could be found in all the forests of the valley; so that at the period of which we write, it was a veritable sportsman's Eden.

Four months have wrought sad changes in the Davis family. One would suppose, from the demeanor of its members, that one of their number had recently died, so utterly is the whole place pervaded by the spirit of melancholy. Eldridge Davis has become the mere shadow of his former self. Anxiety, hope deferred, and the shadow of an impending calamity have combined to play havoc with his sensitive organism. Ever since the day, four months ago, when he was interviewed with regard to certain mortgages, his eyes have had a peculiar look in them—the look of one hunted—his whole manner denotes that he has become a prey to a feverish restlessness which is consuming his very vitals.

The scene which occurred between father and daughter, when the former learned the cause of his neighbor's hasty retreat from his dwelling, we purposely drew the veil over. When Mr. Davis learned that Alice had given Walter Desmond a positive and final answer in the negative, hope seemed to die in his breast; especially so, when on attempting to remonstrate with her, he found that she was unalterably fixed in her resolve never to receive the man again. By common consent the subject was dropped, nor had it been mentioned by either of them since.

Not long after Desmond's rejection, the Davis family were able to understand the meaning of the words of inuendo which were spoken to Alice on that occasion. The persons who held paper against Mr. Davis found their honor scarcely proof against a rich man's gold, so one by one these papers had passed into the possession of Desmond.

Perhaps a month had elapsed before Mr. Davis became aware of this, although Alice suspected that

something of the sort would be attempted, since John Elton had given her the hint to that effect, during their ramble by the brook. But as she knew of no way by which it might be prevented, she said nothing of it to her father.

One day, however, the storm broke. It came in the form of a note from Desmond, demanding the payment of some two thousand three hundred and sixty-seven dollars on a mortgage which had long since been due.

About two weeks later, and while Mr. Davis was meditating what course was open to him, he received another note informing him of the purchase of another mortgage and demanding payment of the same. He resolved to call on Desmond and see what it all meant, as the latter had not entered his house since the evening of his rejection; but on attempting to see the master of Desmond Hall, Mr. Davis was met at the door by a servant, who told him that "Massa Desmon," was not at home, although, as Mr. Davis drove on to the lawn, he had seen him walk off the veranda. It was a very discouraged man who returned, that afternoon, to the Davis homestead.

Alice had done her best to cheer her father up, but truth to say, she was in no very cheerful frame of mind herself. The hand of absolute poverty is a hand of iron, and when it rests heavily upon us, or more particularly, when it rests upon our loved ones, even the joys of love are crushed by it and become the bitterest dregs in our cup of sorrow.

Alice knew now, that it was the fixed purpose of the man her father had honored by the name of "friend" —a man whose wealth only made him more able to execute his base purposes—that it was the determination of this man, to force her to become his wife, or else to witness the roof sold from over her father's head. Yet she bravely tried to put all this from her and so attend to her household duties, that no comfort might be denied her father, which their limited means could procure.

All the letters that Mr. Davis had written Desmond had been returned with a curt statement to pay up, or the mortgages would be promptly foreclosed; and in as broad a sneer as pen could portray, one note closed

with the insinuation that if the terms were not agreeable, Miss Alice might possibly suggest such as would prove mutually so.

It was now all settled; all the legal forms had been complied with and Walter Desmond was practically master of the Davis homestead; its goods, chattels and servants; but thanks to the institutions of our land, he was farther than ever from being master of the hand of Alice Davis. There had been a levy on all the "movables," the public sale was shortly to take place, and it was expected that the sale of the plantation would almost immediately follow.

Rumors to this effect had spread through the neighborhood and, in due course had reached the ears of the negroes on the Davis plantation. There were not a few of these who were glad to hear it. Their friends had been already sold, and affairs had been so badly managed that they had been made to suffer, in more than one particular, from the general neglect. But the loyal old household servants were far from sharing this feeling. Many of them had been born on the plantation, and as they expressed it, "on it dey 'spected ter die." Standing in little groups, around the stable, or near the doors of their quarters, in the moonlight, they would discuss all this, in the same solemn tones they would have used had "Mars' Davis been a-layin' up dar' in de ole' house a cole' corpse."

For several weeks after the experiment we witnessed in the theosophist's study, there had been repeated attempts made to receive, by some means, a satisfactory clue to the ancient treasure which they both now believed to be concealed somewhere in the valley. Alice was repeatedly mesmerized and while in that state deftly questioned; but strange to say, on each occasion her answers were more vague and uncertain than before. "Ouija" behaved in a manner perfectly ridiculous, racing round over the board, as though partaking of the excitement of those who held their hands upon it, or contenting itself with spelling out half-sentences, or combinations of meaningless words. In fact, both father and daughter were fast becoming unfit for this sort of experiment; the former, because of physical inability that tended to prevent the neces-

sary mental concentration; the latter, by reason of the growing hopelessness of the situation. Recently, however, there had been no attempt of the sort; and with the calmness of despair Alice and her father awaited the fate before them.

John Elton, during these months, had not been a frequent visitor at the Davis homestead. Perfectly aware of the storm about to burst over that devoted house, he had used every effort to prevent it; but an unsuccessful man is an object of fear to money-lenders, especially when he is unable to give approved security. So, while Elton found many to sympathize with the family, and still more to denounce Desmond as a scoundrel, he found none to help. Then, he was also aware that his visits only added secret pain to the lacerated feelings of Mr. Davis; hence the instincts of a gentleman prompted him to absent himself, as much as possible, from the latter's home.

This is the state of affairs in the home of our heroine, as we look in upon it, one Tuesday afternoon, in the latter part of November. Father and daughter are in the dining-room, sitting before the grate which, owing to the warm atmosphere of Indian summer, is fireless; Alice is speaking of the fox-hunt which is to take place early on the morrow. She has purposely broached the subject as soon as dinner is over, hoping thereby to infuse a little life into the broken spirit of her father.

"Well, I do not see why you should not go," she said. "I know of nothing that would be a better tonic for you and I am sure it is a sport of which you were once fond enough."

"Yes," was the reply, "but times change, Alice; the cry of the pursuing hounds would awake no answering music in the forest for me now, as it once did, and every laugh and joke would, by reminding me of other days, be as a knife thrust."

"Oh, do not speak so," said Alice; "these gloomy views will kill you, father. Don't you know there is a Providence, which watches over the affairs of men; and do you think we shall lack any good thing, while subject to the care of such a power? I know not *how* it shall be, but this I *do* know, our enemies shall not tri-

umph over us. Sometimes I have been blind enough to doubt, but just when the hour grows darkest, the gloom is shot through as by spears of silver, and I am, in spite of myself, made to believe—*to know*—that this thing we dread shall not happen to us."

"For myself," said the father, "I must say, I have no such faith. I consider the world well enough, for those who use it well; but I have no such views of its government as those you have just expressed. I believe that all Intelligences, whether in human bodies or out of them, are subject to fixed laws which will not, and cannot, be interfered with by a higher Power. There is no higher Power than Law. If there were, to suppose He would interfere about a question of property, would be to hold as absurd an opinion as those who expected the Great Teacher of the New Testament to become a divider of inheritances among them.

"No, Alice, we must live our days and suffer our lot upon the earth, knowing that our present sufferings are only the result of sins and mistakes committed by us when we *went this way before.* If our associations be pure and our ideals lofty, when the centuries have passed and we again assume a robe of flesh, in order to work out another problem in the mystery of our destinies, we shall then enjoy a life amid surroundings of purity and peace; and thus each incarnation being but a step to the one above it, we climb the interminable road which leads upward to the Unknown.

"Oh, father," said Alice, "you know how much I am opposed to such views; they find no warrant in the Word of God and are among the things which have poisoned your life."

Ah, Alice, you are not the first whose zeal for truth has caused them to inadvertantly injure the cause they sought to defend. The words, "poisoned your life," seemed to cut Mr. Davis to the quick. His nerves were in no condition to endure such thrusts; nor was Alice, by any means, in the habit of giving them. But, prompted by zeal for her mother's faith, she had made use of words, the full strength of which she had not weighed; and a moment after, she would gladly have recalled them, but it was now too late. Her father

turned upon her, with a light in his eyes and a flush upon his cheek, not good to see.

"No, Alice," he said, "it is not my faith or lack of faith which has poisoned my life; it is the imperious will of a resolute girl, who, in order to gratify a fancy, or humor a whim, will permit her father to be turned from his own door. It is not a question of *faith*, but of *law;* and if you will study the law, for which you have such reverence, you will there find no higher command for a daughter than the one which says, 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' It is surely a strange way you have, Alice, of observing this law, when in order to gratify a girlish fancy, you will deliberately turn aside from an honorable proposition that would save your father from want. I never intended to mention the matter to you again; no, I had resolved to leave my home without a word of reproof to you, but since you speak of my having poisoned my life by exercising the liberty of my opinions, I shall have to call your attention to the true source from whence this poison really comes. If you would act the part of a true daughter and consent to a union with Mr. Desmond, even now, all might——"

"Father!" cried Alice, "your words give me more pain than would the loss of all I possess in this world; you shall hear me out now," she exclaimed, as she observed her father about to speak. "I beg pardon for what I said; indeed I would not wound you by a single word, nor did I intend the full meaning which the words conveyed. But when you refer to a union with Walter Desmond as desirable, aye, even tolerable, and when you speak of his proposal as an 'honorable proposition,' from which I have turned aside to gratify a girlish fancy, I can but wonder where are those principles of honor which once burned with so bright a flame in my father's breast!

"Here is a man," she continued, with increasing warmth, "whom you have honored as a friend, who has enjoyed the hospitality of a gentleman's home and who has repaid all this by insult, insolence, and the basest injury. There was a time, father, when you would not have suffered his name to be mentioned in your presence; you would not have permitted the foot of

such a person to cross the threshold of your home. *Now* you speak of him as though he were a gentleman, as though he were all that is good and true. I tell you now, that I would rather be wife to the coarsest clown in all this valley, than be the honored mistress of Desmond Hall; and, father, I trust you understand me perfectly, I will go with you out from under this roof where I was born; and with you I will face poverty and all else that this pitiless world may have in store for us, but I will not have you thrust before me the hated image of this man as one who could have given us an easy and 'honorable' escape from our difficulties. His base acts, in the past few months, should be sufficient to arouse all the righteous indignation of your soul, even as they have aroused mine. To suppose he can force me to marry him by this persecution —I would sooner *starve!*

"You were right when you said it is not a question of faith, nor is it, it is a question of *soul!* For if I were to 'honor my father'—if by that you mean, were to marry Walter Desmond—I should forever dishonor my soul! Which shall it be, father?" she cried, arising in her agitation and going over to his side, "which would you have me honor, the law or my soul?"

For the second time that afternoon, Alice had gone too far. As she arose from her seat and approached her father, she observed that he bowed his face upon his hands; but so excited was she that the significance of the action was lost upon her, until her last question was answered by a sob. She was not prepared for this; to see her father angry, or to hear him make petulant remarks was nothing strange to her, but to hear him cry ——. There is always a sad meaning in a case of this sort. Whenever a self-possessed, reserved gentleman, unaccustomed to such weakness, begins to break down and cry, there is, perhaps, no surer sign that his powers, both of mind and body, are beginning to decline.

Alice looked upon the feeble wreck of what had once been a specimen of most noble manhood, and, like a flash, the whole truth came home to her. The sentiments which her father had just expressed were not his real opinions, but only the subterfuges by which a weak and almost heartbroken old man sought

to avail himself, of what seemed to him, a haven of refuge opened to himself and child. And even as she looked upon him, his frame was shaken by convulsive sobs and she saw tears of agony trickle rapidly through the thin fingers with which he strove to hide his face.

"Oh, father, what have I said?—don't—don't; you will kill me if you do so," she said. "Oh, I am so sorry if I wounded your feelings; pray, forgive me, and father, let us not talk of this matter again."

Without replying, he arose, and keeping his face turned from her, left the room.

Alice stood for a momont irresolute, debating with herself whether she should follow him or not. Presently deciding not to do so, she sank into the chair which he had vacated, thoroughly crushed by the conflict of feelings through which she had passed. Look which way she might there appeared to be no escape. Her lover was loyal enough to die for her if need be, but unfortunately, loyalty cannot always be turned into ready cash and that was the only article that could afford the desired relief. Not only the plantation and the slaves upon it, but her home and its contents also must be sold. She shuddered as she thought of her father's feelings, when the feet of strangers should walk through the room which he had so long kept closed against the vulgar gaze; and she could anticipate the chuckle with which they would pull aside the curious things, and ridicule the man who put them there. The calamity yawning at her feet was so deep and black that she dared not look into it; for at the bottom she knew there lay the dead face of her father; while he had never intimated as much, yet she knew that he would never survive such disgrace.

Thus she sat for perhaps half an hour, half blinded and altogether dazed by the trouble about to befall her, and then a strange thing happened. From the very lowest depths of her darkened soul there welled up a tiny fount of light; so small at first as to be scarcely perceptible; it strengthened and increased until it sprang high up through the gloom, which it scattered and dissipated as it fell back in showers of gold. What was this strange hope, the light of which sprang like a fountain in the dark soul of Alice? Surely it was

not brought about by any process of reason, for think as she might, before her mind there was neither light nor hope—rather was it one of those presentiments which have come to us all at critical times in our lives, and with their subtile influence have chilled or cheered us without our knowing why.

What are these but the shadows of events to come? The light is very bright now and the reflection of it has spread in a smile of hope all over the girl's countenance.

"What is it?" she kept repeating. "Why do I feel like this? Certainly I have little cause for joy just now."

But try as she would, she could no more restrain the happy emotions which filled her heart than she could have restrained the sun from shining after the obscuring cloud had passed. She knew not from what quarter it might come, but this she knew—knew it by the promptings of a mighty faith, yea, by an infallible intuition—that she and her father would be rescued from the fate which threatened them.

As she tried to reason with this new emotion she chanced to look through the window out upon the lawn, and she saw her father pass out of the piazza and go down toward the gate. Springing to her feet she ran out of the room seizing her hat as she did so, and followed him. Just at the gate she overtook him, and as she came up to his side she saw that he had regained his composure and had bathed his face, obliterating every trace of tears. Under the circumstances Alice thought it best to make no allusion to the scene which had just occurred. She observed that he was experiencing one of those periods of pleasant reaction, which will come, even under the most dismal circumstances, and which are nothing else than nature's protests against protracted sorrow. So, when Alice looked up into the serene face of her father, from which the clouds of trouble had temporarily passed, she resolved, if possible, to communicate to him something of the hope which irradiated her own soul.

"Father," she began, "it has been a long time since we have made an effort to find those buried records. Suppose we try this evening."

"My dear, what is the use of trying?" was the reply. "I feel that I could not endure any more failures, on that line; and of late, do you know, I have a sensation as though I were being mocked by fiends."

"Oh, father, shake off all such feelings," said she; "you would never imagine such things if you were in perfect health. Let me tell you something—I am *sure* we are on the very brink of an important and joyful event. I *feel* it. I am not sure what it is to be; or how it will come; but, I tell you, *come it will!* I cannot understand the hope which has come to me, but this I know—of all our sorrow, not one trace remains to shadow my soul this afternoon."

"Well, you are certainly in a different mood from what you were after dinner," said her father.

"Pray do not refer to that affair," was the reply. "Just after you left the room, all in a moment, my mind somehow became stamped with the glorious certainty that all our clouds would pass away. Now, I make this request of you, try to compose your mind and rest your body, so that you may not be nervous or excited when we work to-night. I want you to be in the best possible mental and physical condition for what is before us." And she looked half-doubtfully at her father, who appeared so pale and worn of late; almost ill it seemed to Alice, as she regarded him attentively.

Would he be able to make a fair experiment? She feared for it, yet she would encourage him, and possibly he might rally for the effort. So after further talk, she was rewarded by seeing a flush spring to his pale cheek and his eye burn with rekindled hope, and she knew, if he could only be able to command and concentrate his will and exercise the necessary patience, she might expect that a very fair effort would be made.

CHAPTER XVI.

MASTER AND SLAVE.

On our first visit to Desmond Hall we witnessed the triumph of right, as represented and enforced by the courageous spirit of John Elton; quite different is the scene which shall greet us in that home this evening—the evening of the day on which Alice held the discussion with her father, described in our last chapter.

The lord and master of the Hall is in a small room on the first floor leading off the passage on the right. This room is called by the slaves "Massa Desmon's office." Its furniture consists of a few chairs, a comfortable rocker, centre table, writing-desk, and a sideboard on which are pipes, tobacco, decanters and glasses.

Above the fireplace, which is in one corner of the room, there is a collection of swords, dirks, and pistols arranged in the form of an ornament; while, perhaps, the most suggestive thing in the room—the thing most indicative of the character of its occupant—is a brass hook on the left side of the grate; rather there are two of them, one just back of the other. The first supports the tongs and shovel; the second, an assortment of whips and rawhides. The first glance may impress the observer with the fact that they are riding-whips, which some of them are; but a moment's inspection will show that most of them are made for a far different purpose. Coarse, tough, rawhide lashes, with a loop for the hand, having a serious appearance as though destined for rough work; very different are they from the dainty riding-whips which rest beside them on the hook, for they bear traces of hard service. And they *have* seen hard service; hard indeed, for the poor slaves who have cringed beneath the cruelty of a brutal master.

If our readers imagined Walter Desmond conquered when John Elton left him, on the night of our last

visit to this place, it was because they were not familiar with the wicked nature of the man. As soon as his fit of rage subsided sufficiently to allow him the power of clear thought, he at once began to lay plans aimed at the accomplishment of a two-fold purpose. In the first place, he was determined that the vow his rival had hurled at him should never be fulfilled. No man should marry Alice Davis but himself, and he would marry her speedily. After his rejection he was the more determined on this point. She should creep to his feet in the very dust, so to speak, or he would drive herself and father forth into the world, without a shelter; and that proud beggar, John Elton, should learn what it was to enrage a gentleman of wealth and influence like himself. We have seen with what haste and vigor he set about the execution of the first part of his contemptible design.

But with reference to the man he hated he had a still darker plan. He had determined that Elton *should die!* His rage at first, inspired him with a false courage, and he determined to force Alice to marry him and then punish and humble her by provoking Elton to a duel and killing him. Sober second thought, however, brought suggestions of prudence. He felt himself inferior to the other in the use of weapons, as well as in physical strength and skill; and it would surely be foolish, he thought, to throw his life away just when he had begun to enjoy the sweets of triumph. For a time, even Walter Desmond shrank from the temptation which next presented itself. For the first time in his life, thoughts of murder were taking possession of his mind. He imagined that he struggled against these dark suggestions; but, somehow, the more he struggled, the stronger their hold upon him. He could not understand this, because his heart was darkened by evil passion. But had he understood the nature of these thoughts, the matter might have been clearer. It was not the thought of killing, that he tried to put away from him, but the horror of the *method*, and the attendant circumstances.

As the weeks passed on, however, and he saw no indication of yielding on the part of Alice, the temptation to kill his rival grew stronger. Mr. Davis and his

daughter must know, he reasoned, that all their worldly goods would be taken from them; and he also imagined that so far as the father was concerned he would be glad enough to accept his terms. Yet the terms were not accepted.

Meantime the people in the valley were beginning to treat him with coldness, not to say disdain; his course in buying up Mr. Davis' paper was considered dishonorable at first, but when it was publicly known that he did it for the purpose of gaining possession of the home of Mr. Davis, it was considered little short of a piece of scoundrelism. Had the gallant gentry of Virginia known the real motive that prompted Walter Desmond, the consequences for him might have been serious. That, however, was known only to four persons—Mr. Davis and his daughter, John Elton and Walter Desmond himself.

The fact that no apparent change had been wrought in the resolute soul of Alice, maddened him beyond expression. Was it possible that this girl would suffer her father and herself to be driven from their home, and possibly from the Luray Valley, rather than become his wife and the mistress of Desmond Hall?

Well, would she leave the valley, after all?

Was it not just possible that there might be a quiet marriage and an humble home, large enough, at least to shelter Mr. and Mrs. Elton, and the invalid father of the latter?

To Desmond, the very idea was maddening.

Well, how might it be prevented? Clearly there could be no such home, and no Mrs. Elton, unless there was a John Elton to provide the one and be husband to the other.

There was but one way out of it. *Elton must die!* But tax his imagination as he would, he could see no chance for him in a duel with his rival—clearly some other way must be devised.

About six weeks after the letter of apology had been written to Alice, Desmond left home. No one on the plantation knew where he had gone, not even his sister. After being absent eight days, he returned, one evening, bringing with him three persons—a negro,

his wife, who was a very light mulatto, and their babe. No one knew where, or of whom, he had purchased these; nor were they likely to know, for the first question on the subject addressed to Desmond by his sister, was answered by a very polite intimation, that if every one would attend to his own affairs, the condition of the world would be improved; and this intimation—taken in connection with the voice and manner of Desmond as he uttered it—tended to discourage further questions.

As for the slaves themselves, they would talk but little with the other servants; and absolutely refused to answer any question as to their former owner or place of residence.

The overseer was very much surprised, when, on the second morning after the arrival of the new servants, the wife refused to go into the field with the other slaves. This was a new feature in the history of that plantation; and as it was a very busy season, the fodder being ripe and ready to save, sundry preparations were at once begun with the object of teaching the woman that obedience was the road to happiness, at least in that place. During the altercation, and before the first blow of the rawhide had fallen on the woman, Mr. Desmond appeared and ordered her to be instantly released, and electrified the other servants by giving orders to the overseer, that this woman and her husband were not to be set about any of the ordinary plantation labors, as he had purchased them for household work exclusively. Not long after this, Mr. Desmond and the "new man" began to spend much time together in the office

On this particular evening, the master of the Hall seemed to be thinking deeply and was evidently slightly nervous. With hands clasped behind him, he paced back and forth across the floor. Pausing at length by the table, he rang a small bell that stood upon it; the summons was answered by a female servant, who was told to send "Parker" to the office. Almost immediately the person named appeared at the door, and Mr. Desmond bade his "new man" enter and be seated. After the door had been locked by the master, he turned to the man and said:

"I think I have a plan now, Parker, which will work safely for us both. I see no reason why you should hesitate for a moment, as I have taken every precaution for your safety."

"What is your plan dis' time, Massa?" asked the slave.

"Simply this: if you could put the man out of the way so that people would suppose it was done through anger, it would be better for us both. I think you were right, perhaps, when you refused to shoot him *accidentally*, while out hunting, for there are many circumstances which might look suspicious for us about that; for instance, your recent appearance here, and—but never mind about the reasons, let us understand the plan I have mapped out, and prepare ourselves for its execution. I suppose you have heard that there is to be a grand chase, to-morrow? The fox that was bagged last Saturday is to be turned loose, two miles up the Hawksbill, in the glen. Quite a number will join in the chase, and I understand the man we are after will be there also. Do you understand the management of hounds?" he asked suddenly. Receiving an affirmative reply, he said: "I might have known you did though, remembering where you were brought up. Well, I want you to accompany me to-morrow, and I think that some time during the day, we can find a chance to provoke a quarrel with John Elton, or at least *you* can, for I must not be put in the wrong light. Then if you can draw some slight chastisement, or abuse, from him, no one will ever imagine, especially if I join him in condemnation of you, that the results following are anything else than a deed of vengeance done by an angry slave."

"Yes, Massa," said the man called Parker, "all this would be well 'nuff on your side, but how 'bout me?"

"Oh, haven't I fixed that all right?" said Desmond. "You shall have your thousand dollars, and your freedom; also the freedom of your wife and child. Then, I have made all necessary arrangements for your escape. If a slave can sometimes elude the vigilance of his master and make good his escape unaided, do you not suppose it could be done the more easily, if his master were to provide him with all things necessary

for his comfort, and aid him in every possible way? I tell you, any night you do this thing, by the morning following, you shall be far away from this valley and you shall have money enough to supply your needs until you reach a place of safety, when your thousand dollars shall be given you."

"An' how 'bout Sallie, an' the child?" asked Parker.

"Are you fool enough to want to take them with you on this race for life?" said Desmond, angrily. "I will take good care of them until you are all safe, then you shall have them both sent to you in the safest way possible. So if you have no other questions to ask on that line, we will arrange the details of our work. Would you like some brandy?"

Going over to the sideboard, Desmond poured out a large quantity of that article and swallowed it at a single draught; then pouring out about half the quantity he handed it to Parker. Having drank its contents, the slave replaced the glass upon the sideboard.

"Now to business," said the master, as he threw himself into the rocker and made a motion for Parker to take one of the other chairs and draw it near his. In low tones, and with every appearance of the deepest interest, they talked of the fox-hunt on the morrow, and how it might be arranged into a trap for the man whose life they sought.

As they thus converse, we have opportunity to notice that the negro, Parker, is rather a fine specimen of his race. A large, well-proportioned figure, and a face that indicates honesty, rather than brutality. If one accustomed to read character should look on that face, he would find the impression grow upon him that it was the face of a man who could be trusted. Yet, under the curse of slavery, it was often just such a character that caused the ruin or death of its possessor.

The predominant passion in this man's heart was love for the poor, half-white slave girl he had made his wife, and the dusky little infant she had given him; and the fear of separation from, or injury to these, could, if impressed upon him by a skilful fiend, who might chance to be his master, transform him into a creature as madly savage as any demon in the pit.

While we have been noticing all this, the conversa-

tion between the two men has been growing more earnest; in fact, there seems to be a sort of intensity in their manner, a sort of suppressed excitement, as though a part of their lives were oozing out in every word. Presently the face of the slave grew almost pallid as he strove, apparently, to gain the mastery over some strong emotion.

"I can never do it, Massa! Oh, I can never do it! I should see his ghost every night so long as I lived," said Parker.

"But I tell you that you shall," said Desmond. "Confound you, it seems impossible to get the value of money through your thick skull. Here I have offered you freedom, and the freedom of your wench and brat, and a thousand dollars on top of it, just to do a little trick which you would be glad enough to do of your own accord if you were angry, and you whimper out you cannot do it. Why, you never had the fourth part of a thousand dollars in your life, and never will have unless you earn it in this way. Perhaps you do not know what pleasure a thousand——"

"Oh, Massa, I would never do it for the money; I don't care at all 'bout the money, 'fore the Lawd, I don't."

"But you *will* do it, will you not?" asked Desmond.

"Oh, I can't!" was the reply; "'deed I can't!"

The face of the master flushed with anger, and as he sprang to his feet he ground out the words, "You infernal nigger, I'll see whether you will do as I say, or not."

Catching up one of the heaviest rawhides from the hook, he quickly snatched a pistol from the cluster of arms upon the wall, and turned upon the slave. The latter said nothing, but slightly bowed his head in expectation of, and submission to, what was about to come.

Five heavy lashes fell across the shoulders of the black man; but no cry broke from his lips, not even a groan, nor was there any sign of yielding, or change in the determined expression of his countenance.

Desmond, observing this, gave five more blows of the whip still harder than the others.

Ten lashes for the man whose only offense was that he had refused to do murder in cold blood.

"Curse you!" said Desmond. "I am half a mind to send a bullet through your skull! Whoever knew one of your infernal race to have either sense or gratitude? Here I found you cringing beneath the hammer, about to be posted off to die in the cotton fields of Georgia. Your wife, on her knees, prayed me to buy the three of you, so you would not be parted; and made the most wonderful promises to serve me faithfully forever; and—liar that you are—you said you would die for me, if I would only keep you from being parted from the woman. Well, this is my thanks."

"So I would, Massa, if it so please you to send a bullet through my head, I would be glad to die. But I never did hurt any man without cause—and *I never will!*"

Oh, the majesty of that face, as every feature eloquently assisted in speaking the last words recorded!

As he spoke, Parker arose from the chair on which he had remained seated through all the punishment, and folding his arms over his breast looked calmly at the man before him—the man whom the law had made his master.

"I suppose, instead of that," said his owner, "you will tell it everywhere that I whipped you because you would not kill John Elton. Suppose you try that, who do you think would believe so pitiful a story.? I would rein you up immediately and sell you to Georgia, and that would be the end of it. And see here, Parker," he continued, "you must understand that you cannot stay here now that you have refused to do this thing. Have you forgotten that when I took you aside and talked with you, on the day of the auction, that I then expressly told you that if I purchased you and your family and kept you all together, that I should require a great service at your hands? I thought you understood the condition fully, when I paid for you. Why don't you answer? You black fool, I'll split your very heart with this rawhide if you don't!"

"Massa," said the slave, "I thought I understood, and was willing to die for you if you wanted me to, but I did not think you would want me to kill anybody. I thought, when you first told me, that I would do it; but I didn't know how it would make me feel just to think 'bout it. Oh! I would sooner die myself!"

While the man was speaking, a strange sparkle came to the eye of Desmond, and there was a sarcastic curl of the lip; evidently a new idea had come to him and it must have been something desperately wicked, for under its influence, the expression on his countenance was perfectly fiendish. He said nothing for a few moments after his servant had ceased speaking, but whistled softly as he walked the room.

"All right, Parker," he said, at length; "I certainly would not wish you to do anything so dreadfully against your conscience as this appears to be. I trust you will pardon me for offering such an insult to your *Christian character*."—(Oh, the irony of those two words!)—"I hope you will enjoy the trip that you are about to take." Here the black man looked appealingly at his master. "Certainly you are to take a trip," the latter continued, jeeringly; "I really fear the atmosphere of this place might be injurious to your morals. I have too many slaves on the plantation now, and I see that I was foolish to increase their number. Only the other day, I had a chance to sell some of them to a Georgia trader and refused, but as he is still in the neighborhood I will send for him, and you shall have a change of climate. Besides "—he added with a sneer—"it will give you an opportunity to get *another wife*."

The fear which had been more and more visible in the face of the slave, seemed to change to a panic as Desmond uttered these last words, for their meaning was understood instantly; springing toward his master, the poor wretch fell upon his knees and cried:

"Oh, Massa, you is goin' to sell Sallie and de baby with me, isn't ye? Ye is goin' to sell us all together?"

"Not much!" said Desmond, as he struck his whip smartly against the leg of his boot and turned his back upon the kneeling man.

"Oh, Massa, please let my wife go with me. I am willing to go down to Georgia, or anywhere else, only let me have my wife and child."

"*Your* wife and child," said Desmond, as he glared upon the other; "I should like to know how they became *yours?* The wench and brat *are mine!* They are *mine*, do you understand; bought and paid for with my

money, and I intend to keep them. We have plenty of work here for women to do ; besides, one of the best niggers on this plantation would be glad enough to have this woman, I can tell by the way he looks at her, and I intend that he *shall* have her."

"Oh, God !"

This exclamation seemed to burst from the very centre of Parker's heart;—from his kneeling posture he sprang straight into the air, and landing on his feet whirled three times round, his hands pressed close against his face, acting precisely as though his heart had been pierced with a dart. A moment later his hands fell down, revealing a face so stamped by despair that its very appearance was changed.

"Forgive me, Massa," he said, "no nigger here shall have my wife, if my killing a man will satisfy you. Fix up any plan you like for me; I shall not refuse to do it any more."

"So, ho," said Desmond; "now you talk like a man. I thought that little argument would bring you round. Won't you have another glass of brandy, to keep your spirits up, before you go to bed ?"

"If you please, Massa," was the reply; "and please give me plenty of it."

As Parker drank off the brandy and left the room, there was that in his eye, which it would seem, might have provoked the pity even of a lost soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

"OUIJA'S" ANSWER.

ON the same evening, a light burned in the theosophist's study. Following the promptings of the strange hope that had sprung up within her, Alice had managed to inspire her father with a share of her own enthusiasm and the faces of both, gave indication of a serenity of mind such as they had not felt for weeks. What secret monitor could have been thus exciting the expectations of Alice Davis? Whence came this strange elation of mind?

These questions presented themselves, more than once, after she had entered her father's study; and she could but reflect that should this attempt about to be made prove futile, as had all the former efforts, it could only give him additional sorrow. More than once she reproached herself for having stimulated him with such hopes, but right in the midst of her self-reproach she felt the same strong belief rise up and defy all her powers of reason. Indeed, she no longer believed simply, she *felt*—she *knew*—that something important, be it communication or revelation—she cared not for the name—would be handed down to them out of the unseen and handed down that very evening; therefore, it was with burning cheeks and flashing eyes that she seated herself by her father's study table, and began to make ready for the work of the hour.

"How shall we begin, daughter?" asked Mr. Davis. "I desire to leave the direction of our work entirely with you since you seem gifted with such special inspiration."

"Well, father," was the reply, "I am satisfied that in all our previous work we have made this mistake; I have not been sufficiently impressed by your questions, because they were put to me too much at random. Now let us make out a list of such questions as

you desire answered to-night; I will study them carefully and try to impress them upon my mind. Yes, I will charge my very soul with them and then, when you have me under proper control—not before—put these questions; insist on their being answered. Let no side-suggestion interfere with the execution of this plan, and I feel sure that the result will be a pleasant surprise for us both. And above all things, father, be calm and self-possessed. Let us make out the list."

A few moments later, it lay on the table before them.

"Are you ready to begin?" she asked.

Assuming an easy position in the rocker, Alice fixed her eyes upon her father, who took a seat in front of her. The first mesmeric passes had already been made, when she suddenly began to manifest a strange restlessness.

"What is the matter, daughter?" said Mr. Davis.

"I scarcely know," was the reply; "for the life of me, I cannot take my mind off 'Ouija'; it comes to me with the force of a conviction that, somehow, our success to-night depends upon that toy."

"Insensate board!" said Mr. Davis. "I have no faith in it; we have already wasted too much time and energy in that direction. Compose yourself, Alice, and let us proceed."

Without making reply, she arose from her seat, and going over to the stand, opened the drawer in which "Ouija" was kept and lifting out the toy, placed it on the centre-table.

"Why do you trifle with that, Alice?" asked her father. "I really have no patience to fritter away to-night, and it appears to me that you do wrong to let your mind rest on that object, even for an instant. Why do you not keep your mind on the questions we have prepared?"

"I do not know, father, but I somehow feel impressed that this is what I ought to do"—as she spoke she placed a sheet of paper beside the toy—"and, father, if we fail in other directions, I intend to make a determined effort, all by myself, to get a real good answer from 'Ouija'! However, I am now ready to be mesmerized," and as she said this, Alice resumed her seat.

A few moments later she entered into that myste-

rious state, so closely resembling natural slumber, yet so different from it. Never had her father known her to respond so readily to the mandates of his will. Surely the hour was propitious for the final struggle—for such Eldridge Davis felt it to be—which was to determine whether the labors of his life had been a delusion and a dream, or a series of experiments leading on to the most astonishing and unheard-of results. Conscious as he was, that the work of the evening would, in any event, be a final effort—for he had resolved it should be so—he yet felt no nervous excitement or dread of results, such as had marred many of his former experiments. It was now, or never; and well did he realize it, as he looked upon the passive features of his child. In a strong, incisive, but not loud voice, he asked the first question written on the paper:

"Where are the records, or treasures?"

A shade of what seemed vexation passed over the face of the sleeper; slowly the head turned from side to side, as though the investigating spirit were in doubt. Then came this paradox, slowly uttered:

"*Far under ground, and also above it.*"

"What does she mean by that?" muttered Davis; then recollecting himself, and resolved that he would not be diverted from the written form, he put the next question.

"Tell me how I may find them?"

This time there was no hesitation. Scarcely had the question been asked, when Alice began to answer, and these were her words:

"*By digging.*"

"Nothing strange about that; evidently then, they are under ground."

This thought flashed through the brain of Mr. Davis, but it was only as a flash. In doing this sort of work, the operator has but scant time for reflection; as any withdrawal of attention, or will-power from the person mesmerized, usually terminates the performance.

"Do you see them, Alice?" was the next question.

"*Yes,*" was the response.

"What do you see?"

Again the hesitation, as of one who knows that some-

thing is wanted of him, but is not sure what it is; then slowly came the reply:

"*I see the records, and again I see the treasure.*"

In the very midst of the last reply, the thought came to Mr. Davis that the connection of the words, "records," and "treasure," must be the cause of Alice's hesitation. Could it be that there were both records and treasure, as had been intimated in her vision? If so, then it was possible that the vision might prove true still further, and the records be concealed in one place and the treasure in another. At any rate, he feared the results of this hesitation. And, if he had rightly surmised its cause, he resolved that it should be avoided.

This conclusion was reached, and the resolution taken, in far less time than it takes to write it. At such times the mind is wrought up to its highest pitch and works rapidly. Hence, as Mr. Davis put the next question, he changed it slightly from the written form, thereby making it a command; at the same time throwing his entire will into the words. He said:

"Trace out the way to the records, so that I may find them."

Ten minutes later, Eldridge Davis was standing by his study table, laboring hard to suppress his excited expectation and wonder—resolved, no matter what occurred, that he would not be betrayed into a relaxing of that mysterious and powerful grip, by which his will was holding the spirit of his child.

This is what happened:

As Mr. Davis commanded Alice to trace the way to the records, she began to arouse herself, as though preparing for some sort of physical action. First one hand moved, then the other, then both gripped the arms of the rocker, as though she were endeavoring to arise. Backward and forward she swayed, then made still another effort and arose.

In spite of himself Mr. Davis could not prevent a thrill of consternation. Never before had his daughter attempted anything of the sort, during a mesmeric trance. Was it possible that she intended to start out through the night and lead him to the records? He half believed it; but no—such evidently is not her in-

tention, for with eyes half open and fixed, utterly without expression, she has turned her face toward the middle of the room. What is she about to do? Gathering up all his energies, Eldridge Davis drew them to a focus, and burned this command into the very brain of the girl:

"*Trace out the way to the records.*"

Alice has paused beside the table. She places her hands upon "Ouija" and remains motionless. And then it was that the man began to understand. Never before had he been able to hurl his will—so to speak—from himself, upon another, with such conscious power. Not for a single instant did his mind waver; but with ever-increasing strength and clearness he pressed home the demand:

"*Trace out the way to the records.*"

Alice felt this command, although she did not speak. He saw her whole frame quiver, and a tremor pass along the hands whose finger-tips rested so lightly on the toy.

It began to move.

Hairbreadth by hairbreadth—inch by inch. No racing round this time. One second the board seemed to rise up, as though inclined to rear on end—the next, with loud knocks and a curious creaking sound it would twitch back and forth, as though shaken by invisible machinery.

Mechanically Eldridge Davis grasped a pencil, and began to write the letters which were now being rapidly pointed out; still keeping his mind concentrated upon his daughter.

What was it he was writing?

But there was no time to read. Well enough he knew that there must be no relaxation of the will; no wavering of the attention.

Still the work went on.

Perhaps ten minutes passed thus, although to Eldridge Davis it seemed ages. The motions of "Ouija" were very slow now, scarce more than a tremor—now they had ceased altogether.

Suddenly, he felt like one who beats the air. The will-power he was exerting was being thrown away—no one was being controlled by it. The next instant

his daughter turned half round, revealing to him her face from which every trace of mesmeric influence had vanished, at the same time exclaiming:

"Father, what is it? What has happened?"

By way of answer Mr. Davis took up the paper, on which he had written the letters pointed out by "Ouija," and gazed eagerly upon it. He felt like one who begins to read a paper that *may be* a reprieve from death. And this is what he read:—

"The way is open. Go due northeast—reach barn at corner of forest. Follow forest fence to dyke brook—half-mile. Thence with brook, north—to and into cairn; find records in centre, and round them bones of ancient dead."

As the above was written without spaces or marks, it took Eldridge Davis a little while to read it.

"What is it, father?" asked Alice. "I am dying to know."

Mr. Davis read the paper aloud, and laying it on the table, they both drew up their chairs and seated themselves beside it, the better to study out its meaning.

"What barn is it, Alice? Let me see," said her father. "The nearest forest in a northeast direction, is the Hun woods. Great Jove! Don't you remember, Alice, that the widow Simpson's barn *does* stand right at the corner of it?"

"Yes," said the latter, "and I remember an old worm-fence runs down the wood, but I remember no brook."

Mr. Davis meditated a moment, then struck his forehead with his hand.

"No, dear," he said, "because the fence, after following the road for about a half-mile, turns slightly and passes through the forest. I do not remember where it ends, but I *do* remember a brook running through the swampy thicket, because I was one of a surveying party, about five years ago, and we plunged down into the swamp and found a brook—great heavens!—I remember now, on an old deed it was mentioned as the *Dyke brook!*"

"Well, father," said Alice, "what of the cairn mentioned here?"

"Yes, I remember seeing one or two of those strange mounds over on the north side of the swamp along the hillside, but so far as I am aware, no one has ever thought of breaking into one," said Mr. Davis, "although I must say, I have often been tempted to do so out of mere curiosity. The negroes believe them to be haunted."

"Wonder if the brook runs to one of them?" said Alice.

"I do not know, but I expect to find out before sunrise," was the reply.

"You will do nothing of the sort," said Alice. "Why, father, you must be mad to think of going on such a quest, at this hour of the night. Let me advise you what to do. Send for Mr. Elton to-morrow——"

"No, daughter, I will send for no man," interrupted her father. "I alone will finish this investigation, and if it prove successful, I alone will reap the honor. We have received too much ridicule and scorn to give our triumphs to others."

"Well, then, take Uncle Ned and a few trusty slaves and to-morrow night begin your search. Oh, father, I feel that it will not be in vain!"

Such was the faith of Alice, a faith that had saved her father from despair; and, although they both might soon be doomed to terrible disappointment, yet, putting all such fear far from them, in the small hours of the morning they retired to rest, but not to slumber, full of an excitement, and a hope, that words cannot describe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VIRGINIA FOX-CHASE.

A PERFECT autumn day in the Luray Valley—this would fitly describe the harmonizing loveliness that fell from placid sky, flashed from painted forest, and was mirrored in crystal brook, on the day selected by the young gentlemen of the neighborhood for the grand fox-chase.

The negroes had been preparing for it for two days past;—getting the horses and dogs in condition; making sundry bets on the length of the chase, or the merits of some favorite dog; a few coppers or a broken knife being staked, to give strength and emphasis to the opinions so freely expressed.

And, although less demonstrative, the masters were very nearly as much excited as their slaves. Not that a fox-hunt was of such rare occurrence, but because this promised to be an occasion of more than ordinary interest. The fox was one pronounced by connoisseurs in fox-flesh capable of any amount of endurance, and one not likely to be easily taken by the hounds.

Then, in addition to the younger men who proposed to engage in the sport were some veterans, whose age, and the increasing infirmities caused by a too liberal mode of life, had made their attendance on the sport rare, but having received special invitations they had consented to be present—to share the sport and witness the ability to ride and manage horses that might be displayed by the younger men.

After partaking of an early and hasty breakfast, the little party assembled at a turn of the Hawksbill, where there was a pleasant glade, and there prepared to turn loose the fox. There were present twenty-three well-mounted men, as many negroes, and a pack of, perhaps, thirty hounds. These dogs had been carefully selected from the kennels of their masters; so that the

pack was made up of the best fox-hounds to be found in all Virginia.

Precisely at half-past seven, two negroes took a bag from a wagon, and carrying it with care, so that the bottom of it just touched the ground, went with it toward a clump of undergrowth, about a hundred yards distant from the little party. This bag contained the fox, and the moment of excitement was near at hand, when the sport would really begin.

We have just time to notice a few of the characters present. Over yonder, on the extreme left of the group, is John Elton, now in the act of untying from a small tree, his horse, "General," the same one he rode when he accompanied Alice Davis to the camp-meeting. Not far distant from him is his employer, Mr. Hopkins. It is a rare and important occasion that can call both these men from the Hopkins plantation at the same time; but the sport anticipated to-day is of such interest, that the planter could not forego it, nor would he deprive his overseer of the pastime that afforded such pleasure to himself.

Then there was a trio of planters who had come a distance of five miles, that morning, to join the sport; and close by them stood two gentlemen from a farm-house near by, who did not intend to join the hunters, but had come out merely to see the fox turned loose.

Then, close in a body, were ten or twelve gentlemen, owners of the neighboring plantations, and guests from a distance who were visiting them.

On the extreme right stands Walter Desmond, gently tapping his boot with his riding-whip as he waits for his man, Parker, to bring his horse. Calm, and intent upon the coming sport as he appears to be at first sight, a second and more careful look will reveal the fact that he is literally consumed with an anxiety with which the incidents of the chase have nothing to do. Every few moments he fixes his eye searchingly upon the man Parker, and again throws a quick glance in the direction of John Elton and Harold Hopkins. He is attended by two negroes, the man Parker to attend to the horses, and another man who has charge of two fine fox-hounds.

Harold Hopkins has two servants also, and as he and

Elton mount their horses, these two men are doing their utmost to control the two splendid brutes of which they are in charge. One of these belongs to Mr. Hopkins, the other is the property and special pet of his overseer.

The men are all mounted now, while the fox, having been shaken from the bag, has bounded through the bushes and is away like the wind. How the negroes struggle with the hounds, as each dog tugs at its strap, and joins its voice to the general chorus, whose volume is well-nigh deafening! But the fox has emerged from the other side of the brush now, and having had sufficient start, the signal is given to "let slip the hounds." With a "yelp," and a volumed cry—sweeter by far to the ears of those sportsmen than the music of any orchestra on earth—away dash the dogs, and just at that instant the fox leaps over a fence—his red brush tossing in the air a flash of defiance to his pursuers—and rounding a corner of the lot, dashes into the forest. But the dogs are on his trail, and as they level to the work, earth and heaven seem to ring an echo to the measured and thrilling music of their voices.

Not a man there but felt, as he gave his horse the rein, that ten years of life's care and worry had suddenly been lifted off him, as he felt the sweet air of the Luray Valley strike against his face; while his horse, on a dead run, bore him across the level fields.

The strip of forest, into which the fox had plunged, was about a mile wide. On one side flowed the Hawksbill for a little way, on the other was pasture-lands. The fox had entered this strip of woodland near its northwest corner, and was apparently running down toward its southern end. No one expected that it would continue in that direction very long, as the Shenandoah river bounded the forest on the south. Of course the fox *could* swim the river, but was it likely to do that? Besides, it was a long run down to the river—quite a long run after the Hawksbill had turned away from the forest—so it was concluded by the hunters, who assembled for a moment near an old fence, that the fox would emerge from the forest at some point on the side opposite the stream.

No sooner was this conclusion reached than, with a

bound, the horses clear the fence and their riders dash along the forest on the side not bounded by the stream. Several moments are spent in dashing madly along. In the course of the chase the horses jump another fence and leap over a brook, and then every hunter draws his horse down to a walk, and listens.

The hounds, that have been baying so harmoniously and musically, change their cry, and give vent to a sharp, uncertain bark. A moment later they break out in unison again, but only for an instant; it is evident to every hunter present that the hounds are "off the scent." Perhaps for five minutes the dogs continued to scurry through the wood without striking the lost trail.

Presently one of the hunters—a young planter—rode into the wood at a place where the branches were not very thick, and disappeared from the view of his friends. At length, the sound of a horn rang out through the forest, recalling the dogs. Again and again pealed forth the horn. The "yelping" of the hounds grew feeble and seldom—evidently they were making their way back, in obedience to the recall of the horn.

Suddenly, those who were waiting so anxiously on the outskirts of the wood, were startled by the steady bay of one strong-lunged hound.

"That is old Rover! That is my dog!" cried John Elton, excitedly. "I could tell his voice among a thousand. Yes, and he has struck the trail," he exclaimed, as twenty different dogs took up the cry.

Back they came, apparently "hot" on the same trail they had gone over; one of the party spoke of this somewhat disappointedly.

"Never fear," Elton replied, "Old Rover is running no back track. The old scamp is too wise for that; the fox has evidently doubled on his trail."

With this theory all agreed; few words were spoken, however, as it seemed the cry of the hounds grew fainter. Just then the branches swayed, and the hunter who had entered the forest a short time before, emerged from among the trees.

"What is it?" they all cried in unison, "Did you see the fox?"

"No, he has doubled on his trail," was the reply. "The hounds came tearing back like mad, but just before they reached me, and in plain sight from where I stood, they turned off and made straight for the stream. No doubt the fox swam over the Hawksbill and will take across the clearing; dash back round the wood, men, lively now, we may get a sight of him."

The horses, by this time, were thoroughly imbued with the excitement of their masters, and they needed no urging to cause them to break into a mad run, which soon brought them round the end of the strip of forest.

Just as they turned the corner of the wood, so that the cleared land beyond it became visible, a spectacle met their eyes which was well-nigh sufficient to turn a sportsman's blood to electricity.

There, just before them in the open dell was the fox, darting like a red arrow—now in full view—now temporarily concealed by some thicket, whose frost-painted leaves rendered the fugitive of similar hue, invisible—the next second appearing, only to be lost as soon amid the tall grass through which, perchance, he now plunged.

Next came the hounds, packed close together and running with noses near the ground. How they *did* run! And as they ran, the quiet air for miles around was burdened with the music of their cry.

But a little more than a quarter of a mile intervened between pursuers and pursued and, although it would have been quite a disappointment to have had the fox captured so early in the day, yet, so exciting was the view presented to these sport-loving Virginians, that, with one accord they drew in their horses and rising in their stirrups and waving their hats, they shouted and yelled to their hearts' content.

The pause was only for a moment, however, and then they were away again, dashing down in an attempt to intercept the dogs.

John Elton saw, with pride, that his Rover was leading the chase, and then horses and masters reached the very acme of excitement, as they stretched away after fox and hounds.

To one inexperienced in such matters, it would seem

that such a chase could have but one possible termination, *viz.*, the speedy capture and destruction of the fox: but those hunters, better versed in the ways of the red fugitive before them, knew that in his wily brain there lurked a hundred cunning tricks, any one of which, would outwit the keenest hound in all the pack.

And it was not long before the fox began to give proof of just such sagacity, and by unexpected turns and sundry petty expedients to throw his pursuers off the scent, in half-an-hour had managed to put two good miles, at least, between himself and the on-coming hounds.

After some hours of this sport, the hunters were separated into little companies of four or five, and were scattered over quite a large scope of country. Finding their horses pretty well jaded, and it being near the noon hour, they began to wind their horns, as a signal for all to meet together, at the place they had selected for their noonday meal.

It was expected that the fox would be run to earth sometime during the afternoon, as he appeared to be making his way over toward the Glenfield dens, where he would probably find refuge.

Under the branches of a certain large oak, the shade of which was refreshing at noonday, even though so late in the season, the negroes had been ordered to meet their masters, with baskets of such eatables and drinkables as would prove most acceptable to the weary men. Here they all assembled; coming in, a few at a time, John Elton and his employer being among the first to arrive.

"Elton," said the latter, "we must be unusually hungry to get this start on all the rest. However, I presume they will lose no time in getting here, now that the signal to assemble has been given. Let us tie our horses to those two swinging limbs; it will be safer for them and out of the way of the others. It will be better not to have them led to the brook until after lunch, as they are too warm to be watered now."

By the time their horses were tied, perhaps fifteen of the party had assembled and were either attending to

their horses in person, or had given instruction to their servants how they wished them disposed of

Mr. Hopkins and his overseer were already opening their basket, and all the other members of the party were engaged, or about to engage, in the same preparative work, when Walter Desmond dashed into the glade. He acted like one who had been belated in meeting an engagement; as his look expressed what seemed a feeling of vexation, and his horse bore evidences of having been hard ridden. Springing from the saddle he threw the rein to his man Parker, who stood near by, saying in an insolent tone,

"Here, nigger, tie my horse where it will be safe."

As the man led the horse away to do his master's bidding, the latter turned toward his lunch-basket, and, as most of the party—stimulated by the unusual appetite the chase had given them—were already exploring the depths, and bringing forth the contents of their own, no one thought of watching the negro to see what he did with the horse.

Just as Elton was about to attack his lunch, Mr. Hopkins suddenly sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "Look there, Elton, what does that mean?"

Turning quickly, the man addressed looked in the direction his employer was pointing, and this is what he saw: The negro, Parker, had led the horse, from which his master had dismounted, over to the very spot where the horses of Hopkins and Elton were standing. Throwing the bridle-rein of his master's horse over his arm, the negro was jerking out the knots in the halter of Elton's horse, and doing it so roughly that "General," unaccustomed to such rude treatment, was getting badly frightened; and just as Elton's attention was directed to him, he sprang forward and nearly upon the man who was so roughly untying him. Apparently rendered furious by this, the slave turned upon the noble beast and gave it two brutal kicks, directly in the side, in full view of the whole party of hunters. Not a man among them but felt his blood boil with indignation, and many whips were grasped a little more firmly than they had been at any time during the morning, as on every side men springing to their feet exclaimed 'For shame! You black scoundrel, what do you mean?"

Elton gave himself but little time to reflect. It came to him intuitively that the slave was not alone in this affair; but the brutal kicks, bestowed upon his faithful "General," were such an offence that he felt it his duty to punish the offender instantly. A few rapid strides brought him to his horse, and as he grasped the rein which the negro had that moment succeeded in untying, he cried angrily,

"You scoundrel, why did you kick my horse?"

The result of this question was amazing. Stepping back defiantly the man, Parker, cried out in a voice fully as loud as the other's, "Don't call me 'scoundrel,' you poor, white trash. What made you fasten your blamed old hoss to my tree for? I had my eye on it ever since this morning, for massa's hoss. Take it away then, or I'll kick it again, or its massa either, for—." But the skilful application of John Elton's fist prevented any further words from Parker just then, and stretched the latter prostrate on the ground.

Mr. Hopkins, who reached the spot that instant, caught the bridle of Walter Desmond's horse, and leading it to a sapling near by, tied it, and turned toward the group of men that had by this time collected round the negro, just as the latter sprang to his feet.

Drawing his knife, Parker sprang straight at Elton, and had it not been for the fist of a bystander, solidly planted on his jugular, the man would probably have given the young overseer an ugly, if not a fatal, wound. As it was, he again found himself lying on the ground, while the feet of two or three of the party, placed upon his neck and breast, effectually persuaded him to remain there.

"Why, Elton, what have you done to this wretch?" asked Harold Hopkins. "A knave like this should not be suffered to go at large."

"Whip him to death!" "Kill the rascal!" These were the cries heard on all sides.

"Hold on, gentlemen," cried John Elton; "perhaps I understand the cause of this dastardly affair better than most of you." Here he gave a significant glance in the direction of Walter Desmond. "I have done nothing to this fellow, nor do I know any reason why he should wish to harm me, but——"

"Hold on, gentlemen," a voice now interrupted, "I know the man better than any of you; a more surly rogue never went unhung." As Walter Desmond said this, he advanced and gave the prostrate slave a kick that could not have been very pleasant to the latter. "This morning," he continued, "I had occasion to punish him for some of his rascality, and he has had the very devil in him ever since.—Get up, you wretch," he cried, "and ask this gentleman's pardon for the way you treated his horse, and also for your personal abuse. Let him get up, gentlemen," he continued, "I will see that he is punished in a way he will not soon forget, when I get him home, and he shall beg Mr. Elton's pardon on his knees."

The men removed their feet from the body of the slave, who slowly arose to his feet, but just as Elton was about to protest against his being made to go upon his knees before him, the slave sprang back and crying out—"No, you don't; *I'll* beg your pardon before many days! Oh, yes! I'll beg your pardon"—darted off into the adjacent forest before any one could intercept him.

"I wish these dogs were blood-hounds," said Walter Desmond; "we would teach that scoundrel a lesson he would not soon forget. Never mind, gentlemen, he will probably turn up at the Hall before morning, and I promise you all that his punishment shall fully equal his deserts."

Elton felt ashamed of the suspicions which he had a a few moments before entertained, that Walter Desmond was possibly the instigator of the insult; and with something very like kindness in his voice, he turned to the latter and requested him not to punish the slave on his account.

Presently all the party were quietly enjoying their luncheon, as though nothing unusual had occurred. Cold meats, luscious bread—white as a snow-flake—and cake, were the staples in the way of eatables, while the drinkables were the products of the orchard and the vine.

John Elton was about half through with his lunch, when he heard his name called by a gentleman in a neighboring group.

"There is Mr. Elton, boy. Mr. Elton, here is a boy that wishes to see you."

Recognizing a negro boy from the Hopkins' plantation, he arose and walking a little apart, beckoned him to follow.

CHAPTER XIX.

RESTITUTION.

"WELL, what is wanted?" said Elton, as he paused and turned to the boy.

"Dar' is a strange gemman an' a boy wants to see you, Massa," was the reply.

"Where are they?" asked the overseer.

"Up at de' house," said the boy.

"I presume you are mistaken," said Elton; "if there is a stranger at the house, he probably desires to see Mr. Hopkins. I will go and make him aware of the fact.

"No, Massa," said the boy, "I ax'ed him if it was Massa Hopkins he wanted ter see, an' he said 'no,' it was John Elton, *Testwire*, an' he told me to hurry right arter ye."

Returning to the party, Elton approached his employer and gave an account of the message which the boy had brought.

"Better attend to the matter at once then," said Mr. Hopkins; "I presume the hunt is nearly over, as no doubt the fox is earthed by this time; I shall return myself in an hour or so."

With a word of explanation to three or four of his more intimate friends, John Elton mounted his horse and turned his head in the direction of the Hopkins plantation. Dismounting at the door he noticed, as he gave his horse in charge of a servant, that a strange boy was standing on the veranda. A peculiar sort of creature, whose hollow eyes were fixed intently on him. Approaching the lad, Elton extended his hand and said pleasantly, "Good evening,"(it is always evening after dinner, in Virginia) "are you one of the persons who desired to see me? What is your name, may I ask?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy. "I'm one on' em, an' my

name's Jakey Thompson, but I can't tell yer all 'bout it. *He*"—thrusting his thumb over his shoulder toward the open window—"*he'll* make it all straight wi' ye."

Elton, after this intimation that the only person competent to converse with him on a matter of business was probably awaiting him in the house, started in that direction; but as he turned to go he felt a touch upon his sleeve, and turning, the great hollow eyes of the boy were looking earnestly up into his face.

"Please, sir," the boy said, "oh, please take me. I knowed yer was kind-hearted the minnit I clapped eyes on yer, an' I never wants to go back ter town agin. I'll do anything yer tell me, deed I will. I'll mind every word yer say, only let me be yer boy, an' stay in this place, an' live here."

"I do not understand you, my good boy," said Elton "I would like to have you, I am sure, but I greatly fear that I am not in a condition to take boys to raise just now. However, we will see you again after we talk with your friend, the gentleman who came with you —did you say he was in the house?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "he is in thar, waitin' ter see you."

Entering the house, Elton found himself in the presence of a very dignified and gentlemanly-looking person, apparently somewhat advanced in the middle period of life, who arose from his chair as Elton entered the room.

"Have I the pleasure of meeting Mr. John Elton, son of the late Orville Elton?" asked the stranger, as he extended his hand.

"That is my name, sir," said Elton, warmly grasping the hand extended; "to whom do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"My name is King," said the stranger; "William L. King, of Philadelphia. I am an attorney-at-law in that city, and have taken this rather long journey in pursuance of business with which you alone are concerned. You did not anticipate a visit of this sort, then?" continued the lawyer, with a twinkle of merriment in his eye.

"Why, no," said Elton; "I know of no business in Philadelphia that could be of the remotest interest to

me. However," he added, quickly, "we will talk of business later; have you been to dinner, Mr. King?"

"Oh, yes," said the latter, "I arrived about ten o'clock this morning and was informed that you were with a party of friends, enjoying a sport in which I would have given much to have been permitted to participate."

"Perhaps your wish may be realized," said Elton, "we often indulge in a fox-chase at this season of the year."

"After the boy was sent for you," continued the other, "I was given a chance to test the hospitality for which your state is so justly famous, and I assure you, I did justice to the bounty of your board, as the young man who is with me can testify, provided he isn't too full for utterance."

"I am pleased to hear that you have enjoyed such poor entertainment as we have to offer," was the polite reply of Elton to the lawyer's rather enthusiastic remark; "and now," he continued, "you would probably desire a rest after your long journey and we can defer all business matters until you are sufficiently refreshed to discuss them."

"On the contrary," said the lawyer, "with your permission we will proceed at once to business. I enjoyed a short but refreshing sleep just before dinner, and, I assure you, I need nothing further to add to my personal comfort; as my conversation will not, I trust, be unpleasant to you, suppose we proceed to discuss the business that brought me to your valley."

John Elton, although too polite and hospitable to hurry his guest into making a statement as to the nature of his business with him, was, at the same time, very glad that he was ready to take up the matter of his own accord, for, truth to tell, he was consumed by curiosity and an expectation of he knew not what.

"Who in Philadelphia could have business with me?" he soliloquized; "and what could be the nature of it? The stranger had already intimated that it might not be unpleasant to him. Oh, if it might only be of such a character that through it relief might be given to the treasure of his heart, in this hour of her extreme need!"

All these things flashed in confused form through his brain as he led the way to the parlor, and placed a chair for his guest beside a table, and near a window, so that he might find it easy to write, or figure, should he desire to do anything of that sort. As he was about to invite the lawyer to take the seat, the latter begged to be excused for a moment, stating that he desired his travelling-bag.

"Pray be seated, sir," said Elton; "I will order it brought down to you."

In spite of himself, his voice quivered, as he gave a servant the necessary order. "What was he about to hear, and how would it affect his future and *hers?*" Somehow, he felt that it could be no trivial business that would cause a lawyer to take such a journey. It had probably taken him weeks to reach the Hopkins plantation, and the voyage by schooner was one not likely to be made without considerable personal discomfort. Such a trip, he argued, would only be made by a lawyer who was about to attend to a matter of signal consequence. However, he managed to preserve an appearance of composure, as he seated himself. The servant returned with the carpet-sack, and placing it near the table, left the room.

The bag was quickly opened by the lawyer, and a bundle of papers taken from it. Untying the tape that bound these together, he selected one and handed it to Elton with the remark:

"I presume that will be sufficient to prove the nature of my business with you, sir."

As Elton took the paper from the extended hand of the other, he saw that it was half unfolded, and the same glance revealed a portion of the writing; four words, however, stamped themselves instantly upon his mind, to the exclusion of all else—the words—"Last Will and Testament."

Seated there, in the parlor of Hopkins Hall, with the sunlight of that hazy Indian summer, dappled by the shadow of painted autumn leaves, falling at his feet, John Elton read the document which the lawyer had placed in his hand; read it with throbbing heart and joy-bewildered brain. How much it meant to him! Better still, how much to *her!* Was it not the proc-

lamation of her emancipation from the thraldom of poverty?

The assurance that the old roof should still cover the heads of father and daughter, as it had done all these years?

Was it not the first bugle-note of his complete triumph over his proud and insolent foe?

It was indeed a very reveille that foretold the arising of the day-star of his life, which was, even now, ready to leap above the horizon.

This is what he read:

"In the name of God, Amen.

"I, Henry Thompson, of the city of Philadelphia, State of Pennsylvania, being of sound mind and memory, do declare this to be my last will and testament:

"1. I give and bequeath unto my son, Jacob Thompson, the sum of five dollars.

"2. I give and bequeath to the son of my old friend and employer, John Elton, of Virginia, all the remainder and residue of my estate, consisting of mortgages, stocks, and funds on deposit in bank, amounting to nearly eighteen thousand dollars; all of which shall be duly paid to him; be the sum more or less, *as the aforesaid sum is already justly and truly his by right.*

"3. I appoint the aforesaid John Elton, son of Orville Elton, of Virginia, the guardian of my son, Jacob Thompson: requesting him to have full control of him and his interests, until he is twenty-one years of age.

"4. I do hereby nominate, constitute and appoint my lawyer, William L. King, my whole and sole executor of this, my last will and testament, hereby revoking and disannuling all other or former will or wills heretofore by me made or caused to be made, as also ratifying and confirming this my last will and testament.

"Signed, sealed and pronounced in the presence of David White, John Trent, Jonathan Hunn.

{Seal}

"In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my seal this seventh day of April, 18—.

"HENRY THOMPSON."

For a short time after he had finished reading the document, John Elton preserved strict silence. He felt the eye of the lawyer upon him, and he did not care

to betray the deep emotion which thrilled his soul. He felt that his first expression should be uttered, not to ears of flesh and blood, but should be lifted on the wings of his happy spirit to the Great Ruler of the fortunes and destinies of men. The first words he spoke were a credit to his manhood.

"I do not understand this matter at all," he said. "If this person left a son, he is the rightful heir to this money. Is it—it cannot be that the boy I met on the veranda, as I entered the house, is the 'son' spoken of in the will?" Without waiting for the other to reply he continued rapidly, his hopes meantime going down to the freezing point, "If so, I repeat, he is the rightful heir, nor will I touch a dollar of the money rightfully belonging to him."

John Elton had not taken time to count the cost of such a statement. No need for one of his gentlemanly instincts and bright honor to do that. He saw what he believed to be his duty, although he knew little of the circumstances in the case; and he was ready, at a word, to do that duty whatever the cost might be.

"While I honor you for the sentiments of honesty and justice you have expressed," said the lawyer, "I must tell you that you are mistaken. This money does not belong of right, to Jacob Thompson, nor did it ever rightfully belong to his father. This document only gives you a legal right to that which in equity belonged to you before the will was written. Now you will please read this paper, and your mind will be enlightened, while your scruples will be set at rest."

Elton took the paper and read on the outside of it the words, badly written but quite legible,—

"CONFESSION. *To be read only by the son of Orville Elton, and then to be destroyed.*"

A feeling of sadness mingled with respect caused Elton to hesitate, as he was about to read the paper which he had already unfolded. Into what secret was he about to be led? What story of crime or folly concerning himself, and written by fingers now cold in death, was he about to read? His visitor must have noticed this hesitation, and if so, he evidently guessed its cause and respected it; arising from his chair he excused himself, saying that he "would enjoy a stroll

upon the lawn while he" (Elton) "perused the paper."

We shall not enter into the minutiæ of this confession, as the main points of it are already known to our readers.

As Elton had thus laid bare before him the weakness and sin of what was, in many respects, a noble nature, he felt strong pity for the man who seemed to repent so deeply. He reflected that it was, after all, an instance of good being made to come out of evil, as had these sums of money, spoken of in the paper, not been embezzled by Captain Thompson, they would probably have been lost with all the rest of his father's wealth, when the crash that beggared the family came upon them. Then there were little hints, all through the confession, of the desperate struggles made by this erring man in order that he might make restitution to those he had wronged. Evidently he had undergone voluntary privations, in order that the sum taken might be restored. True, there were only hints of this, here and there, but they were sufficient to make the cheek of honest John Elton flush and burn with something very like shame, as he thought of this man enduring all this in the cause of honesty, and—*for him.*

Of course, the real depths of privation through which the ex-sea-captain had passed, were never known to Elton; the confession did not speak of them, and the only persons who could have given him such information were the two visitors; and of these, the first was so well versed in such matters, as to feel sure that such knowledge could only cause pain to an honorable man, while it would do no good; and the other was well satisfied to let the dead experiences of the past be forgotten.

Elton sat musing over the paper, which he intended to reduce to ashes on the first opportunity, when approaching steps caused him to turn his head, and as he did so, the lawyer and the strange boy whom he had met on the veranda entered the parlor.

"Let me introduce to you your ward, Mr. Elton," said the former, as he led the boy close to where the overseer sat.

The latter arose from his chair and laying one hand

on the boy's head, with the other grasped warmly the hand that Jakey extended to him.

"So you have come to live with me, have you, my boy?" he said. "Well, I trust you will have no reason to regret it."

As William L. King, Esquire, looked into the manly eyes of the overseer, moist with the tears he could not hide, it occurred to him that if Henry Thompson had left his son all the money mentioned in the will, it might not have proved so great a blessing to him, as would the home and the brotherly care of the noble man who stood before him.

"Please, sir," said Jakey, "I only hope yer intend ter keep me, I'm tired and sick of that city; an' if ye'll only give me 'nough ter eat, and plenty o' warm clo'es in cold weather, I'll try to work hard fer ye; 'deed I will."

John Elton felt he could not stand much more of this, and turning quickly toward the window, so that the others could not see his face, he replied, in a voice husky with emotion:

"All right, Jakey, never mind, just now, what you are going to do for me; I guess you won't have to go back to the city. You can go out and look over the place now, and we will talk over and arrange your affairs later."

As soon as the boy had left the room, the overseer turned and approaching the lawyer, took the latter by the hand and said:

"There is not much that I care to say on this subject, but if it is possible for a man to do his duty by a boy thus committed to his care, I promise to do mine by this one. If it is possible to instil right principles into him, it shall surely be done. I will do by him as though my every act were noted by the vigilant eye of his father in the Spirit Land, as I have no doubt it will be."

The sound of hoofs rang hollow on the road, and both men glanced through the window.

"Who is the gentleman?" asked the lawyer, as the horseman turned his horse through the gateway, and rode upon the lawn.

"Mr. Hopkins, my employer, and the master of

Hopkins Hall," was the reply. "We will presently inform him of the principal points in this budget of good news, and he will, I assure you, be mightily pleased to hear of my good fortune. In all the Luray Valley there is no better man, nor one with more generous heart, than the man you see dismounting from that horse. Pray excuse me, I will return in a moment."

A little later, the lawyer heard some one—most probably the master of the house—excitedly exclaiming:

"Elton, you ought to have stayed with us. We ran the fox to earth just north of the Rush lot. He went into a den dug out under the roots of an old stump; we dug for half-an-hour, but finally gave it up as a bad job. I was the very first one that— What did you say?— Oh, I beg pardon, I forgot about your visitor. Yes, I will be with you presently; shall be happy to meet him."

After the introduction and greeting, the main points in the story were told to Harold Hopkins, and the will was read by him. Jakey Thompson was called in from the stables, where he was satisfying his curiosity by inspecting the live-stock, and introduced to Mr. Hopkins. The worthy planter, after the full truth dawned upon him, arose and grasping the hand of his overseer warmly exclaimed:

"Well, John, no man in all this valley is more worthy of good fortune than yourself. I hope that this wonderful luck that has come to you—which seems like a fortune arising from the depths of the sea—may bring with it all manner of happiness, and every possible joy."

For an hour or more, the three men talked about the legacy, so unexpected to two of them, and so utterly like a gift of mercy direct from heaven's treasure-houses, to one. Presently Elton desired to know if his employer would be engaged that evening; receiving a reply in the negative, accompanied by a knowing twinkle of the eye, the overseer blushed like a school-girl, and appeared to hesitate a moment before proceeding with his remarks.

"What is it, John? Did you wish me to do an errand for you?" asked Mr. Hopkins, with a sly wink at the lawyer.

"No," stammered Elton, "but I thought perhaps you could make it pleasant for Mr. King, as I desired to attend to a matter I have on hand this evening."

"It really appears to me," said the lawyer, "that Mr. Elton prefers to do his errands himself, rather than have you do them for him."

"Yes," replied Mr. Hopkins, to whom the remark had been addressed, "I believe it is customary for young gentlemen about the age of Mr. Elton, to imagine that *sòme* errands are best done, when done by themselves."

After more good-natured chaffing had been indulged in by Mr. Hopkins and the lawyer, John Elton excused himself in order to prepare for the ride he expected to take immediately after tea.

It would be a most difficult matter to attempt to analyze the feelings and emotions that held possession of the overseer's soul, that evening, as, at an early hour, he rode off the lawn at Hopkins Hall, and turned his horse in the direction of the Davis homestead.

No one can really appreciate prosperity unless he has tasted something of the bitter waters of adversity. From the earliest period of his life, Elton had known little but poverty and sorrow. Shattered fortunes, the death of kind parents, such cold charity as distant relatives or half-hearted friends could show, each of these had been in turn the experience of his youth. And now that he had reached the period of manhood, a light had shot through the darkness, softly bright as the reflected loveliness of an angel's pinion; a light that diffused itself through every avenue of his soul, and tinged even his sorrows, until, like sunset-clouds, they stood transformed to gold. And then, all the troubles of his life together were but as a dew-drop beside the mighty sea, when this last grim dilemma had confronted him; this terrible, agonizing perplexity, that threatened to take his love—to take the source of all his happiness—and make for him, out of it, a very rack of torture.

What torments of mind had he not endured, at the thought of Alice being rendered homeless, and with her father turned friendless upon the world, simply

because he loved her; and because she would not consent to give him up? But now, in an instant, all had been changed; and, while no great wealth had become his portion, yet it seemed in his eyes a colossal fortune; because it meant a happy marriage, a peaceful home filled with comforts for his loved one; and, as these thoughts took form and shape within his mind, visions of rapture, airy palaces of joy, towered aloft before the eyes of his enchanted spirit, until their flame-tipped spires appeared to pierce the skies.

In this condition—intoxicated, so to speak, with pleasure—the variegated foliage of autumn seemed like colors given to the woodlands by the angels, and all the earth appeared to glint beneath the ever-changing lights of heaven. His joy was too great for silence, so he whistled as he rode along, then broke into a song. Ah, John, did you not see those watchful eyes, half-hidden in that bush? But no—he has passed on and never even looked toward the place where a dusky form is hidden; but as he passes round the curve, so that the woodland juts out and conceals the bush, there slips out of it a small colored boy who chuckles to himself:

"Golly, guess I done earn dat dollah mighty easy. Wonder what Parker want me to spy on Massa Elton fer? Well, dats none o' my lookout, all he wanted ter know was if Massa Elton went towards Massa Davis' ter night, an' said as how he'd gibe me a dollah if I'd watch here, an' see. What he want ter know dat fer? Dun'no; 'spose all I has ter do is ter hurry home and let him know what I'se seed, and git the dollah."

This wise soliloquy being ended, the under stable-boy at Desmond Hall, takes a short cut through the grove, so as to reach home as soon as possible.

Did John Elton only know it, while about to announce the tidings of a great victory to his blushing sweetheart, he is in reality, only on the eve of battle. Events are thickening rapidly and the morrow shall witness, either the permanent prosperity of the Davis household, or its blasted hopes and utter woe!

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE SWAMP.

"No, sah, Ole' Ned doan' go on no sich 'spedition ter-night."

A group of four colored persons stood on the lawn of the Davis homestead, and among the number was Uncle Ned, who had just spoken. Eldridge Davis stood in front of his slaves with a lantern in his hand, while at his feet was a pile of promiscuous articles, lanterns, axes, shovels and picks, just such an array of implements as one would be likely to select who contemplated the removal of several bodies from a graveyard.

Immediately after dinner, Mr. Davis had selected three men, the best on the plantation, and told them that he expected some important work done by them, and that if they would do exactly as he ordered and hold their tongues, they would lose nothing by it. Then taking Uncle Ned aside, he made him acquainted with so much of the work to be done as he thought advisable. It was easy to see that the old man had but little relish for the job; while he did not positively refuse, yet the whites of his eyes expanded ominously, and many solemn shakes of the head betrayed the trepidation which he secretly felt.

Then began the preparations, and as the old servant saw the spades and picks, it was evident that the sight in no wise allayed his fears.

As the shadows lengthened on the Davis lawn the superstitious fears of Uncle Ned increased correspondingly, until, as the moment for departure arrived and Mr. Davis made his appearance to see that all was in readiness to set out, they broke forth in the open and mutinous remark recorded above.

"What reason have you for saying that, Ned?" asked Mr. Davis, meantime biting his lip in nervous vexation. "We are now ready to set out; the work

before us will not be hard, and I see no reason why you should refuse."

"I hates ter be onobleegin'," said Ned, "but I spects ter go ter heaven when I'se dead, an' I know I neber shill ef I sells my pore soul ter de' debil, as some o' my betters hab already done."

The last part of Uncle Ned's remarks was made in an undertone, but was heard distinctly by Mr. Davis. Superstitious fear, in the opinion of Eldridge Davis, is one of the most uncomfortable sensations that can torment the human breast; hence it was with a smile of pity, rather than a frown of anger, that he bade the three men "stay around a bit," and told Uncle Ned to step into the house, as he wished to speak with him.

Once out of ear-shot of the others, the master proceeded to remonstrate with his slave upon the foolish and unreasonable fears to which he was giving way, at the same time reminding him that, as there would be four to one, they would be under no necessity of doing anything that they might deem wrong or dangerous.

These and other arguments were used with such good effect that Uncle Ned finally promised, not only to go with his master and obey him in all things reasonable, but also that he would use his influence with the others so that no obstacle or impediment should be thrown in the way of the enterprise, if he could prevent it.

After a little more parley and some threats, the men were induced to prepare for whatever their master might have in store for them; and as twilight began to deepen into night, followed by many a curious glance from the slaves who remained behind, the little party, led by Mr. Davis, took its way across the open fields. After tramping along through the gathering darkness for nearly an hour, Mr. Davis paused at a certain spot where the woodland jutted out into the cleared land, and asked:

"Isn't there a barn somewhere near here, Ned?"

"Yes, Massa," was the reply, "jess about a hundered yards from here is the widder Simpson's barn; yo' kin see it in anudder minnit."

The slaves looked curiously at their master as he paused for a moment by the side of the barn, and re-

moving his hat dried his perspiring brow with his handkerchief; they heard him mutter:

"Yes, here is the worm-fence running right along the wood; no need to light the lanterns yet, we can easily follow this fence, if it *is* dark."

"But I spec's it mout be best to light 'em," said Uncle Ned, "we mout stumble goin' 'long dis ole fence in de dark."

"Never mind," said Mr. Davis, "we will try it awhile without a light at any rate. I do not care to be watched to-night, and we will soon be where we can light the lanterns with but little risk of being seen."

Nothing more was said for some time. The master led on while his slaves followed in Indian-file, as noiselessly as so many ghosts. On one side of the fence were cultivated lands, while on the side next the wood there ran a road—at least it had deserved that name at one time, but evidently it had not been used to any extent for some years, and was now nearly filled, in places, with undergrowth. Along this road the party were making their way, when Mr. Davis suddenly stopped. He found himself confronted by a thick clump of bushes apparently well-nigh impenetrable. What had become of the road? Where were they?

"Ned," exclaimed he, "where is the road? Have we lost our way?"

The master had noticed that for the past few yards the path had been very difficult and more than usually obstructed, but such was the excitement under which he was laboring that he paid but little attention to it until it became absolutely impossible to go further. Now as he turns to question his old slave, he finds him as much confused as himself.

"'Deed, I doan' know what hab' become ob it," said Uncle Ned; "here am de fence still lef' us, anyhow."

"Yes," said his master, "let us retrace our steps a little; but first let the lanterns be lighted."

This being done the men were able to walk with greater comfort, and were soon standing in the road again.

"Now, how is this?" said Mr. Davis; "this is certainly the road, the question is, where does it go to, that we should lose it so suddenly?"

"Look, Massa," said one of the men, "see dese heah bars in de ole' fence, nebber thought 'bout dat, did ye?"

Sure enough, there were the bars where the road had turned from the forest out into the field, and then being deemed out of date and of no use, had been plowed up.

"I have been along here a few times in my life," muttered Davis, "strange I never noticed the way this road ran. But, I suppose we cannot expect to remember everything," he added, sagely. "However, we won't stand here any longer, men," he said, in a brisk voice; "we must be getting on as there is work before us to-night. Let us follow the fence on the other side."

It was not so easy walking over the "listed" ground, but comparing it with what they would have to walk through that night it might well be termed a pleasant highway. It was not long, however, before they were compelled to pause again. The fence had turned away through the wood, and they were at the end of the cleared land and on the verge of a dense thicket of undergrowth, running down into a swamp.

Here Mr. Davis began preparations for the real work before him. To one of the men he intrusted the picks and other tools not needed in making a way through the tangled swamp. To Uncle Ned he gave a stout bill-hook, and to another slave, an axe. Instructing these two to go before him into the thicket he followed after with a lighted lantern in either hand, held so that the light might be thrown upon the bramble just ahead, and thus enable the "advance guard" to clear the way.

To the negro who brought up the rear with the tools, he gave strict orders to keep a sharp lookout and to fall back a little, every now and then, and listen if any voice or sound gave indication that they were being watched, or followed. The remaining negro was told to creep under the brush and look for the easiest places where a passage might be made. In this manner they slowly advanced toward the centre of the swamp.

All this difficult work might have been avoided had

Mr. Davis been sure of the exact location of the cairn indicated in the writing. By taking a wagon and horses the entire party might have driven round the swamp, and by a drive of about eight miles, they would have found themselves somewhere near the spot for which they were now heading. But there were other mounds in the Luray Valley, and it would not be wise to run the risk of finding the wrong one—at least, this was Mr. Davis' opinion of the matter; and besides, he had express directions in "Ouija's" answer to "Go due northeast—reach barn at corner of forest"—all this he had certainly done. Then was he not told to "follow forest fence to Dyke brook?"—and this was just what he was at present trying to do.

"We certainly ought to be near it, by this time," he soliloquized.

"Near what, Massa?" said one of the men, overhearing the muttered remark which Mr. Davis was not conscious of having spoken aloud.

"Why, near a certain brook, for which I am seeking down here," he replied. "I thought it was only a half-mile from that barn, but I fancy we have come a much longer distance than that already."

"Dat am becaze de comin' hab been so mighty rough, Massa," said the negro. "I'se doan tinks we hab come berry much mo' dan ha'f-mile."

"Ouch—Oh!"

This cry, accompanied by a splash as of one in water, sounded just ahead of them, and the next instant they heard the voice of the man who had been sent on to find the easiest way to pass through, exclaiming against his luck at having fallen into a brook.

Pressing on, they soon reached the spot and found that he had met with no great accident, having stumbled into the brook they were seeking; but as the water was not deep, and the night was not cold, there was no particular harm done.

Up to this point Mr. Davis had managed to keep comparatively cool, but now that he had reached this brook, his blood began to flow very rapidly through his veins. If there was no mistake or deception in the writing, he was now on the direct track that led right up to the very spot where the treasure—for, be it

coin, precious stones or records, all the same it would be treasure—was concealed.

"'Thence with brook, north.' Yes, that is what the writing said," murmured Mr. Davis to himself, taking care this time not to speak so as to be heard, "and that means that I am to go north. I should judge that this brook runs about north and south, so we will head northward, and up stream."

While the brush and undergrowth was not so thick along the stream as it was a little way back, the swampy nature of the ground rendered walking quite as difficult, and rather more dangerous, than it had been at any time during the evening. Mr. Davis now took the lead, having cut a stout stick with which to try the ground, and carrying one lantern he gave the other to Uncle Ned, who brought up the rear. Proceeding thus in single-file they made their way slowly along.

Soon the ground became more firm and they were evidently getting out of the swamp; a few more yards and still another change was noted, for the trees were larger and further apart—they were no longer in a thicket, but were coming out into a forest. At length Mr. Davis paused and faced the men who were following him.

"Have any of you," he said, "ever been here before?"

No one answered for a moment; then Charles, a servant nearly as old as Uncle Ned, replied that he had "hunted in dese yar woods," he thought, but never so near the swamp, and he did not know that the brook ran up in this direction from the swamp. No one had anything to add to this, so the party proceeded on its way.

As they followed the brook the forest appeared to grow denser. Evidently they were now in the very heart of the wood. As he walked eagerly along, moving so rapidly that his sable followers found it difficult to keep pace with him, Mr. Davis was suddenly struck with the idea that, after all, this brook might not lead directly to the cairn mentioned in the writing—it might be miles away through the forest. He realized that he was now in one of the most inaccessible por-

tions of the Luray Valley, a spot seldom visited even by the most adventurous hunter, and he was glad now that he did not try to drive around the swamp, as he surely never would have been able to find this brook in that way, unless he had worked his way to it through the swamp from this side, in which case the labor would have been the same.

"But would the brook run to the mound?"

"Might they not pass it in the darkness?"

"What did 'Ouija' say?"

He remembered the words well enough—"to and into cairn"—but, surely this did not mean that the brook ran into the cairn; he understood by that, simply that he was to make his way into the cairn, in order to find the things mentioned further in the writing.

"But, evidently, the brook must run *near*, if not *to*, this particular mound," he reasoned; "unless the whole thing was a delusion and a fraud." At any rate he resolved to use all diligence to find the mound. He argued that it paid to use diligence, when the study and labor of half a lifetime would be wasted without the results of this night's search. So pausing again, he told Uncle Ned to cross the brook with the man Charles, and while he walked directly up the brook, to let Charles walk about a dozen rods from him through the wood, instructing every man in the party not to lose sight of the two lanterns carried along the stream by himself and Uncle Ned; and to warn him as soon as they came to any kind of hill, or mound.

After this precaution against passing the mound in the darkness had been taken, the little party went on up the stream for, perhaps, fifteen minutes, when Mr. Davis came to a standstill, and in a voice choked with the excitement he vainly endeavored to repress, called his men to the spot where he stood.

For the past five minutes they had been ascending the side of a gently sloping hill, through which the brook had apparently cut its way, its bed now being several feet below the bank on which they stood; but just here it had made a semi-circular curve, leaving a knoll, or bluff, about one hundred feet in diameter;

and on this knoll, shut in on every side by ancient monarchs of the forest, and half encircled by the brook, stood *the cairn mentioned in the writing*.

There was nothing remarkable in the appearance of the mound. Had Mr. Davis not been especially interested in it, he might have passed by it with only casual notice. Many men, considered "wiser in their generation" than he have viewed those mysterious *tumuli* scattered at various points over the American continent, as the mere results of turbulent natural forces.

But however far astray Mr. Davis might have been on many questions, he had studied this and kindred subjects too thoroughly to make any such mistake. He *knew*, from the indisputable evidence furnished by the contents of these mounds, that the forces that heaped them up were *human* forces; even as the anatomy of the skeletons usually entombed within, proved that they could have been vital under such conditions, and amid such surroundings, as only existed in the misty and prehistoric Past.

This cairn was certainly not remarkable in its size, being only about eight feet high, and perhaps thirty in diameter; no trees had grown upon it, only here and there over its surface were scattered a few low bushes. The earth of which it was composed appeared to be, so far as they could determine such a matter by the uncertain light of their lanterns, of a reddish brown, and was mixed plentifully with pebbles.

These few general facts Mr. Davis took in very soon after his eyes fell upon the *tumuli*. While making these observations he had moved slowly around the mound, until he now stood upon the side opposite the group of servants. At his feet ran the little brook that had proved so faithful a guide, plunging again into the forest after making its detour round the mound.

As soon as the light from his lantern flashed back from its waters, the words of the writing occurred to him with new force,—"*To and into cairn;*" because, had the brook made no detour, its deep bed must have been made right through the cairn itself. In other words, this strange mound stood exactly on a line with the centre of the stream, as it ran on its original course.

If he had cherished any doubts before, as to the reliability of "Ouija's" answer, this discovery served to banish the last remains of them; and it served, correspondingly, to increase his eagerness to begin the real work for which they had taken this disagreeable tramp. Passing quickly back to the group of men, who were standing silent as though awed by the near presence of some dread and supernatural thing, he set down his lantern and in low tones spoke as follows:

"Men, I have brought you out to-night on what you may think a very strange journey; so far, you have done well; but your real work will now begin."

At this point he noticed some of the men shifted their position uneasily, and each looked at the other suspiciously. Evidently their superstitious fears were being aroused. In fact, the negroes did not like the appearance of the mound at all. There were more of the same sort not far from the Davis homestead, and it had been a tradition, time beyond memory, that they were the chosen and special abode of ghosts. Therefore their master understood the thoughts and feelings of his men perfectly, as he saw their restless, uneasy movements. He knew that if they once reached the point of stubborn rebellion, no power he could exert would be sufficient to compel them to do his bidding; he knew that his only chance lay in keeping them stimulated with some strong hope, and busily employed.

"Do not think," he continued, "that you are to do this work for nothing. I shall pay you well for digging into that mound, whether we find anything therein, or not. But if, as I suspect, we find certain articles hidden there, I will not only make you rich presents, but I will do more; I will *set every one of you free!*"

These last words acted like a charm on the men. Every trace of their former hesitation vanished, and seizing pick and shovel they awaited the direction of their master at what point to attack the cairn.

Taking another hasty glance, the latter concluded to dig on a level with the hillside straight toward the centre of the mound, and on a line with the brook.

Picks and shovels were soon being rapidly plied, and as Mr. Davis saw the deep trench fast extending toward the centre of the cairn, he could scarcely re-

strain his impatience. Judging by the progress already made, he estimated that in another half-hour they would reach the centre and *the secret of the mound* would be discovered.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEATH OF THE SLAVE.

We must now return to the Davis homestead. As Eldridge Davis led his men into the swamp, his daughter invited her lover into the parlor. Both the young people were laboring under strong excitement. John Elton's face was flushed, and his eyes sparkled, as he grasped his sweetheart's hand; while Alice manifested a nervousness entirely foreign to her usually self-possessed nature.

There was, however, this difference between them:—while John was eagerly bent on unburdening himself by telling Alice of all his good fortune, she had resolved to say nothing to him of the strange journey her father had taken. If it should end in failure and disappointment it would be much better—she thought—that her lover should never know of it, while if any really valuable discoveries were made it would then be time enough to mention the fact. She believed this would accord with the wishes of her father, even as it met the approval of her own best judgment.

But while she resolved to say nothing, she found it difficult to control the excitement which almost consumed her. She imagined that she could almost hear her heart throb, and it was indeed a fortunate thing that her lover was so entirely engrossed with the desire to communicate what was in his own mind, or he would surely have noticed her restless and feverish condition. As it was, he saw nothing of it, and as soon as they were seated, he began to tell her of the visit of the lawyer, and the wonderful business that had brought him to the valley.

The first few sentences fell almost unheeded on her ears, so deeply was she engrossed in her own thoughts, but as soon as Elton had gotten well under way with his story, she was all attention.

This was indeed good news, for was not the fortune of her lover *her* fortune?

Therefore it was not strange that the weary, visionary father, plodding his way through the tangled mazes of the swamp, should be forgotten by the daughter at home, who sat listening to the words of her lover; for is not this the plan of the Creator? And has it not been the law of the race from the beginning?

Surely every experience in life has its uses. What was all the darkness and sorrow occasioned by the threats and plots of Walter Desmond, but a convenient background for the happiness of this hour? At least, so it seemed to Alice Davis, as she sat beside her lover, on that autumn evening, and heard the whole story of a dead man's sin, repentance and restitution, and thought how much it meant to the ones dearest to her of all others in the world.

It meant a home and competence for her dearest friend, and should the venture on which her father was that moment bent prove a failure, then as John Elton's wife, she could give him a refuge, and a home, where he could hide his disappointment from the scornful gaze of the world, and end his days in peace.

At last the whole story is told, and Elton sits holding the hand of the fair girl by his side, and looking deeply into the joy-lit eyes turned upward to meet his own.

"So it really appears, dearest," said John, "that the plans of our enemy have come to naught. With this money I can pay off the mortgages on your father's property, make some needed repairs on the house, and we can be married at once, and begin our married life in clover."

Alice blushed, smiled, and attempted to withdraw her hand at this, but as the attempt was not very energetic, and her lover's grasp was strong and firm, the attempt, it is needless to add, was not a success.

"Or, if you do not care to live here," he continued, "I shall, I have no doubt, find myself able to settle your father's affairs satisfactorily to all parties and we will select a place, just such a one as you like, dearest, and I will purchase and fit it up for our home."

"Not so fast!" said Alice. "It really appears to me that you are inclined to rush to conclusions this even-

ing, John. There will be plenty of time to consider the matters you speak of, later."

As Alice said this, she gave the man beside her such an arch, coy look as made his heart bound and his veins tingle; that single glance implied an agreement with everything that he had said. While Alice was not averse to having these matters spoken of by her lover, she felt that the hours of this evening, when she had first learned of the good fortune of the man so dear to her, were all too sacred for any form of business; hence, without putting any such thought in words—not for anything would she have done that—she somehow led Elton up to the same thought, and after that, business —the future with its joys, cares or possible sorrows, and the world beyond that little parlor, with all of weal or woe in it, were thought of no more; but on the wings of love, and an exalted and pure fancy, were those two borne up into the holiest human experience—religious joys alone excepted—that it is possible for the children of men to know. It was love's young dream that they were enjoying, and they were dreamers of the most approved type, dreamers whose blood was warmed by the sweet breath breathed from the pine groves of Virginia, a state where love is as natural, and as sweet, as are the flowers of its native soil.

Once or twice, during the evening, Elton had asked for Mr. Davis, but each time Alice had managed to give an evasive answer which, excited and pre-occupied as he was, had served to satisfy him. But now the hour had grown so late that he deemed it prudent to bid Alice adieu, but before doing so, he asked her pointedly about her father, and where he was. To this direct question Alice was forced to reply that he had gone out, early in the evening, on a matter of business and would probably not return until a late hour.

There was something in the manner of Alice, as she made this statement, that led him to see that it was not her wish to be catechised in this direction; and, as she manifested no desire to have him remain until her father's return, with not a few warm hand clasps and, we are bound to say, with more than one good-night kiss, our hero found himself upon his good horse, "General," wending his way, at a moderate pace, tow-

ard his home. The moon rose late that night—not until half-past eleven was the Luray Valley illumined by her modest rays. The night could not be termed one of *bright* moonlight, as the face of the sky was overcast with light clouds which alternately half obscured the moon, the next instant permitting it to shine freely forth, for a moment, only to be obscured the next. But Elton paid no heed to earth or sky. His thoughts were entirely absorbed by his own personal matters, and his heart was entirely full of love, thankfulness and joy. He scarcely noted the different points along the road, or the different curves and turns in it. In this way he rode carelessly along, until he had covered nearly half the distance from the Davis homestead to Hopkins Hall.

Suddenly his thoughts were brought back to earth and to the present by the report of a gun, at a point just a few rods ahead of him, where the road made a sharp turn. His first impulse was to bring his horse to a standstill; but, on second thought, he concluded it was only some idle fellow amusing himself by discharging his gun in the air; so he permitted "General" to continue on at the same moderate pace, not neglecting however, to keep a sharp lookout as they drew near the turn. He expected to meet some belated hunter, perchance a colored boy, whistling on his homeward way. As he neared the spot, no such familiar sight greeted him, but instead, a dark object prostrate in a lock of the fence.

What was it? A log, perhaps? "General" gave him no time to decide this question, but with a loud snort, sprang so suddenly to one side as nearly to unseat his rider, then gathered himself, took the bit and started down the road on a dead run. It was some time before Elton could pull him up, in fact, to do so required the putting forth of his full strength, and when he had succeeded, the noble beast stood quivering in every limb.

"Something wrong about all this," soliloquized Elton; "General, is not in the habit of behaving like that, unless for good cause. Wonder what that dark object could have been? It certainly gave the horse a bad fright. Well!" he continued, a moment later, "there

is surely but one way to find out, and that is to return and see for myself."

But he found it easier to *say* this, than to *do* it. No sooner did he attempt to urge his horse in the direction of the mysterious object, than he reared and plunged so violently that he could with difficulty keep his seat. By dint of force and persuasion, however, he at last managed to get the horse back within a few rods of the corner, when it came to a dead stop and absolutely refused to take another step.

Just then Elton heard a deep groan, as from one in distress or pain. It appeared to come right from the lock of the fence where he had seen the dark object; the horse heard it also and made another strong effort to turn with him in the road.

"This will never do, General," said Elton. "What! brute, would you run away from a fellow in distress? Possibly some one is shot, so, if you will not approach him, I must go without you."

Springing lightly to the ground, he tied "General" to a sapling which stood beside the road, and walked back toward the spot from whence the sound had seemed to come.

Again it was repeated—a low, deep groan, accompanied by a muttering as though words were being spoken.

There was no longer any delay on the part of Elton. A few rapid strides brought him to the spot. There lay the dark object which had caught his eye as his horse dashed by. Evidently a human being, and probably badly hurt, for the agonized groans still continued.

"My dear fellow, what is it?" said Elton, bending over the prostrate form. "Are you hurt? If so, how, and by whom?"

For some moments past the moon had been obscured by the clouds, but just at this point they parted and a clear ray of moonlight fell full upon the dusky face before him; only for a moment did it continue thus, for the clouds closed in again and there was gloom, but that moment of moonlight had been sufficient. John Elton recognized in the man before him—the man who was evidently wounded and possibly dying—the same

negro who had abused his horse, in the glen, down near the Hawksbill—the negro, Parker, the slave of Walter Desmond.

While Elton easily recognized him, yet it failed to occur to him that there was any special significance in his being there, at that hour of the night. Much less did he cherish any suspicions that the negro had been upon any criminal business that might have put him in his present sad plight.

So it was in a very kind tone of voice that he again addressed the man.

"Are you able to talk? If so, tell me how you were shot, and if you are injured seriously? You may depend upon me perfectly. I will do all in my power for you and will go immediately to the nearest house for assistance."

With another groan the negro turned a little more upon his side, and made reply.

"Yes, I am badly hurt—killed, I am afraid, but it is no more than I deserve. An' what hurts still worse is to have you stan' an' talk to me so kind an' pitiful; you had oughter kill me an' be done with it."

"Kill you, my poor fellow," exclaimed Elton, "why, what for? I bear you no ill will for what passed this afternoon. Come now, make yourself as comfortable as possible and I will soon return with help."

"Hold on, Massa!" said the slave, as Elton turned to go. "Doan' leave me, I have only a little time left on this earth, and I must tell you something. Please come a little nearer."

"Well," said Elton, "if you really wish to tell me something I will wait to hear it; but you had much better let me go for help at once, unless you are able to walk, which I fear you are not."

"No, Massa, I shall walk no more," said the man, and he at once began the story he had to tell. "I was sittin' on this old worm-fence waitin' fer you to come along, Massa, an' the lead now in my carcass was intended fer *yourn*."

Here Elton started violently; what he had mistaken for an accident was about to prove the miscarriage of a *crime!*

"Go on, my man," said Elton.

"I was waitin' here fer you, an' jest as you turned the corner I intended to drop you from your saddle, but the Lord made my wickedness to fall upon my own head. I heard your horse comin' an' I got my gun all ready, an' jest as I was goin' to bring it to my shoulder the trigger hitched in the end of a fence-rail, an' the whole load went right into my side. Oh, Lord! what shall I do?"

Elton was so thunderstruck he could hardly speak.

"And what harm have I done you," he managed to exclaim, at last, "that you should seek to take my life? You see a kind Providence has mercifully protected me, and shielded me from your murderous designs."

"But I want to tell you how it was," gasped the slave. "Oh! forgive me, Massa, I cannot die until I tell you all, an' have you forgive me."

"But you will have to wait," said Elton; "this affair must have witnesses; I will only be gone a few moments."

Without waiting to hear the protestations the other began to make, Elton ran to his horse, sprang upon it and dashed away in the darkness. From the scene of the accident to the house of William Randolph was only about twenty minutes' walk, so it was not very long after mounting his horse, before our hero was knocking loudly on the farmers' door. An excited question on the part of the farmer—a hurried reply from the horseman—a brief interval of waiting, and three men were making the best possible speed in the direction of the wounded man. As both the others were on foot, Elton deemed it his duty to leave them and push on ahead. Even though his life had been attempted, he felt a strong pity for the would-be murderer who, wounded unto death, was lying alone in the darkness, by the wayside.

The ride he had taken to procure assistance consumed but a short time it is true, but, brief as it was, it had given Elton a chance to *think;* and had there been light enough to reveal the expression on his face, it would have indicated that ideas were coming into his mind with extraordinary rapidity.

What had he ever done to this man, that he should desire to take his life? Evidently he had done nothing.

He had met a few of the negroes belonging to Walter Desmond, but this one he never remembered to have seen until that day, when he had been so bitterly insulted by him, after the morning's hunt. As he had never seen the negro before that day, he certainly could have given him no cause to insult him, much less to take his life.

But if Elton could see no cause why the *man* should try to murder him, he thought he could see cause for such attempt on the part of the *master*. "But then, did not Walter Desmond bitterly resent the treatment the slave had given his horse that day? Fury!" muttered Elton, between his clenched teeth, as this thought flashed into his mind. "The whole thing was evidently arranged between this negro and the scoundrel who owns him—a sort of by-play to divert suspicion from the real criminal, and furnish a reason, or excuse, for this dastardly attempt on my life."

By this time Elton was as near the wounded man as his horse would permit him to approach; so dismounting and tying his horse, he was soon bending over the negro's unconscious form. The loneliness and pain had evidently been too great—the slave had fainted.

Elton bitterly reproached himself for not thinking to ask Mr. Randolph for some spirits, or a restorative of some sort, but so great had been his haste that it had never entered his mind. Now he feared it was too late. Just then he heard voices, and the farmer and his son appeared.

"Is he dead?" queried the blunt voice of the elder man. "Didn't you say he tried to shoot you, and shot himself instead?"

"That is what he told me," said Elton.

"I declare, I don't know what these confounded niggers are a comin' to. A man will not be safe to ride the roads next. You didn't tell me whether he was dead or not," continued the farmer, "so I tole Jim to grab a lantern, an' I jest brought 'long a bottle of as good brandy as can be found in this yere valley; so——"

"Bring it right this way, my friend," interrupted Elton. "I really fear there is no time to lose; the man is not dead, but has fallen into a dead faint and

we must bring him round at all hazards: there is a story on his lips that he *must* tell, before he dies, if human power can make him tell it. Please hand me the brandy and light the lantern as quickly as you can."

Raising the head of the negro upon his knee, Elton poured a small quantity of the brandy between his lips; waiting a moment, he repeated the dose. With a gasp, the slave opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the man who bent over him.

"I thought I should die when you left me, Massa Elton," he said. "Oh, it was so awful to be left alone in the dark."

Elton noticed that there was scarcely a trace of the customary negro dialect in this man's talk. Also, as the light from the lantern fell upon his face, he saw there no sign of brutality; rather was he surprised at the high type of character indicated by it. Such a face, to one accustomed to read the human countenance, would have revealed honor, honesty, and self-respect. All this served to convince Elton still more, that the slave was scarcely responsible for the crime he had attempted. Therefore he turned to the farmer and his son, who stood a little way back, and requested them to come closer to the wounded man.

"Now, my good fellow," he said, addressing the slave, "I want you to tell us just how you came to make this miserable attempt upon my life. Feel perfectly free to tell the whole truth, because you are in the hands of those who are both willing and able to protect you from any person desiring to do you harm. And remember, you are desperately wounded and perhaps dying, therefore you should free your soul of this guilty secret lest you should be called to face it at the Bar of God."

As Elton ceased speaking, the negro made an effort to reply, but the pain and loss of blood had been too much for him; the words he attempted to speak gurgled in his throat, and he nearly fainted again. The brandy was immediately placed to his lips and this time, being partly conscious, he imbibed a quantity sufficient, not only to restore him, but to give him at least a temporary strength. Then he began his story, and in presence of the three men, narrated under what circum-

stances he had first seen Walter Desmond; the conditions under which he had been purchased; the work that his master had commanded him to perform, and how he shrank from it, and refused to do it in spite of the offers and threats that were made. And then, with ever-weakening voice, the man narrated what had occurred in Desmond's office, when the final promise had been given to do this deadly work. Every little while the faint voice would be choked with sobs, which being checked, the sad story would be continued.

Elton felt his soul burn within him, as he thought how the honor in the breast of this poor slave had lent him courage to bear up under taunt, threat and scourging, but had succumbed at last to protect the dusky wife so much beloved; and he could but ask himself—"Had it been Alice, what would *I* have done?" at the same time feeling for the man who could use such means to force a defenceless servant into crime, an indignation that was boundless.

And now the whole horrible plot is before them—but the story and life of the slave are destined to end together. As he ceased to speak, even by the dim light of the lantern an ashy hue could be seen to spread over his dusky face; and with the words:—"Massa Elton—forgive—my wife and babe—in heaven"—he fell back—*dead!*

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RECORDS RECOVERED.

"MASSA', fo' de' Lawd's sake, what am we comin' to?"

Uncle Ned had been, notwithstanding his age, outstripping the others in his efforts to find whatever the mound might contain desirable to his master. His shovel had moved to and fro almost with the regularity of clockwork, while great beads of perspiration stood upon his sable brow, and glistened like diamonds in the light of the lantern. This special effort, while in part due to the real affection entertained by the old slave for his master, was doubtless more largely due to the offer of freedom which had just been made in case something of real value should be found.

The men had not worked very long before they began to dig up shells of strange form, such as they had never seen before. Some of these were picked up and curiously regarded, for a moment, by the negroes; then thrown aside as being unworthy of further notice.

Not so with Mr. Davis; he, stooping down so as to bring them close to the lantern, examined each with great care. As he did so, his face turned a shade paler, his lips compressed and his eye glistened, but no other indication of excitement did he give except that of hard and hurried breathing. He was rapidly reaching that stage of emotion where a man does not care to express himself in words. *The shells were unlike those of any mollusk, or shell-fish, at present inhabiting the American waters!*

It was at this point Uncle Ned made the remark with which we opened this chapter. As Mr. Davis arose from the examination of a curious shell, he saw that the old negro had dropped his shovel and was standing erect, intently regarding some object which he held in his hand.

"What is it, Ned?" said his master. "Let me see what you have found?"

Without a word Uncle Ned handed the article to Mr. Davis. It was a knife of flint; not very perfectly formed, to be sure, but yet one that would have passed as a fair specimen of its kind in any of the museums where such relics are kept. But the strangest thing was that round it, just where the flint that formed the handle flattened down to the blade, there was a ring of metal. Some of the negroes mistook this for gold, and one caught up his shovel and attacked the mound again with a great show of vigor, saying, that if there was gold there, he would soon find more of it.

By dint of considerable brushing and rubbing, Mr. Davis soon found the ring to be of copper; it had been placed on the flint very carefully and tightly; these and a few other points were noticed and then the knife was quickly laid aside. He felt that if his search amounted to anything, curiosities of far greater interest than a stone would soon be unearthed. So all fell to work with renewed spirit.

The idea had somehow taken possession of the men's minds, during the last few moments—perhaps it was the sight of the copper ring round the knife, which some of them supposed to be more precious metal—at any rate, they now had the idea that it was gold for which they were digging. This being the case, they knew, if it were found, their master would be able to richly reward them, and also to set them free. And they knew too well his honesty and truthfulness to doubt, for a moment, that he would keep his word. So nothing was heard from the men, for some time, but their deep breathing as they gave full exercise to their sturdy muscles, and threw out great shovelfuls of the light soil.

"Lor', what dat?" said one of the men, as his shovel gave a sharp "click" against some object. Bending down he gave a glance at the thing, then with a low, peculiar cry of fear sprang back and stood gazing at it with protruding eyes.

"Well, what is it, man? What have you found?" exclaimed Mr. Davis, angrily.

He did not like such an interruption; it was calcu-

lated to put the "horrors" on all the rest; and once let the men get thoroughly afraid, and he knew that it would be useless to try to do anything with them. They would be as likely to scurry madly through the forest as anything else. So very quickly he sprang forward and picked up the shovel. With a few well-directed efforts he unearthed the object of alarm and held it up.

"Now, men," he said, "isn't this a pretty thing to be afraid of? 'Tis a bone to be sure, but only the leg-bone of some animal. Why, I expect Tom has gnawed the meat off dozens of such bones, and now he stands there paralyzed with fright. Out on such foolishness! Well, if he is going to be scared out of his wits by the bone of an animal, he is not likely to be of much further use, so I suppose I shall have to use his shovel myself;—however, there will in that case, be one less to reward when we find what there is in this mound," he added, significantly.

The feverish, energetic spirit of Mr. Davis was contagious; or perhaps it was the concluding remark about the expected reward; at any rate, all seemed eager to continue their work.

"I didn't think we had any nigger 'mong us big fool 'nuff to git skeered to def at a bone," said Uncle Ned, glancing contemptuously at the discomfited Tom.

"Ef it had been er ole ham bone wid some of de meat still stickin' ter it, I spec's as how some niggers we know wouldn't er been so mighty skeerful," said Charles.

With rather a crestfallen air, the butt of all this criticism approached Mr. Davis. He was the same man who had been ordered to precede the party as they entered the swamp, and who had, consequently, fallen into the brook.

"I done feel bad, Massa, eber since I got wet; spec's dat what makes me feel so creepy."

A very lame excuse this—the fellow had not fallen into water over knee-deep—but the next sentence explained it all.

"Ef I only had a little suthin' to warm me up," he continued, "ter sorter' put life inter me, I'd be all fust rate."

In his excitement Mr. Davis had forgotten the ne-

cessity he was under of fighting the spirits ethereal and imaginary with spirits tangible and liquid. But it was a neglect for which he speedily made amends by drawing a good sized flask of rare old apple-jack from his pocket. Taking a moderate quantity himself, he handed the flask to Uncle Ned.

"Share alike, boys," he said, "it is all for you, only share alike and do not take too much at a time."

Truth to tell, the master did not greatly care, just now, if his men did get slightly under the influence of the brandy; he had an idea that it might supply nerve and courage for the remainder of the work before them.

After each had quaffed a very liberal quantity and the flask had been returned to Uncle Ned for safe keeping, the work was resumed with greater zeal than ever. By this time they were very near the centre of the mound. If anything of consequence was to be found there it was certainly time that it was beginning to appear. So thought Mr. Davis as he stood watching his half-drunk slaves at their labor. The bottle had circulated among them once again, with the result that a sort of careless bravado, even an approach to glee, was observable among them.

The earth was loose and light, and it did not appear to be at all hard labor to shovel it out; so as Mr. Davis stood and watched his men rapidly ply their shovels, at each stroke drawing nearer to the very centre of the mound, he began to feel that his prospects of success were growing small.

And what did failure mean to him? Simply the loss of everything; the labor of a lifetime; all these strong and lively hopes which had recently come to him; home; his daughter, possibly—yes, and life itself; for he felt that he could not live after the final blow had fallen, and the final disappointment had done all its work.

And now, for the first time in his life, standing there amid the dark shadows of the forest, he became fully conscious of the fact that, be the result of this search what it might, he had been a foolish man. He had devoted his time and attention to researches of questionable propriety, ethically considered, to say the best of it; and as for this last proof and outcome—if a success,

it would be a poor enough compensation for all he had endured. If a failure, it would be—well, death, likely. Yes, it was a terrible thing. A lottery whose prizes were held in invisible hands, and whose wheel was turned by forces unknown to man! Whence did it come? was it thrown up on the shovels of the half-drunken negroes? At any rate it was a resolution and a strong one. After to-night, Eldridge Davis would have no more of lotteries, especially spiritual ones. He would get all that was to be had out of this present undertaking, but never would he enter upon a new one. To-night should forever end his work along this line!

"What is it, Charles?"

This question was caused by the fact that the negro addressed had paused in his work and was looking intently into the excavation. He had been digging between the others and had pushed his work slightly in advance of them.

"What have you found?" again asked Mr. Davis.

"Doan' know, sah," was the reply. "Shovel hit a big stone, I 'spec's; leastwise I'll soon see."

After throwing out a few more shovelfuls of dirt and holding one of the lanterns close down in the excavation, the negro was able to get a partial view of the obstruction.

"Gor, massa, it no stone!" he exclaimed, in tones of mingled fear and curiosity. "It a wall! Looks like de wall ob an' ole vault."

At this statement all the negroes quickly drew back from the suspicious impediment. It was evident they wanted nothing to do with vaults. Mr. Davis sprang into the trench and with his hands removed some of the loose dirt, the better to get a view of what was beneath. Soon he had succeeded in uncovering what appeared to be a portion of a stone wall. It seemed to be only about a foot high, but as only a small part was exposed to view, he could not determine its length. That portion from which he had cleared the dirt seemed to be composed of small stones, fitted closely together and joined with a sort of mortar or cement. But what chiefly puzzled him was to determine of what possible use a wall could be that was only a foot in height; but then, it might have been left unfinished. Still

using his hands to scrape away and push back the earth, he gradually worked his way inward.

No, the wall was not left unfinished, the top of it presented a surface as smooth and regular as the side; more—this smooth surface extended inward as far as he could thrust his hand, and then it dawned on Eldridge Davis that this was only one of the walls; for—since there was a roof, also of stone, it must require four walls to support it, and, therefore, what had been discovered must be, as the negro said, a vault or chamber, built by—heaven only knew who—here under this mound of earth, in the very heart of this dense Luray forest.

But what sort of chamber could it be that was only a foot high?

This thought greatly perplexed Mr. Davis. Perhaps, after all, it might only be a solid bit of masonry laid flat upon the ground, for he felt quite sure that in digging the trench, the men had kept very nearly on a level with the surface of the earth beyond the cairn.

But then—perhaps so—he would see.

"Quick, Ned, give me your shovel," said Mr. Davis.

Very rapidly did he make the dirt fly from along the side of the wall.

"Yes, it is even as I thought," he exclaimed, after a few moments' labor. "This wall was erected in an excavation made below the surface of the earth."

Turning to the men, who had all this time stood idle, Mr. Davis perceived that they were considerably demoralized. In spite of all the transient courage they had been able to draw from the brandy flask, it was evident that they very much disliked to work around a place which they feared might be the abode of dead men. All their enthusiasm seemed to have oozed away, and with distended eyes they were standing close together, whispering to one another, and apparently considering the advisability of beating an instant retreat from so horrible and dangerous a locality. It was at once apparent to their master that he had made a great mistake in permitting them to stand unemployed.

"Come, men," said he, "this is no time to stand about leaning on your shovels; no doubt there is,

beneath those walls, a rich reward for each of you. Let us at once clear away the dirt from a larger portion of it, so that it can be easily broken into."

No one stirred. Uncle Ned looked at the other two, then gave a sort of snort, shuddered, and drew back.

"Come, men, do not give it up now; have I not offered you enough? What have I done to you that you should refuse to do what I ask?"

"Well, Massa," said Uncle Ned, acting as spokesmen for the others, "we doan' want ter dis'bey ye, nor act nowise contrary, but when it comes ter diggin' down 'mong de dead in de dark night, we can't do it! No, sah, we can't do it!"

"Who asked you to do it?" said Mr. Davis, turning pale under the influence of mingled rage and disappointment. "All I ask of you is to dig round that wall and lay it bare, then help me to break into it. There are no dead men in it—at least, I do not believe there are—but I promise you the instant we come to any skeleton, or anything you may object to seeing, I alone will remove it, or do anything of that sort necessary to be done, and you may stand back out of the way."

Still no one moved.

"Curse you," said Mr. Davis, "I have promised you all the reward in my power to give, is not that enough? Why don't you go to work as I ask you?"

A look of mingled fear and suspicion was stamped upon the faces of the negroes, while the eyes of their master began to flash fire.

"Look here, men, you are going to do as I bid you. Do you hear what I say? If you don't do it, I intend to *kill* you!"

As Mr. Davis said this, he drew two pistols, which he had concealed upon his person before leaving home; so he was prepared for just such an emergency as had occurred.

"Now, men, we stand four to one," he continued, "but I hold the lives of two of you right here in my hands, and unless you do my bidding, I shall surely shoot. Now this is the last time I shall speak to you. Ned, brace yourself with another pull from that flask."

As this was not a hard command for the old man, it was readily obeyed.

"Pass the flask to the others, and let them drink and act like men."

Each of the others gulped down a large quantity of the fiery liquor and stood as though waiting further orders.

"Now move lively, men, take the shovels and uncover that wall."

This last order was accompanied by the simultaneous click of the two pistols, as they were cocked by the man who held them.

"Come 'long, boys," said Uncle Ned, "mout jes' as well die one way as 'nother. Some white folks clean gone crazy anyhow."

Slowly each man betook himself to the work of clearing away the dirt from the wall. Slowly and suspiciously at first, but more rapidly and heartily as the brandy again made itself felt. Soon they had cleared away the dirt so that an entire side of the wall, nearly twelve feet long, was exposed; also a part of the flat roof of the chamber, perhaps five feet in width, was also laid bare, together with a sharp angle of the wall.

"Now, men," said Mr. Davis, in a brisk, cheery voice —he had already put up his pistols—"bring the picks and break into this place. Work quick, boys! work quick and let us see what we have here!"

Tom ran up with a pick, being eager, apparently, to atone for his former rebellion, and struck the masonry a smart blow. Whoever constructed the wall had, evidently, understood the art of building in stone, as the stroke of the heavy pick was entirely without result.

"Go at it with a will, men!" said Mr. Davis; "attack it here at the corner. Strike hard but carefully, and try to hit between the stones."

So faithfully was this advice followed that the whole corner was speedily demolished, and a hole yawned at the feet of the toilers through which it would have been possible to have dropped a barrel.

"Pugh!" said Charles; "neber smelt de like!"

Mr. Davis knew what that meant, instantly.

"Stand back from the hole, every one of you," he cried, having no desire that his men should be poisoned

by the foul air. "Rest a moment," he said, "then we will soon burn up the bad air, if any remains; perhaps, however, it will all pass out of itself."

After the lapse of a few moments, he requested Uncle Ned to hold one of the lanterns down through the aperture, at the same time bidding him be cautious and keep his face turned away, so that he might not inhale the poisonous air.

Mr. Davis speedily had reason to regret having asked one of the negroes to do this, and to wish that he had performed the service for himself. It was evident that there was no great quantity of poisoned air escaping as soon as the lantern was let down through the hole, because the light shone out through the aperture, proving that it still burned. Uncle Ned, however, kept his face religiously turned toward his companions; manifestly he had determined to run no risks.

"Well, Ned," said Mr. Davis, pale with excitement, "what are you staring at Charles for? There is no more foul air to hurt you. Look down into the hole, or better still, make way and let me take——"

A blood-curdling yell broke from the old negro's throat and drowned the concluding part of the order. He had acted as his master began to speak, and stooping down had looked into the aperture, which was dimly lighted by the lantern held within it.

One look was enough!

Still another yell, louder than the first, and the lantern was dropped *within the aperture* and the trusty (?) servant, who had lately held it, was dashing madly through the forest, followed closely by his now thoroughly demoralized companions.

"Confound them all!" exclaimed Davis, savagely. "They have indeed left me in the lurch; but, as there is a heaven above me, this thing shall now be carried through."

Giving himself no time to reflect as to possible consequences, he grasped the stone wall on either side of the hole and *leaped through!*

No man in his right mind would have thought of doing such a thing. Of the depth of the chamber, or the possible horrors of its contents, he had thought nothing. Fortunately his feet struck the floor of the

vault, leaving his head almost on a level with the aperture.

"Struck the floor of the vault," did we say? Nay! rather *what lay upon the floor!* A *something* that rattled like a score of castanets! that seemed to turn and slide beneath the feet of the man who had so recklessly leaped into—*he knew not what!*

Eldridge Davis—it is needless to say—was by no means a timid man; yet as he stood perfectly still in the crypt, he seemed to feel a hand of ice clutch his limbs, and every hair upon his head appeared to rise and stand upright. This emotion of terror was, however, short-lived; too often had the man passed though ghostly experiences to succumb now when he felt himself face to face with the climacteric event of his life.

But first—What had become of the lantern? As this question flashed through his mind, he almost cursed his stupidity in not thinking about it before he sprang into the hole. Then he remembered that Ned had held it through the aperture, and, consequently, must have dropped it into the crypt as he turned to flee.

"Wonder what the fool saw?" soliloquized Mr. Davis, as he stooped to feel for the lantern.

"Heavens! what was that?" he cried, as his hand came in contact with some hard, cold substance.

Instantly he was himself again. No more timidity or hesitation now; a mighty joy surged through his heart as he realized that the object he had touched was a *human bone!* The cause of the negro's fears was no longer a mystery—he had leaped upon a *skeleton!* But the master now gave little thought to the conduct of his slaves—he was thinking of the writing!

"What did it say? 'Find records in centre, and round them, bones of ancient dead.'"

It would have required all the ghosts of Dante's "Inferno" to have frightened him now.

"We must have a light!" he muttered, as he stooped down and reached out his hand once more. This time, by good fortune, he was enabled to grasp the object of his search.

"Patience!" he whispered, as he proceeded to relight it; and as the rays of the lantern streamed over the stony floor of the crypt they revealed a picture so

strangely horrible that even Eldridge Davis shrank from it, and felt a half impulse to flee from the place. The next instant the instincts of the scholar mastered every idle impulse, and with lantern held close to the floor, he began to inspect his surroundings.

This is what he saw:—The bones of perhaps fifteen skeletons were scattered on the floor of the crypt! Of these, four or five were almost as perfect as though the bones were wired together. The others, except four, were scattered indiscriminately about; skulls, ribs and vertebra being mixed and mingled promiscuously. Evidently he was not looking upon bones which had remained as they were interred. Rather did he view the work of some vandal who had disturbed, and possibly made merry, with these sad relics of a by-gone age. Some *living* hand had thus mixed and mingled these bare timbers of the human house!

"But what manner of men could these have been?"

As soon as this question presented itself, his mind reverted to his daughter's dream.

"Surely," thought he, "these bones could have belonged to men of no race *now living upon the earth!*"

And with this thought in his mind he took up a skull. It looked almost as if carved from flint. Had there not been marks distinctively human about it, he would have concluded that he was looking upon the skull of some ferocious *brute!*

"I should judge," said he—speaking to himself—"that when this man was alive, a crop of coarse and matted hair grew down close to his small and deep-set eyes, with no forehead intervening! Ages must have passed since these bones were animated by the spirit of life! Fancy the mighty monarchs of Egypt, whose mummies we call ancient! Why, they were but creatures of yesterday, compared with these! Yes, children of nature were they"—he continued, as though addressing the skull he still held in his hand—"and I have no doubt but that accounts in part for the wonderful preservation of their remains. Why, look at this skull! Looks as though a blow from an axe would scarcely break it!"

He noticed also, that the bones indicated that these creatures were very short in stature, but wonderfully stout. The shoulders were exceedingly broad, and the arm bones in length were out of all proportion to the height of the body—being full a third longer than the average length of the human arm. He also noticed, incidentally, that many strange articles and implements were scattered about among the bones—broken pipes, bits of earthen-ware and stones which, judging by their form, might have been used as arrow-heads.

These things were not arranged in an orderly manner, as though placed by loving hands beside buried friends, but were mingled with the bones of the skeletons, as though ruthless hands had hurled both bones and implements into the crypt. We mentioned the fact that four of the skeletons were apart from the others, and to these Mr. Davis now turned his attention. As he looked at them, the picture of the fish god of the Philistines as it adored the Ark of Israel, was brought very forcibly to his mind. They lay face downward, and their heads were toward a large, round stone ; one being on each side of it. But what served so forcibly to remind Mr. Davis of "Dagon of the Philistines" was that the head and hands of each skeleton were removed from the trunk—which was otherwise intact—and placed together near the stone and perhaps two feet from the skeleton to which they had belonged.

"What could this mean? Surely there is design in this, at any rate," he concluded, as, stooping a little, he made his way cautiously over the clattering bones toward the stone. "Why should these poor bones be made to venerate this central object? Their arrangement round it, and especially the fact that the skulls and hands are thus placed, would seem to indicate that it had served the purpose of an altar. By Jove!" he exclaimed, "suppose that stone should cover a hole in which treasure is stored away! Let us see!"

With this thought he set down the lantern and attempted to roll the stone over. It was a task which he never accomplished! Even as he made the effort, there was a curious sound which appeared to come from the very centre of the stone, and the top of it slid off so easily that Eldridge Davis lost his balance, and plunged

head first into the heap of bones upon the other side. Had he possessed the nerves of an ordinary person, his sensations, as he scrambled to his feet and cleared the dust from his throat, would have been far from pleasant! In the heart of a dense forest, alone, at the dead of night, and with his throat full of dust that had been vital ages before a European foot had touched this continent! If any mortal can imagine a more uncanny situation, let him speak!

But Mr. Davis gave no heed to his uncanny surroundings. As he fell over the stone, in the dim light he caught the gleam of metal, and all unmindful of the dust which half-choked him, he eagerly bent above the stone. He now noticed that this had been separated in the middle, and that each half had been roughly hollowed out, by some means, so that it resembled a huge stone cup; hence what he had mistaken for a solid stone was but two cups—the one resting exactly upon the other.

Not the stone, however, but its contents was what chiefly interested him; very carefully he lifted from the lower cup the metallic object which reposed in it. He found, as he did so, that he held in his hand a round *copper plate* about a foot in diameter, and that more of the same sort still remained in the stone. Bending low over the lantern, he blew away the fine dust which had collected on the plate and scrutinized it with most eager interest.

"Great heaven!" he cried, "if it isn't covered with Hebrew characters!"

On these he bent his gaze steadily for some moments, his countenance meantime beaming with an ever-increasing joy.

"From what I can understand, I believe this is just what I am after," he exclaimed, joyfully. "Evidently 'Ouija's' answer and Alice's dream corroborate each other, and I hold in my hands the 'Lost Records'!"

Turning again to the stone, he took out the remaining plates, and found that there were seven in all; and that, like the first, all were filled with large and badly formed Hebrew letters. Casting his eyes about the chamber, so rich in objects of interest to one of his turn of mind, he exclaimed:

"Presume I have the chief treasure this place was built to hold. At least, if there are other things I want, I can come for them another time, as no one will be likely to disturb them."

Acting on this idea he placed the plates under his arm, and, having first set the lantern outside the aperture, he next proceeded to climb out himself. So weary was he that it was with some difficulty that he succeeded in doing so; but oh! what pride and joy filled his soul, as he thought of the treasure which he carried.

As the first arrow of fire from the unrisen sun sped toward the zenith, Eldridge Davis staggered across the threshold of his home, and with the plates still held close beneath his arm, with tottering steps made his way up the stairs toward his study!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"REX'S" LEAP.

"OH, father! what have you?"

Mr. Davis had not reached his study door when he heard his daughter rapidly ascending the stairs, and the words we have just recorded burst from her lips, as she caught sight of the plates under his arm.

Not until he had entered the study and seated himself in his chair did he make reply, and then, so utterly exhausted was he, that it was only in the fewest possible words that he described what he had found; leaving all description of the adventures of the undertaking until a more convenient time.

Neither father nor daughter were in proper condition for a calm discussion of any matter. The former could scarcely summon strength sufficient to reach his home. During the labors attendant upon entering the mound he had been stimulated by the strongest excitement, but, as he struggled through the swamp on his return, more than once he feared that his strength would fail him. Now that he found himself in his study, he felt but little inclination for conversation, even with his daughter, so utterly was he worn out.

The latter had not slept during the night. After her lover left the house, she wandered from room to room, listening eagerly and hoping that each sound that broke the stillness of the night, might prove a herald of the return of her father. As the minutes lengthened into hours, her anxiety increased, until finally it changed into a sickening fear that he would never come. She knew how utterly disappointed he would be should this final effort prove futile, and she feared the result of such disappointment.

About three o'clock in the morning she heard a noise, as of men walking. Then one of the dogs barked, and a man ran round the house. Going to the

door she called to know who was there, but as no one answered she concluded that some of the slaves, interested like herself in the party that had gone out, were up awaiting their return. Had she known that it was the poor wretches who had deserted her father in the forest, and who, even then, were cowering in their cabins, and with horror-laden accents describing what "Uncle Ned saw in de ghost moun'" it would, naturally, have had but little tendency to have soothed her nerves.

Thus the hours passed, and morning found her still a watcher for one whom she began to fear would never return. We can well imagine, therefore, with what joy she heard her father's step upon the stairs.

After the baldest outline had been given, she felt that she wanted time for reflection, and a chance to become calm before she heard more. Telling her father that he must partake liberally of the breakfast, which she would have prepared for him, and afterward sleep until noon, she pressed a kiss upon his brow and left the study.

Proceeding at once to the kitchen, she ordered Aunt Chloe to cook as choice a repast for her master, as she could possible prepare. Next she proceeded to the stable, and ordered "Rex" to be saddled and brought round to the door. So quickly had all this occurred that, as our heroine rode off the lawn, she observed that it was but little more than an hour after sunrise.

"Rex" was never in better spirits; the bracing air of the late autumn imparted such vigor to the horse, that the fire flew from the stony road, as his iron-shod hoofs rang merrily upon it. Alice cared but little in which direction "Rex" turned his head, as she passed through the gateway of the Davis homestead. She did not expect to take a very long ride, her chief desire being to calm herself by a brisk gallop through the morning air, and thus obliterate the anxiety to which she had been a prey during the night. Also she wanted a chance to think over all that had been told her by her father and lover, after which she anticipated that she would be in a better frame of mind for the enjoyment of her breakfast.

Absorbed in thought, as she was, Alice had probably

ridden two miles before she took any notice of the direction in which she was going. She had allowed "Rex" to follow his own inclination in his choice of roads, hence, all unconsciously, she had been riding in the direction of her lover's home. It brought a blush to her cheek, as she aroused herself from her reverie, and found herself dashing rapidly along, heading directly for Hopkins Hall.

"Rex, you naughty fellow, where are you taking your mistress? This will never do. I fear that somebody we know has been teaching you a trick or two."

As Alice said this, she patted the neck of her galloping steed, who answered the caress with an affectionate whinney.

She had now reached a point where there was a road leading off the one which went to Hopkins Hall, and down this road she reined her horse. She was now riding through a by-lane, which was seldom used; a lane which skirted round several plantations, and finally came out into the main road some distance beyond the home of Eldridge Davis; so that by entering it, as Alice had done, it would be possible for her to circle round, and thus reach her home without retracing her way. She had proceeded some distance along this road, and had drawn "Rex" down to a walk, so that she might the more leisurely meditate on her father's strange adventure, when she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the road behind her. She would have heard them much sooner, perhaps, had she not been preoccupied with her own thoughts, as, when she turned her head the horseman was close upon her. She recognized him instantly—her lover's bitter enemy; her own worst foe; the planter, Walter Desmond.

Alice had only time for one hasty glance, but that one look was sufficient to reveal the fact that something was decidedly wrong with the man. His clothing was disarranged, and covered with dust; his hat pulled low down over his eyes; and he was minus collar or cravat. Not only was his excitement manifest in the disorder of his attire, but his face was red and appeared to be swollen, while his bloodshot eyes seemed perfectly ablaze with fury. His horse ap-

proached at a mad gallop, and its quivering flanks, flecked with foam and stained with blood, furnished proof that the master had made free use of the heavy silver spurs which he wore upon his boots.

Alice scarce had time to note all this, quick of apprehension though she was, when the man was beside her. Not until she turned her head on hearing his approach, did he seem to know who it was that he was overtaking. In fact, he was in the act of dashing by without any regard to her whatever, when suddenly he reined his horse so that it fell back upon its haunches. An expression of evil triumph, which was perfectly fiendish, swept over his face, and turning in his saddle he caught "Rex's" bridle-rein.

"What do you mean, Mr. Desmond?" cried Alice, as soon as she could recover from her amazement.

Both horses now stood perfectly still in the road. The planter seemed in no hurry to answer the question which was hurled at him by the lady he had insulted. With the same leer upon his countenance, he kept gazing insolently at her, meantime keeping a firm hold upon the rein of her horse.

"Mr. Desmond, what do you mean? How dare you insult a lady, in this manner! Let go my horse, instantly!"

Whatever of frantic haste Desmond may have displayed in riding, he was now evidently disposed to take his time. For a moment he was silent; then in a voice, husky with some strong emotion, he said:

"Alice, will you accompany me to the West? Will you swear, by all you hold sacred on earth, to marry me as soon as we can reach a minister? Think well before you answer; it is the only honorable course left open to you!"

Alice's face flushed crimson at these words. "Was the man crazy, or was his reason drowned in rum? What could he mean?"

"I have told you, Mr. Desmond, once for all," she cried, "that I could never marry you; an honorable man would never persecute a girl as you have persecuted me and my father. I command you, unhand my horse!"

Rage and triumph were mingled in the expression on

the face of the man before her, as Alice uttered these fearless words.

"Pray, what do I care for your commands?" he hissed. "Have I not, for your sake, made every sacrifice possible to man? Have I not loved you as it is the lot of few women to be loved? Yes, and I have offered you everything that the heart of woman could desire. And how have you repaid me?—By scorning me, for a low beggar! And now you have driven me into crime! Yes, into *crime!*" he continued, rapidly. "This morning when I heard how all my plans of vengeance had miscarried, and started to flee from my pleasant home, out into the exile whither my love for you has driven me, little did I think that kind fortune would throw you thus into my power. And now that I have you, do you fancy, for an instant, that I intend to let you escape to the arms of that scoundrel, Elton, while I am forced to flee for my life? Never! Thank heaven, you are mine now, safe enough! Oh, I presume you will agree to marry me; if not, I think you will be glad to do so before the sun is one hour higher in the sky," he added, sneeringly. "However, we will not talk longer here, I will tie the horses to the fence, and under yon tree we can come to an understanding——"

The face of Alice Davis had been turning very pale, for the last few seconds. There was a steel-like flash from the blue eyes of the insulted girl, and a compression of the lips which left only a faint line of red visible. As Desmond uttered the last word, he received a terrific blow from the heavy riding-whip which Alice carried in her hand;—a blow which, falling as it did directly across the scoundrel's face, sent him reeling backward in his saddle, half-blind with anguish, and caused him to drop the rein of Alice's horse.

As Alice struck the blow which resulted in the freeing of her horse, the latter seemed to arouse to a consciousness that his mistress was threatened with danger; at any rate, as Alice tightened the rein upon him, he gave one terrific bound, and, with a loud snort, was off like a dart. No need of whip, or spurs, for the noble "Rex," who was so rapidly widening the distance between his mistress and the wretched man they had

left reeling in the middle of the road. So suddenly had the affair occurred that Alice could scarcely comprehend what had happened, until she felt the invigoration of the mad pace her horse was now taking. The air rushed by her ears; she felt the play of the muscles of her good steed, and, somehow, it cleared the last trace of bewilderment from her mind.

Something had evidently put Walter Desmond utterly beside himself, she reasoned, so that now utterly desperate, intoxicated and in deadly anger, he was bent upon proceeding to the very last extreme. He was even capable of taking her life.

Just as she reached this conclusion, she heard a hoarse shout. Turning her head and looking behind her in the direction of the sound, she saw a sight which, at first, almost took her breath, then made her blood tingle even to her finger-tips. The man whom she had left behind had recovered from the pain of the blow, and, having plunged his spurs deep into the bleeding flanks of his horse, was rapidly pursuing.

Alice quickly calculated her chance of escape. She was perfectly aware that but few horses in all the valley, could equal her own good "Rex" in a race of this sort; but she was also aware, that one of that small number was the powerful steed on which Desmond was mounted. "The very best in his stables," she thought, as looking back again, she saw that her enemy was only about a quarter of a mile behind, and was slowly lessening the distance.

"Oh, what shall I do!" cried the now frightened girl. "Surely there must be some way of escape! He *must not* overtake me!"

Truth to tell, Alice Davis was not herself that morning; the terrible strain of the past few hours had told fearfully upon her nerves. In fact, refreshment and rest was the sole object of her ride; hence, we must not wonder that our heroine gave way to a momentary fear. But almost instantly her eye brightened, and her face paled, as her fear gave way to indignation.

"I have half a mind to stop my horse and give him another taste of this whip," she muttered.

By this time they had covered at least two miles, and were riding along a very lonely part of the road,

They had not passed a house during the race, and she was well aware that it was still quite a distance before they would reach one. In the meantime, what was Desmond doing? Alice judged from the sound of the running horse that he must be drawing fearfully near. She ventured to look behind again.

"Oh, heaven, Rex, what shall we do?" she cried in dismay, for as she glanced back she saw, not only that he was but a few rods behind, but that he was in the act of drawing a pistol, evidently intending to shoot her, or her horse, she knew not which. "What shall we do?" she cried, as her heart seemed to cease its motion.

Then a splendid impulse seized her, and bracing herself as for some grand effort, she raised the handle of her whip and laid it gently between the ears of her flying steed. It was the first effort she had made to quicken his already rapid pace; she had felt that he was doing very nearly his level best, and if she wished to add something of encouragement for a last effort, she knew precisely the one thing which she had to do. She had now done that one thing necessary. A shake of the head and a low neigh was a sufficient assurance to Alice that she was perfectly understood.

The test to which "Rex" was about to be put was just before them. A sharp turn in the road—a gulch, both deep and wide, at the very edge of it—this it was that caused Alice to place her whip between her horse's ears. Not ten horses in all Virginia could have cleared that dreadful chasm, but in her terrible peril Alice had asked her horse *to do that very thing!* "Rex" had answered her! *He would try!*

There is a wild yell from the man behind, as he sees the horse he is pursuing rush toward the dreadful brink. A shot rings out upon the morning air, but already the noble "Rex" has risen from the earth and seems suspended in air as, with his precious burden, he goes flying across the gulch.

Has he leaped short? Yes—for his forefeet only appear to strike the earth beyond. No!—for on the very brink he gathers himself, and, unhit by hostile bullet, unhurt by his splendid effort, he goes dashing into the forest beyond.

But what is this? Can Desmond's horse follow that? No matter, he is ridden by a madman, who will now force him to it, or die in the attempt. A strong pull upon one rein, a cruel thrust of the spurs, and another horse has gone flying from the brink of the gorge.

No second horse follows "Rex" into the forest!

A few hours later, a band of excited men stand round a man and horse—*both dead*—as they lie at the bottom of that gorge. And as they talk of the events of the past few hours—the plot against Elton and the dastardly attempt upon the life of Alice Davis—they look into each other's faces with glances of stern satisfaction.

Wickedness has been its own executioner!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LOST PEOPLE.

It has been a fortnight since Mr. Davis has been able to leave his bed. The trying hours spent in the forest searching for the records, the weary tramp home and the excitement which followed, upon the return of his daughter from her perilous ride, all conspired to utterly prostrate the master of the Davis homestead, and for days together he tossed upon his couch delirious; as his daughter bent lovingly above him, she greatly feared that his days on earth were numbered.

Many visitors called at the house during these days of anxious watching, and expressed their sympathy, interlarding their remarks with indignant utterances respecting the treatment her family had received at the hands of Walter Desmond. Somehow, the whole matter leaked out, and all the Luray Valley was thrilled with mingled feelings;—indignation at the treatment of Alice and her friend Elton; pity for the poor slave; satisfaction that the lawless scoundrel had been so quickly visited by the retribution which his crimes deserved; and joy that the two young people, so popular all through that section, were in a fair way to enter the most responsible estate known to humanity, with so much promise of prosperity and happiness.

Their mutual relation being no longer a secret, the only thing which served to dampen the joyous congratulations of ardent friends was the serious illness of Mr. Davis. For three days he seemed to linger on the very threshold of death. His life, like some faint taper-flame, breathed upon by an unfriendly air, appeared to hesitate, doubtful if best to flicker on, or perish. Then the crisis came and passed, and each day now brought him a little added strength.

Not long after he was able to sit in his chair, he

requested Alice to go to the study and bring the plates, about which he had raved almost constantly during his delirium. So much so, in truth, that Alice had been forced to give more than one evasive answer to the physician's questions as to what could be the disturbing subject on her father's mind. Through the long nights of fever, he had raved about "lost records, buried treasure, prehistoric people," and would narrate portions of what occurred during the lonely hours when, with his slaves, he had wandered through the forest in search of the mysterious mound.

Alice was forced to pacify and restrain him now, during his early convalescence, as best she could, knowing the unwisdom of permitting him to indulge in the mental exercise of such examination during his present weak condition. The season was very favorable to his recovery. Besides, Alice permitted herself to drop sundry encouraging hints of her own assured prosperity and happiness which encouraged her father not a little.

He was very much shocked to hear of the death of Walter Desmond—still more when he heard under what circumstances he died. As may be imagined, all that Alice said of her own matters was judiciously communicated to him in such a manner, and at such times as she judged most likely to stimulate and encourage him. And now that he knew of Elton's good fortune and that, at the same time, he was relieved of intolerable persecution by the death of Desmond, he seemed to experience a certain composure of mind such as he had not enjoyed before for many weeks.

As the days went by and he grew stronger, his desire to examine the copper discs, which he had found in the centre of the stone, became more intense.

"Alice, I must look at them this very evening!" he exclaimed, one night just after his daughter had brought him his supper. "I am sure that I could go up to the study now, I am certainly strong enough; besides, this sort of thing will do me no good; a look at those plates would benefit me more than all that you could do for me!"

Alice realized the force of the remark, as she observed the eager light in his eye.

"Well, you must not think of going this evening,"

she said. "Try to compose yourself, get a good night's rest, and, after breakfast to-morrow, I will go with you and give you every possible assistance."

This proposition was not at all in accordance with the wishes of her father. Now that he was fairly on the road to recovery, the very uppermost desire in his mind was to know, if possible, the revelation locked up in the Hebrew characters written on those discs. After some discontented grumbling, he concluded to accede to the wishes of his daughter and postpone all investigation until the morrow.

As she entered the room with his breakfast, the following morning, Alice was delighted to note the marked improvement in his appearance. He seemed quite vigorous, for one recently so ill. Therefore, with cheerful words she encouraged him to partake heartily of the food which she had prepared.

"Strange that he does not eat more," she thought; "can it be the excitement of his prospective labor, this morning, that takes away his appetite?"

Alas! poor Alice, did you but know it, only this excitement enables him to eat at all! But she did not know this, nor how near the sombre shadow of another great sorrow was to the ascending sun of her own happiness.

Breakfast is soon eaten by the hope-inspired scholar, and, accompanied by Alice, he ascends to his study, which he has not entered for many days. Soon the ancient plates are spread upon the table before him, and he is hard at work trying to decipher what is written on them.

"Looks like a sort of bas-relief," observed Alice, as she stood behind her father's chair and looked down upon the plates which he was studying.

"Well, I should say this work was done by striking some blunt instrument as it was pressed against the copper," he answered. "It is certainly going to be a slow job, and one in which I fear you can give me very little assistance, Alice."

"I hardly understand why you should find it so difficult to decipher the writing, father," she remarked; "you are certainly familiar enough with Hebrew——"

"Ah, yes," he interrupted; "but this is very different, and that is what proves the astonishing antiquity of the work. All this is written absolutely without vowel-points; therefore, I shall be compelled to do what is considered a very critical work by the scholarly translators of early Hebrew manuscripts; I shall have to supply such vowels, to the several consonants, as will give the most probable and sensible meaning to the translation. I have now no doubt at all but that I hold in my hand the story of a long-lost people!—a most peculiar branch of the human family, which, believing that God was especially favorable to it, from the tent of a wandering nomad, through various stages of barbarism and bondage rose to a high point of national power and glory; only to have the old race tendency toward migration develop itself afresh during a period of national calamity, and result at last, in a handful of discouraged fugitives penetrating the unknown wilds of this New World, to end their journey and their existence, in the Valley of Luray!"

Finding that she was not likely to be of any use to her father, Alice finally left him to pursue his labors alone, and withdrew from the study. Two or three times, during the morning, she looked in on him to see if he desired anything; but each time he seemed to be deeply engrossed with his task.

The noon hour approached and preparations were made for dinner. Aunt Chloe had taken special pains to cook some dainty "tid-bits," that no one but a Virginia "black mammy" of the last generation would ever have thought of, on purpose to tempt the appetite of her master.

Alice feared for the result of such protracted efforts upon her father's health; she knew that it would require quite an effort, on her part, to induce him to stop work just at this stage, but she was resolved that he should stop.

"Father, your dinner is ready, will you come down to it now?"

"No, dear, I do not wish any dinner."

He made this reply to his daughter as she stood in the door of his study, but without taking his eyes off the work over which he was bending. With a sweet

smile, his daughter went over and standing by his side, placed her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Dear father," she said, "you must not work any longer to-day. How much of this have you translated? Stop now and tell me what you have discovered; remember, I am suffering from curiosity as well as yourself."

By this innocent subterfuge, the sweet girl induced her father to lay aside his pencil and—somewhat reluctantly, we must admit—comply with her wishes.

"I have just finished the first plate," he said, "and of all the wonderful things! Do you know, my ideas about those Jewish travellers appear——"

"But, father, what of the treasure?" interrupted Alice; is any treasure mentioned?"

"Really, I never thought of it," was the reply; "I have thought of nothing but the wonderful mine of knowledge which I have unearthed and shall shortly publish to the world; I tell you *that* will be treasure enough for *me*."

By thus absorbing Eldridge Davis in the theme uppermost in his mind, his daughter was able to lead him down to dinner almost without his realizing whither he was being led; nor did she suffer him to return to his study again that day.

After the first day's labor the work of translating the records became somewhat easier, yet it was not until the fifth day after the work was begun, that the last word which those migratory strangers had stamped upon the copper plates was written out. Of course the task would have been finished much sooner had Mr. Davis been in good health; indeed, it would have been finished sooner, as it was, had it not been for the restraining influence and persuasion of his daughter, who would only permit him to labor a few hours each day.

In the meantime we must not forget certain sable friends who, since the eventful night on which the mound was entered, have scarcely ventured to come near their master's dwelling. Alice, as they are well aware, has long since heard the whole story of their cowardice that night, when they deserted their master through fear of ghosts. Uncle Ned has been especially

crestfallen, and never permitted Alice to see his face until the serious illness of his master. Then the faithful old negro came into her presence, and, with tears of penitence, confessed the fault of which he had been guilty.

"'Fore de Lawd, Missa," he said, "ef ole Ned hadn't seed dem bones all white an' orful like, he'd nebber 'serted massa, dar in de woods; he sartinly wouldn't."

In the same tenor ran the protestations of the other deserters, who came up to the house for pardon and to ask after the health of "Massa Davis."

To all these Alice gave a kind word, and sent them away happy with the assurance that her father cherished no harsh feelings toward them, and that as soon as he recovered, he would reward them for what good behavior they had manifested that night in the wood.

All through the anxious days of watching, John Elton had been a constant visitor at the house, and in this had quite disappointed certain young bloods in the valley, who, since the news of his good fortune, and the death of his rival, desired to lionize him, and sought to monopolize the greater part of his time. But Elton did not care to be lionized: he much preferred to share his time between his duties at Hopkins Hall, and the pleasure which he found in the society of Alice Davis. During the sickness of Mr. Davis, the young man suffered no day to pass without his calling at the former's home, where he usually spent some hours in assisting his *fiancée* to attend to the many duties which now demanded her attention. And when the father sank into temporary repose, the words of love and comfort which were breathed into the young girl's ear, as she sought fresh air for a moment on the veranda, gave her new strength and courage for the vigils of the night.

So the time passed, until the master of the house was convalescent. Then there was an interview between the two men. No one knew what was said by either; but as both were gentlemen of Virginia, it is safe to surmise that it was more in gentle intimation than in actual statement, and that gentle manners and a warm handclasp were more eloquently full of meaning than any long array of words could possibly have been.

While Mr. Davis was working on the plates, the

overseer had been arranging for a visit to the cairn, Alice having received permission from her father to let her lover into the secret of his midnight adventure. Elton resolved that no part of the work, done amid so much discouragement by Mr. Davis, should go to waste: hence, he resolved to take some of the most trusty men on the Hopkins plantation, and, in the near future, pay a visit to that same cairn, when he determined that a thorough search should be made for whatever might be of interest to an antiquarian.

The five days' labor is ended, and Mr. Davis has the story stamped upon the copper plates, all written out in his own mother-tongue. Alice would not read a word until it was all finished, and the following record was spread before her eyes:

"I, Obal, of the Tribe of Ephraim, of the children of the Captivity, do make this record of the journey of my people to this far land, even to the region called Arsareth; where we have dwelt now for many days, and where the few men (or families) who remain alive are like to perish speedily of the Red Heathen who dwell in the desert.

"By Gozan dwelt we, and in the cities of the Medes; whither we were carried from our own land (Israel) by Sargon, King of Assyria.

"But the heathen who were round about us smote us sore, and stayed us from the worship of the God of Israel.

"So it came to pass in the tenth year of our captivity, that we took counsel together to journey beyond the heathen and go by a long way, even a year and a half, through a land whereof we were told in a dream, even unto this region of Arsareth. Therefore we secretly sent messengers to Egypt praying that Pharaoh might give us help: at the same time the Lord gave us favor of the people in the midst of which we dwelt, and they gave presents unto us—gold, silver, precious stones and fine raiment, whereof the greater part hath been lost in our long journey, but much remaineth even unto (this day).

"So it came to pass that on the twenty and third day of the month Adar we took our wives and (young children) and came to the narrow passages of the Great River (Euphrates) which we found in time of flood, but the Most High shewed us favor so that the flood abated, and entering into the narrow passages we crossed over unto the other side.

"Thence there remained for us a great journey through the desert; many fell asleep (died) as we journeyed by the way,

and we feared lest the Lord had purposed to destroy us for our idolatry in the land of our fathers.

"But being strengthened of the Most High by wonders in the heavens, we journeyed on until we came to the Great Sea, whither Pharaoh had sent his workmen and builded ships for us that we might pass to the farthest country.

"Thence we sailed for many days until we found a greater Sea beyond, which was full of tempests and many perils: also we were near to being dead through hunger, when we entered a Great Lake, the like to which hath not been seen. Here were men of a red color who served the Great Wind which dwelt in the West; and these wrought kindly with us, and fed us with such food as they possessed, until we came to the river which is at the end of the lake. Thence into still (other) river, whence we came unto a place where it parteth.

"Here, seeing the country was goodly, we came to land; and because of the present cold, made for ourselves houses in which we thought to live unto the end. We also slew the beasts which we found in the land, of the skins whereof we made for ourselves clothing.

"In this manner we lived many years; we planted seed and reaped harvests, and children were born in our homes; also we strove to teach the Holy Law unto the heathen who worship the Wind.

"But in time these became exceeding angry against us and dealt treacherously with us. Lying in ambush they, in one day, put a great number of us to death.

"So it came to pass that we were exceedingly tormented because of the heathen, and year by year our numbers became less, until but few and feeble are the men left unto us. Verily, the anger of the Lord hath followed us across the Great Sea, even as it was told our fathers that it should come upon them in the day when they forsook the commandments of the Most High!

"We shall not again behold the land that floweth with milk and honey, nor be buried in the sepulchres of our fathers!

"All that is left of the goodly store of treasure, given us by the servants of Sargon, have we hidden in a sure place, even in the wonderful cave whereof no man hath seen the like.

"Lo, is it not in the Valley, about twenty furlongs hence?

"Whoso readeth this record, let him find the hill that is covered with pools of water, wherein is a great hole filled with stones, from which the heathen suppose the Evil One cometh forth as the wind; this enter, and trusting in the Holy One of Israel, with lights burning, descend to the Hall of Beauty, where the flowers are frozen, and the cedars of Lebanon are turned to stone!

"In this place we hid the treasure between the feet of the great dragon, and, astonished at the many wonders of the

place returned, believing, of a truth, that we had found the Most Holy Place of all the earth!

"Let whosoever goeth to take the treasure, remember that the curse of a Lost People shall rest upon him, in the day he maketh known the wonders of the cave.

"Thus have I, Obal, written; and have digged a place in the sepulchre of the Ancient Dead, and prepared a place for the writing, where it may abide.

"Blessed be he who may find it in the days to come! May he be able to find the treasure whereof I speak, so shall much good come upon him, if so be he reveal not the secret of the cave!"

Not a word was spoken by either father or daughter for some time after the latter had finished reading. Amazement effectually robbed her of the power to think; she was lost in a maze of conjecture. The sound of her father's voice roused her from this mental stupor.

"Well, clearly, Alice, we are both wrong in our theories regarding the journey those Jews took in reaching this valley. It appears they did not sail down the Euphrates at all; most probably they did not sail upon it, even, but contented themselves by simply crossing it; entering perhaps, through some small tributaries, termed here 'narrow passages' or, possibly, there might have been a time when they could have forded it, as the writing would seem to imply."

"Possibly a miracle in their favor," said Alice. "Obal says, 'the Most High shewed us favor so that the flood abated.'"

Mr. Davis smiled at this, but made no comment other than to pursue the theme which they were considering.

"Then after the long tramp through Syria, to think of the Egyptians being ready to help them with ships on the shores of the Mediterranean," he said; "but so it must have been, since Obal writes like one who is telling the truth. We look upon the voyage of Columbus as a great undertaking, but it was a small thing in comparison to the voyage accomplished by these fugitives who, after a journey of many months in a burning clime, embarked from the farther shores of the inland sea, for a voyage which took them forever from their

own hemisphere; and, after causing them to endure the perils of unknown sea and ocean, landed them in a drear wilderness, amid countless numbers of hostile savages.

"How very clear the narrative is," he continued; "there can be no doubt whatever, but that the 'great lake' spoken of here, is the Chesapeake Bay; the river which they supposed at the end of it, the Potomac; and the other river, on which they sailed until they came to its fork, must be our own Shenandoah."

While Eldridge Davis was looking at matters entirely from the view-point of the student, his daughter's mind reverted to the latter part of the writing, where mention was made of the treasure, said to be hidden in a cave.

"Do you think it would be possible to find the cave mentioned here?" she asked.

"Yes, I rather think I know just what hill is meant," he said. "I know of a conical hill, not so very far from here, either; and on it there are pools of water, as here described. From the character of the soil I should say the percolation of water from those pools would likely cause a cavern. Mr. Elton is to come to-morrow, is he not? Then instead of planning to visit the mound, as we intended, we will defer that trip and pay our first visit to this same hill which I surely believe contains the cave."

Then, while Alice's mind was filled with the thoughts of dragon's feet and treasure hid between them, her father took up the thread of his theory, and began to describe the hiding of the copper plates in the mound, amid the bones of a prehistoric and crude people. Although rosy visions filled her mind, so that the words her father uttered were lost upon her, still, ever and anon she would be startled by a strange earnestness of manner on his part; a something which seemed rather to indicate fever, or great exhaustion, than anything else. Then again, there would be an incoherence in his utterances—much like the result of intoxication. Alice noticed this, but paid no particular attention to it.

Alas, that we should be compelled, in this world, to read the real meaning of events only when it is too late to prevent the evils coming from them!

That evening, after Alice had retired to her room, she heard, at regular intervals, a dull, "thumping" sound, as of a hammer used upon a soft substance. She listened for a time and then, as the sound seemed to come from her father's study, she resolved to see what he was about. Without knocking, she turned the handle of the study door.

Her father was stooping over the hearth, hammer in hand, and was beating on a shapeless mass of metal.

As Alice entered the room he raised up from his work—she hardly knew him. His eyes were bright—we may say brilliant—while his face was perfectly aflame with fever.

"Why, what are you doing, father?" she asked. "Why are you destroying your plates? Just think of how great value they would be to the world!"

"My child," was the reply, "have you forgotten the curse of that Prophet of a Lost People? *There is a curse on him who reveals the secret of the cave!* I am destroying the secret of the cave!"

Alice took in the situation instantly. The work and excitement attending the translation of the writing on the plates, had been too much for her father. He was now fevered, and delirious!

CHAPTER XXV.

INTO THE LIGHT.

THE physician hastily summoned by Alice left her father's chamber with a very solemn countenance. His only reply to the eager questions addressed to him was a shake of the head, that sufficiently indicated the hopelessness of the case. Brain fever had set in, and, as the patient had not fairly recovered from his former illness, everything seemed to indicate that there could be but one result.

Mr. Davis had fallen into a stupor, almost immediately on entering the bedroom on the lower floor, whither Alice had led him from the study, and all through the following day he gave no sign of consciousness, simply lying with flushed face and closed eyes, occasionally moaning, or feebly asking for water.

"He wanted to see you, John; yesterday he asked if you would be here to-day. He seemed so happy that everything had turned out right at last; is it not too sad that just now, when the clouds have all passed by, he should be taken from me?" And the sorrow-stricken girl bowed her head upon her lover's shoulder to conceal the tears she could no longer restrain.

"Cheer up, Alice, darling," said Elton, "you must not break down like this, when the result is as yet doubtful. You must remember that your father's life is in the hands of our Heavenly Father, who is able to restore him to you, even from the very brink of the grave."

This conversation occurred on the first day of the relapse, as Alice walked down to the gate with her lover, who had spent the greater part of the afternoon at the Davis homestead, and now, in the gloaming, was taking his leave.

"I shall come over again to-morrow," he said.

"Possibly your father may be conscious by that time, and desire to speak with me."

Nearly a week elapsed before the sick man showed any signs of returning consciousness. It was on an afternoon, and Alice had been sewing in her father's room, to while away the hours of watching. She was noting the change which the last few days had wrought in his appearance.

While the girl was anxiously watching her father's countenance, she failed to note the reflection of her own face from a mirror which hung upon the wall. Her friend, Elton, had noted the change in her appearance which the glass revealed, but, as there was no help or remedy for it, like a prudent man, he refrained from speaking of it to her, knowing that the anxiety to which, of late, she had been a prey, together with the nights of vigil by her father's bedside had wrought the change.

Mr. Davis was sleeping. All through the day, he had appeared calmer, and shortly after one o'clock had fallen into this slumber—the most peaceful, apparently, of any which he had enjoyed during his illness.

Alice made no sound, lest she should disturb his slumber, but continued to ply her needle, ever and anon studying carefully her father's countenance. Finally she let her work fall from her hands, and was gazing abstractedly out of the window, when she heard her name pronounced by a faint voice.

"Alice, dear, have I been sick a very long time?"

Arising from her seat, the girl went over to the bedside.

"Yes, father, but you are much better and are going to get well. You must not talk any just now."

A faint smile played upon the face of the sick man.

"I have been very foolish, daughter, I have been guilty of a great waste of time and effort——"

"Indeed you must not talk, father," Alice said. "If you want to get well you must keep perfectly still, and rest."

"You might as well know the worst, my child," was the reply; "I have had strange dreams, since my eyes have been blind to earthly things, and were I to mingle again amid the things of earth, I fancy I could see more

clearly, and live to a better purpose, in the future, than I have in the past; but all is now over, and——"

"Oh, father, you must not talk like this," cried Alice, as her eyes filled with tears. "If you will only do as I say, and remain perfectly quiet, I am sure you will steadily improve. If you should leave me, I would indeed be friendless."

"No, Alice, not friendless, for you have the love of a true and honest man, one who will deem it his highest privilege to love and cherish you always. Also you will have fortune, for be the treasure hidden by those fugitives great or small, still will it be a fortune for the modest requirements of any planter in this valley. But enough of that. I have long felt that I should never enjoy the fruits of all these years of toil. Sufficient will it be, to me, to have the honor of knowing that I have made a discovery so important, and have, thereby, secured the fortune of my child. It will now be no hard task to find the cavern, and secure the treasure. I leave that task to your friend and future husband, Mr. Elton."

"Father, unless you stop talking instantly I must leave the room," said Alice, driven to desperation by her father's persistence in talking. Then she hastened to add: "Forgive me, dear father, but indeed you must not talk; you will exhaust all the little strength which you have left. May I not retire from your room now, and let you get a little sleep? It would strengthen you so much."

Just then there was a faint knock upon the door; Alice, on opening it found Aunt Chloe, who in a low voice said that Mr. Elton was below, and, if possible, would like to speak with her. Low as the words of the servant had been, they were overheard by the patient upon the bed.

"Alice, Alice, come here a moment."

Bidding Aunt Chloe remain outside, Alice went over to her father.

"My dear daughter," said he, "do not deceive yourself. I am perfectly aware of my condition, and while I fully appreciate your desire to have me avoid conversation, yet I assure you, it is useless. *I have not an hour, perhaps, to live!* Tell Chloe to invite Mr. Elton

into the room; there are some things I desire to say to you both, before I pass away."

The perfect confidence with which her father spoke these words alarmed Alice greatly. Hastening to the door, she told the servant to invite Mr. Elton up, as her father desired to speak with him.

As the manly form of the young overseer entered the room, Mr. Davis attempted to raise his head from the pillow, but had not the strength to do so. As his head was raised and another pillow placed beneath it by Elton, the quick eye of the latter noted the hue of Mr. Davis' countenance and the strange expression which it wore, and he knew instantly all the dread truth, which the great love of Alice for her father had made her so slow to comprehend.

"Take a seat, Mr. Elton," the sick man said; "Alice, have you mentioned to him the result of my translations?"

"No, father," was the reply, "your illness has driven all else out of my mind."

"Well, it is time that he should know; will you please bring the paper on which I have copied it? You will find it in my table-drawer, in the study."

Alice was conscious that this was not the time to disobey her parent; without a word she brought the paper.

"Will you please read it," was the next request.

Neither of the men uttered a word until the paper was read to the end. Then Eldridge Davis addressed himself to the young overseer.

"Mr. Elton, you remember the question which you asked me during our last interview? You then did me the honor to ask the hand of my child. I repeat, you did me the honor, because no true man can do another greater honor than to offer to consecrate his life to the happiness of that other's daughter, and become her husband. I am very weak, hence my words must be few; when we conversed upon this subject the last time, I considered my daughter almost a penniless girl. I now believe her able to command a fortune, and am thankful that it has been my patience and labor that has secured for her this dower; for, although much may remain for you to do, I am conscious that in the matter of 'Ouija,' and the discovery of the copper

plates lay the chief burden of this undertaking, and I am also conscious that on my shoulders that burden rested. I have reaped my harvest! The work that remains for you is easy, the reward will probably be great. Have you ever noticed a cone-shaped hill on the Newmarket road, about two miles in a westerly direction from this spot?"

"I know exactly the hill to which you refer, sir," was the reply. "I have been on it, and passed round it, frequently. It is thickly covered with brush and has round it several pools of water."

"Very good," said Mr. Davis; "then as I am perfectly understood, I will name my only wish regarding this matter, and require one promise from you. I wish no one to know of the existence of that cave—in case you find one. It is the one condition imposed by those who owned the treasure, and I feel that their wishes should be respected. I am sure, Mr. Elton, that if you make careful preparations you will be able to enter this cave and secure the treasure without assistance, so you and Alice can then keep the secret locked in your own breasts. Do you make the promise?"

A momentary hesitation on the part of the young people, then both inclined their heads, and the wish of the dying man was gratified. No word was spoken for a short period; the patient's eyes were closed and he seemed to be resting. Alice and her friend almost feared to breathe, lest they should disturb him.

Presently the eyes of the sick man opened, and in a very low voice—almost as though talking to himself—he said:

"I now see clearly, and for the first time in my life; at least for the first time since my childhood. Yes, at last, I see the *truth!* What weaklings are we during all the hours of our boasted strength! Strange that it is only when the bodily powers fail that the mists are driven from the mind, and the spirit's eyes are opened. Since I have lain on this couch, Alice, I have seen many things which you could not see; there have been visitors with us in this room, of whose presence you were all unconscious. Your mother has, more than once, stood by my side and besought me to leave no lingering doubt on your mind, that it might be in my power

to dispel. For dreams and fables, I have turned my back upon the True Light, and I fear, have more than once poisoned even your mind, Alice."

"Oh, father," sobbed the girl, "do not talk like this! You have been all that was good and true to me. To have had such a father has been the chief blessing of my life. Please rest now; let us leave the room, will you not? and do you try to sleep awhile."

As she spoke the last words, both the young people started toward the door: by a gesture the father recalled them, and motioned them to take seats nearer the bedside.

"I shall sleep soon," he said, "the sleep which, on this earth, shall know no waking; yes, daughter, I am satisfied, now, to accept your Bible; to accept the doctrine of your mother, which was the faith of our fathers. Surely one such life as I have led is all sufficient; I have no desire to pass this way again; I desire no re-incarnation! Of the mysteries of our Faith, some are clearer now than they have ever been before; some are mysteries still. But I have learned a new lesson! A lesson taught me by disappointment; by hope deferred; yea, even by my success in reading secrets locked within the portals of the spirit world—but learned, most of all, while under the heavy hand of this affliction; and that lesson is of the everlasting and unconditioned love of God! Oh, Alice, despite the skepticism and neglect with which I have treated this most vital truth of our religion, I now feel the love of God, like heaven's sunshine, dispelling the darkness of my soul! Give me your hands, my children. May heaven grant you all happiness; may your lives be crowned with peace."

As he said this, Eldridge Davis placed the hand of his daughter in that of the man beside her, and clasped them both in his own, now cold with approaching death.

Elton spoke no word; he felt the silence was too sacred to be broken by anything that he could say.

Alice found it possible to express her feelings only in the all-prevailing language of sobs and tears.

A sacred hush filled the room. Whence came it? A strange light was stealing o'er the face of the dying

man. A light that never fell from sun or star. A light which seemed a reflection of the glory which sits enthroned upon the brow of Peace.

Again was the voice of Mr. Davis heard—a mere whisper, which both Alice and her lover stooped low to catch. "The evening darkens—earth's shadows gather—but there is morning in my soul!"

Slowly the light faded, and was succeeded by that expressionless calm that shall one day rest upon the face of all—the calm of death!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAVERN AND ITS TREASURE.

It has now been several days since Eldridge Davis was laid in the cemetery beside his wife; days during which the veil of sadness has hung about the old homestead and its occupants. Alice bore up bravely until the funeral services were concluded, then entered her room to leave it no more for a week. The fatigue and grief to which she had been subject had worn her completely out, and after the tension of her anxiety relaxed, she felt the full effects of what she had passed through.

In the quarters of the servants the spirit of mourning prevailed; be it said to the credit of the sons of Africa, that whenever, on any plantation, their master's body was lowered into the grave, nearly every sable face that had belonged to him would be wet with tears.

Despite his many failings, the dead master had been much beloved by the slaves who remained upon the plantation, and the sorrow which they felt at his death was increased by their sympathy for the young girl who wept over the loss of a loving father.

John Elton was too entirely a gentleman to intrude upon the grief of Alice. While he called regularly each day, he made it a point not to linger more than a few moments, usually contenting himself with sending a respectful message, or tender token, to the girl he loved.

Great as was the love of Alice for her father, the keen edge of her grief was dulled, somewhat, by the soothing effects of time, which has power to calm and ultimately subdue all earthly things. Very pale and feeble was she, when she made her first appearance at the table after the funeral. And how the tears broke out afresh at sight of the chair which sat just opposite

to hers, but which was destined to do service for her father no more forever!

Elton now wisely concluded that it was not good for Alice to be so much alone. On the day after she first came from her room he spent several hours with her, and endeavored to draw her mind off her bereavement by dwelling upon the social qualities of Mr. King, the Philadelphia lawyer, who, after much urging, had consented to be his guest until after Christmas, and he even made her smile as he repeated the droll sayings of Jakey Thompson. He also sought to stimulate her mind somewhat by brief and modest references to the sum of money that had come to him from the father of Jakey, and the manner in which he proposed to invest it.

He suffered several more days to pass and made several more visits to the Davis homestead, before he deemed it prudent to make any explicit reference to the treasure said to be hidden in a cave. It was one evening in the first week of December, as John and Alice sat in the parlor, before the blazing hearth. The cheer and comfort of the fire and its surroundings made itself so sensibly felt, that under its influence Alice appeared to be in better spirits than at any time since the death of her father. Besides, the young gentleman had just been making some requests and asking some questions which had resulted in bringing a very becoming blush to the pale countenance of the sweet girl.

"Oh, rash mortal, I could not think of such a thing. Why, I have nothing to wear that would be fit for such an occasion."

"Yes, but you have over two weeks——"

"Fie! what are two weeks, pray, for such preparation as would be required for *that!*"

These are only samples of the sentences spoken by each, in the red glow of that December fire. But Alice was thinking of it, notwithstanding she had so emphatically declared she could not do so. She was thinking how dreary would be the hours if spent alone in the house, now that her father was taken from it; and how at best, the slaves could afford but poor company for her, during the long winter evenings. She never felt so utterly helpless before, not even when forced to look

upon the prospect of being turned penniless upon the world. In fact, the grief and perplexity through which she had recently passed, not to speak of her illness, had done much toward weakening her nerves, and now she found herself the head of a family of utterly helpless servants with not even an overseer to help her attend to the affairs of the plantation. Besides, the death of Mr. Davis had precipitated the crisis, and certain financial obligations demanded a speedy adjustment. Yes, if ever a defenceless girl needed the strong arm of a loving protector to lean upon, that girl was Alice Davis just at this juncture.

Then why did she hesitate?—a question that can best be answered by our lady readers.

"But, John, it seems so sudden—seems hardly right to be married so soon after—after what has occurred."

Alice uttered the above sentence in reply to something her friend had just said.

"But, my darling, this is just one strong reason why I desire that you shall arrange for our marriage to come off about Christmas," said Elton. "Indeed, under the circumstances, you must not remain here; you never required a friend to love and protect you as you do now, such a friend as can only be found in the person of a husband. We need make no demonstration. Only a quiet wedding with a few true friends as invited guests, and a supper for all the servants in the quarters;—this would be all-sufficient, would offend no good taste, and do no injustice to any one, living or dead."

The strong pleading of masculine eyes and the warm clasp of a masculine hand are said to be forces hard for the feminine heart to successfully resist at any time; but when these forces, exerted to the utmost there in the firelight, were supplemented by every possible consideration both of affection and reason the matter could have but one result. It was arranged that John and Alice should be married during the Christmas season.

Then Elton spoke of a matter which, for some time, had been to him second only in point of interest to the question of his marriage, *viz.*, the cavern mentioned on the copper discs.

"As I know just where the hill is, I shall, with your permission, set out to find the cave to-morrow."

Elton made this remark, just before taking his leave of Alice.

"Are you sure the hill to which you refer is the right one, John, the one that contains the cave?" she asked.

"No, not sure, darling," he replied; "but I consider it so likely to be that I intend to give it a most thorough examination."

"But, in case you discover the entrance to a cave and go into it alone, is there not danger? You might fall, or get lost; really, I shall be quite uneasy about you all through the day."

"I assure you there is no cause for apprehension on my account whatever," said Elton, tenderly. "Surely I am all unworthy the love of such a girl as you, Alice; I only trust that I may be fortunate enough by to-morrow's search, to make you the richest woman in all this valley, even as you have already made me the richest and the proudest man, by permitting me to claim your love and favor."

Early the following morning, our hero started out on his search for the cavern, and what it might contain. There was much which he felt it would be best to take with him, but the fear of attracting attention caused him to content himself with such things only, as he considered indispensable: a large ball of cord, a long rope, made of such material as best afforded strength without bulkiness, a lantern, two stout knives, a hatchet and chisel—these formed the greater part of his outfit, but in his preparation for whatever might lie before him, we must not forget to mention the abundant quantity of eatables which he packed in his game-bag.

He also had another game-bag—or at least what looked like one; but a closer examination would have revealed the fact that this was really no game-bag at all, but a stout leather sack provided with straps and buckles.

As the overseer took his gun with him, his conduct excited no surprise or comment at the Hall, except that

Mr. King hinted a desire to accompany him, but a plausible excuse, invented by Elton, kept the lawyer at home without giving him offence.

Although it was no great distance from Hopkins Hall to the hill which our friend was seeking, yet he forbore to hurry on his way toward it: nor was the moderate pace he took caused by any lack of interest in the business on which he was bent; it was simply the outcome of his commendable caution. He was going to seek for, and if possible enter, a cavern! He knew not how many hours of hard labor were before him; nor what sudden demand might be made upon his strength. Doubtless there would be rocks to lift; or he might be forced to climb over huge obstructions.

Still walking at the same moderate pace, his mind reverted to the sweet girl, in whose interests, chiefly, he had set out upon this quest. As the brisk December breeze blew upon his face it seemed to stimulate every nerve in his body. His face flushed, and there was a tingling sensation all through him, even to his finger-tips. Scarcely could he restrain himself from shouting aloud.

"She really did promise to marry me at Christmas," he whispered softly to himself. "Just think, only a matter of two or three weeks before our wedding-day! Oh, I am so glad that this lawyer came to me with such fortunate tidings just at this time! Wonder if there is any cave in that hill, after all? Even if there is, no doubt that story translated by Mr. Davis was all moonshine. I do hope I may be able to find something of value; it would make Alice so happy!—But then we are going to be happy anyhow; whether I find any treasure or not, I shall certainly find my heart's treasure!"

Thus he walked on, full of sweet imaginations which were glorified by the ever-changing, all-resplendent tints of youth and love. He walked on until before him loomed up the hill which, to his excited fancy, held so many possibilities beneath its dome.

"Now if this hill was ever entered by any mortal, there ought to be some indications of it," he soliloquized, as he reached the foot of it. "Well, there is

nothing beats a careful inspection," he thought, "so here goes for a search."

Hanging the bag, in which he had concealed his rope and the other things necessary to his purpose, upon a bush, he set his gun beside them. Next he broke a stout stick and was ready to begin the search.

He had already arranged his plan of action; he would slowly make the circle of the hill, looking carefully for any indication of hole or crevice. He thought it possible that the people who first found the cave—whoever they might have been—had left some mark by which the entrance could be recognized. He calculated that two such circles round the hill, one above the other, would leave very little ground to be examined.

Slowly, and with great caution, he made his first round. Many were the obstructions which he encountered; all round the base of the hill was a perfect thicket. In fact, so dense was the growth of weeds and small bushes, that he found it exceedingly wearisome to make his way through them. Occasionally a rabbit would dart from a bush at his feet and scud off round the hill, like the wind. Every slight depression was critically looked at, and into most of them he thrust his stick.

The result was always the same; no entrance to any cave, nor anything that had such appearance.

It was, perhaps, ten o'clock when John, having made the circuit of the hill, reached the spot where he had hung his sack. He was now quite hungry, but as it was not time to eat his lunch he resolved to make the other circle.

"Surely nothing can be hidden in that little cave at the top of the hill," he thought. "I might look there—but no, the language read to me never could have referred to a hole like that. I will continue to search as I began."

There is no need that we should follow him as he makes this second circle. It is but a repetition of the former, only this time he searched even more carefully; certainly he wasted more time than on his first round. It was high noon when he returned to the starting-point to eat his luncheon. Wiping the perspiration

from his brow, he proceeded to attack the food in an almost savage manner, as though he considered it in some way responsible for his failure to find the cave.

As he ate, he meditated:—"What if some of these pools of water should have filled up the entrance? Whoever hid the treasure might have filled in the mouth of the cave with stones and earth, and what more natural than that such a depression would become a pond!"

The more he thought about it, the more firmly did this theory fasten itself upon him. It certainly seemed more reasonable to him, now on second thought, that whoever might have wished to hide anything of value in a cave, would take pains to obliterate every trace of their work, rather than mark the entrance to the hiding-place.

"But the Indians evidently knew all about it," he muttered; "they knew the cave was here, but feared to come near it on account of the 'Evil One' who they supposed, made it his special abode."

Then doubts began to creep into his mind.

"I fear the whole thing is a fable," thought he. "Mr. Davis has evidently been of unsound mind for some years past, especially on matters of this kind. What could be more natural than that he should—weakened as he was by recent illness—imagine all this rubbish about a cavern in this hill containing treasure hidden by a remnant of the 'Lost Tribes'? But, in that case, how shall we account for the copper plates?"

While indulging in these conjectures, he had finished his lunch, and in his perplexity, had arisen to his feet and strolled several paces into a clump of bushes which, in his rounds of examination, he had neglected to especially notice. He was abruptly startled out of his reverie by finding himself on the very brink of a shallow depression, the bottom of which was covered with stones. In fact, had he not caught hold of the bushes he would have fallen upon the stones, so near was he to the edge of the depression. He could never tell just what motive prompted him then; but stepping down upon the stones he stooped over and looked at them closely.

Strange that he should grow so pale!

What was it?

A breath of ice-cold air smote him on the face!

For the next half-hour how our hero did work at those stones! At the end of that time he had a hole opened through which he could lower himself into what appeared to be a fissure. Then he ceased his efforts and sat down. He knew that, at this point, a calm mind and steady hand were indispensable.

First he brought the rope, and, after tying knots at regular distances so as to form a sort of ladder, he made the end of it fast to a stout root near the depression. Next he tied the cord fast to a bush and put the ball into his pocket in such a way that the cord would unwind easily, and, after lighting his lantern, let himself down into the hole.

It was a bold undertaking. He might be sliding down into the very bowels of the earth; or into some subterranean and bottomless lake.

As he sank lower, the thought came to him that he had made a mistake in not trying to sound the depths, but he did not pause in the descent.

Another second and his feet rested on solid ground. He seemed to be in a narrow fissure of the length of which he could form no idea, the darkness being dispelled by the light of the lantern only for a few feet in advance of him. But there was no hesitation; he would go forward.

Even as he made the first step in doing so, he again felt the cold wind blow upon his face! A few more steps and he was at the end of the fissure.

By the light of the lantern, he closely scrutinized the wall of earth before him. Still the wind blew upon his face. He noticed a small hole through which it appeared to come. "Was it big enough for him to crawl through? He would at least try."

With this intention he placed his rope upon the ground in such a manner that it might be easily found, then pushing his lantern ahead of him he succeeded in crawling through the hole! It was close work however, and attended with, at least, one alarming event, *viz.*, while in the act of pushing through, a snap in the region of his pocket betokened the fact that the

cord which was to guide him back, had broken. But for this accident he cared little as he had now passed through the aperture.

Where was he?

Surely in Wonderland!

John Elton felt inclined to bite his fingers to see if he were really awake! He found himself in a spacious hall, or chamber, the extent of which he could in no wise determine, in the feeble light afforded by his lantern, although the illuminating power of the light he carried seemed to be wonderfully increased. He could not account for this at first, until he observed the hundreds of glittering substances from which, in every direction, the light was reflected.

Elton stood as though rooted to the spot! Rainbows of ever-changing color rested either end on snow-white and most wondrous statuary. Massive pillars of glittering ice carved by the chisels of a hundred demi-gods towered upward to the lofty and resplendent roof. Chandeliers and inverted tapers depended above his head, while round him were mysterious figures,—giants armed with clubs,—hounds pursuing frightened hares —dance-girls poised in attitudes of inimitable grace, while between their feet bloomed crystal flowers of every conceivable degree of brilliance. Within the lighted space, every variety of fruit, vegetable, and flower seemed mixed in bewildering confusion, while just outside the illuminated circle stood white shapes outlined against the darkness like grim sentinels watching over the spaces of an enchanted garden!

Cold awe stiffened every limb of his body! Out of the very silence came an influence which was almost stifling!

By a resolute effort our hero threw off this sensation and began to advance along the floor of the stupendous cavern, for such it was. He had not proceeded far, before he was compelled to pause before a wonderful column, reaching from the floor sheer up to the lofty dome. It was mystic in whiteness, and adorned with natural carving that most perfectly imitated a masterpiece from some renowned artist.

Passing on he was soon compelled to pause again, as three avenues led out from the hall in which he stood.

After some hesitation, he chose one which led down to a strange formation which, to his imagination, more resembled a turtle than anything that he could think of; and as he passed it, the light fell on its glittering body and dangling legs, and seemed to give it eyes of fire.

Still our hero wandered on amazed and spell-bound by the wonders of the place, all thought of the treasure having temporarily left his mind. Each step reveals new beauties, as stalactites and stalagmites pass under the light which he carries, unfolding their beauties for a moment, only to be lost in darkness as he passes on. Monsters of frightful mien, "Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,"—flowers and vegetables natural and unnatural, all frozen into the enduring rigidity of stone!

But he can go no further: sheer down beneath his feet a black depth yawns, and as he turns his lantern so that the light may strike downward, he fancies it is reflected from the waters of a lake.

Now, for the first time since his entrance into this strange place, John Elton remembers the purpose of his coming and begins to look curiously about him.

"'Between the feet of the dragon,'" he muttered. "Well, easy enough to find a thousand dragons in a place like this! As I cannot go further in this direction, I may as well retrace my steps."

Acting on this idea he had not gone far before his attention was attracted to what appeared to be a most remarkable formation; he touched it. "Not much rock about this!" he exclaimed. His hand rested on a wooden staff driven into a crevice of the rocky floor, while into the top of it was wedged an ordinary Indian arrow. As his eye took all this in, he chanced to glance down the arrow, which was on a level with his head. The lantern shone directly on the rocks beyond and, with a start, he observed that the point of the arrow was turned directly *toward the turtle* of which we have already spoken.

Aye, turtle, or dragon, there it was! And about it, somewhere, he believed the treasure hidden!

He was warm enough now although a moment since he had shivered in the low temperature of the cavern. How eagerly did he search around those slippery rocks!

Again and again he went back and forth along this strange formation; but no indication, whatever, did he see of the handiwork of man; all was the work of nature.

At length he went back, and again looked along the arrow; this time he saw a cavity, between the hanging dripstone, which had before escaped his notice. Indeed he now observed that the arrow *pointed directly toward this cavity!*

Setting down the lantern, he thrust his hands into the hole as far as he could reach, then moved them slowly about. Surely that was no rocky substance with which his hand had come in contact!

Again he pushed against it, and *it moved!*

Another effort, and he drew forth a copper box!

As he regarded it intently, in the dim light, he perceived that it was about fifteen inches square by about a foot high. It was firmly fastened, and, although the crack was visible where the lid joined on to the box, John Elton could find no lock.

"This shall not stop me long," he exclaimed, as he drew from his pocket the chisel he had brought with him. Inserting this beneath the lid, he struck the handle a smart blow with a fragment of rock lying near by. With a snap the invisible fastenings broke, and the lid flew up.

The overseer reeled backward before the splendor which burst upon him! All the changing lights of the kaleidoscope seemed blended in the blinding sheen that darted upward from the casket! The transparent blue of the oriental sapphire mingled its subdued fire with the fiercer blaze of the ruby. Large emeralds were placed in the same setting with topaz and garnet; the ancient ligure blended its more modest tints with those of the variegated onyx, while over all prevailed the clearer lustre of the diamond!

Elton ran his fingers through the gems, and as they dropped back again into their resting-place, a hundred echoes filled the cave with falling diamonds! Again he ran his fingers through the gems, and as the light from his poor lantern fell upon them, from every finger-tip there fell a stream of stars!

Many of the jewels were set in strange designs—

massive bracelets—delicate collars, made of woven threads of gold, and set with gems—golden serpents with ruby eyes, whose every scale terminated alternately in diamond or emerald! These were near the bottom of the casket, while loose gems were thrown promiscuously upon them.

Wonderful as was the cavern it had lost its charms!

Closing the copper casket he placed it beneath his arm, and, wiping away the moisture with which strong emotion had beaded his brow, our hero started for the aperture through which he had entered the cave.

But a burning brain and tingling nerves were not the best auxiliaries in such a matter. Surely he must be near the place, he reasoned; and again he hastened on. Twice he carefully examined the rocky side of the cave, but no trace of crevice or possible outlet did he find.

Suddenly he thought of the diverging ways, which had presented themselves almost as soon as he had entered the place. Possibly he might have passed on by the outlet;—he retraced his steps. How long he wandered back and forth, he never knew. Strange fancies began to creep into his brain; his hair seemed to erect itself upon his head; he spoke aloud—how strange his voice sounded in that rocky place!

"Ha! A grand feast I can make on diamonds! What shape was that which flitted among the columns?"

Heavens!—how the silence pressed upon his brain! What was it? He could scarcely see his way; the rattle of the jewels in the casket seemed to mock him.

Yes, surely the light in his lantern was dying out; he placed the casket on the earth in order to examine his light.

Oh, if the string had not broken!

What?—The flame blew straight out before him and then expired, leaving him in Stygian gloom. But that friendly motion of the lantern's flame had saved him.

Groping in the darkness he grasped the precious box, and, very carefully, made his way straight forward. Nothing but the outward draft could have caused the motion of the flame!

Oh, joy, he has found the aperture!—he is saved!

As he draws the rope up out of the stony depression in the hillside, the stars are shining overhead.

Untying the case, which it was necessary to lash against his breast before he could climb out of the fissure, he placed it in the leather bag which he securely buckled; but, wearied and excited as he was, he did not forget his promise to Eldridge Davis. Before he started homeward he filled the hole in the depression, through which he had entered the cavern, with stones, on which he scattered brush, so that all traces of his visit might be obliterated.

Three weeks from the day John Elton paid his visit to the cavern, there was rejoicing among the servants on the Davis plantation. Recent sorrow prevented all ostentatious display, even had such been the desire of the modest souls who were to be the chief actors in the event before us. But such a thing as display—mere parade—was the farthest thing from their minds. There was comfort; every hearth sent up its Christmas blaze. Yes, and feasting; the table fairly groaned beneath the turkeys and choice viands that were placed upon it.

Only a few very near and dear friends were present. Among the number, we may be sure, Harold Hopkins and our lawyer friend were found; while Jakey Thompson stared in wide-eyed astonishment on all that passed.

Uncle Ned, Aunt Chloe, and their sable companions, crowded the hall and wiped the tears from their dusky faces, as their young mistress took her place beside the man she loved.

Very sweet did she look in her modest attire as the light of the candles, tinged with the deeper glow of the fire, fell upon her. Very sweet and very solemn was her voice, as she repeated after the clergyman,—"for richer, for poorer,"—"to love and to cherish, till death us do part."

There is but little more to tell. The jewels, through the kindness of Mr. King, were judiciously placed, in small quantities, upon the various leading foreign and domestic markets; with the result that Alice Elton was soon possessor of a fortune which made the wealth

with which Walter Desmond once tried to buy her hand, appear contemptible in comparison. Her husband resolved to purchase the dwelling of his would-be rival, remodel it, and make it a home for his wife. So we bid them adieu, at what was formerly Desmond Hall, where they spent their days in love and peace.

All the slaves who accompanied Mr. Davis on his search for the cairn, were set free on the very night of Alice's marriage. While they wept tears of joy at the intelligence, yet they refused to leave "Young Missus," and took up their abode in the quarters at her new home.

The poor slave girl, who was the wife of the unfortunate Parker, was purchased by Alice, on the sale of the Desmond slaves; and she did all in her power to comfort the sad heart of the woman, who mourned the untimely fate of her husband.

Jakey Thompson developed into an intelligent and industrious manhood, which development John Elton did all in his power to promote.

Often, on winter evenings, Alice Elton looked deeply into the red heart of the embers glowing on her hearthstone, and tried to read the mystery of that Imperial Spirit which, burning in the bosom of her father, was strong enough to master the forces of the Occult World, and, amid the darkest poverty, secure that fortune for his daughter which had been concealed in remote ages by the discoverers of "ARSARETH."

THE END.