

stalkers; or, Circumstantial Evidence. A Tale of the South-west

Henry William Herbert

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The Deerstalkers; or, Circumstantial Evidence. A Tale of the South-western Counties.

Henry William Herbert

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ADVERTISEMENT.

If it be necessary to make any remarks on the occasion of offering a new Sporting Story to the reading world, it will be enough to state that this, like "My Shooting-Box," is an attempt to carry a slight thread of connected story through a variety of incidents, on the road, in the field, and the forest; and that its gist is to be found briefly summed up in the last lines of the tale itself, namely, "that there is not only much practical, but much moral utility, in the Gentle Science of Woodcraft."

FRANK FORESTER.

The Cedars, – Jan. 10th, 1849.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPORTSMAN'S DRAG.

When land and rent are gone and spent,
Then driving is most excellent;
For if all other fortunes fail,
You still at least can drive the mail.

Old Song.

In one of the south-western counties of New York, one of those, I mean, which lie between the Hudson and the Delaware, and along the eastern or Mohawk's branch of the latter river, there is a great tract of wild and thinly settled land, well watered and well wooded, and well peopled by those tribes of fur and feather which are so keenly sought by the true sportsman, though, for the most part, human habitations are few and far between.

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In the heart of this wild tract, among the huge, round-headed hills, some stone-ribbed, bare, and crowned with circlets of primeval rock, others feathered with luxuriant woodland from the base to the summit, there lies a beautiful and lonely dell. The mountains, for they indeed merit that name, fall down to it on every side abruptly; and the stream to which it owes its existence, winds to and fro, so deviously, and in such sudden curves, that the eye can scarce detect the point at which it enters or departs from that small verdant basin.

Through this soft lap of ground there sweeps an excellent, though narrow road, dividing it into two parts nearly equal; that up the stream, to the right hand as you travel westward, being occupied by a sweet green meadow, as level and luxuriant as an English lawn; that downward, to the left, much narrower and deeper, and filled with dense and thriving timber.

There was no house, however, on the meadow, nor, with the exception of the winding road, any sign of civilization in the place at all.

The green savannah lay some forty feet above the bed of the stream, at the point where the bed crossed it, and was fringed on every side, but the lowest, with an even and regular belt of willows, aspens, and maples, now clad in their most gorgeous hues, by the first frosts of autumn. Across the lowest end of this basin there was a long green mound, now forming the fence of the road on that side, partially overrun with brushwood and briars; but in the centre it had been cut or broken down abruptly, in order to give egress to the stream, which plunged down to its lower level by an irregular, foaming descent, half cataract, half rapid, of nearly forty feet in height.

It needed but one glance to discover the origin of that smooth, natural meadow; it had been once a beaver-pond, and that low, grassy mound, all overrun with weeds and thick shrubbery, had been, long years ago, the work of the industrious amphibii. The hand of man, it is probable, had broken it, when the beavers disappeared from their old haunts; and the small woodland lake, drained by the outlet of its feeding stream, had become the woodgirt savannah which we see before us.

Immediately in front of the fall, scarce ten yards distant from it, the bridge spanned the brook; and often-times, when the wind blew from the northward, its planks were slippery with the driven spray. Beneath the single arch, there was a deep black pool, wherein the foam-wreaths of the water-fall wheeled round and round in sullen eddies; but within ten yards the water became somewhat shallower, leaving an awkward, stony ford, between the bridge and a second descent, longer and steeper than the upper fall, down which the mountain rivulet fretted and chafed, till it was lost both to ear and eye far in the dingle to the left.

It was past five o'clock one lovely autumn evening, and the sun had already sunk behind the crest of the western hill, though long slant rays of yellow light streamed through each gap and broken hollow of its ridge, filling the valley with a transparent, hazy lustre, which half revealed the scenery, half veiled it from the dazzled eye.

The woods were in their flush of autumnal glory, for the air was keen and hard and bracing. There had been a sharp frost on the previous night, and the washed road, and brimful, turbid stream, showed that it had succeeded heavy and continuous rains. Not a leaf, therefore, had yet fallen from the earliest of the deciduous trees; yet not a leaf upon the hardiest, except the evergreens alone, but had already undergone "a change to something new and strange," and no imagination, unused to the effects of an autumnal frost in America, can fancy its unrivalled beauty.

A beautiful wild-deer had come out of the wood to drink, and was standing beside the ford, having quenched his thirst, gazing about him lazily, and undecided what to do.

Suddenly he raised his head, snuffed the air eagerly, as if he caught a taint on its breezy current, tossed his wide antlers proudly, and dashed through the flooded ford.

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He was a tall and stately beast, yet for three times his length in the middle of the brook he was swimming, nor was it without something of an effort that he reached the bank on the further side, up which he bounded with long, graceful strides, and disappeared immediately in the thick woods beyond.

It was some minutes ere any human sense could have discerned the approach of that, whatever it might be, which had alarmed the stag.

But, in a little while, the clatter of quick hoofs might have been heard on the hard-beaten road, and the rapid roll of a well-built and easy-running carriage, forming as it were an accompaniment to a fine, manly voice, trolling the stanza, which I have prefixed to this chapter, until the wild woods rang to the jocund sound.

In a minute or two the vehicle which bore the singer came rapidly into view, over the brow of the eastern hill, drawn by four capital horses at a slapping pace.

It was rather a singular-looking carriage, half mail-phaeton, half dog-cart, yet nothing could have been contrived more suitable for a sporting conveyance, combining at once room, lightness, strength, and beauty.

In front, it was neither more nor less than a high-seated, open phaeton, with a tall, square dash-board, and a seat so elevated that the driver was almost in a standing posture as he sat, having thus the greatest possible command over his horses. Behind this was a box body, with a slight rail along the top, and a comfortable seat, much lower than that in front, as far aft as possible.

The whole body, which was supported upon three long elliptic springs, and well furnished with wings of patent leather, to ward off the mud splashed from the wheels, was painted of a deep, rich tea-colour, picked out with black, and ornamented only by a small crest, surrounded with a garter, painted in relief of the same colours.

It had three lamps, one under the foot-board, so placed as to throw its light under the horses' feet, far forward; the other two, one above each fore-wheel, with powerful reflectors. No baggage was in sight, except a small trunk of tawny leather, on the rack behind. But there was a profusion of fine bear-skins hanging over all the seats, and covering the legs of the travellers in the guise of aprons, all of the richest and most costly fur.

The four horses, which came trotting over the gentle slope as if they had nothing behind them, were as clean and powerful cobs as ever wore a collar. None of them were above fifteen hands and an inch in height, with capital forchands, high clean withers, small heads well set on, and blood-like ears. No one could look at them without being struck by their perfect similarity in shape, size, symmetry, and style of action. But here the similarity ended; for two, the offside wheeler and the nigh-hand leader, were as black and as glittering as polished jet; the other two were beautiful silver grays.

Such were the team, which, stepping out at the rate of ten miles an hour, all together, at a square handsome trot came clattering down the road, snapping at their long bright curbs, or nibbling in play at one another, without a fleck of foam, or a spot of sweat on their shining coats, whirling the heavy drag along as if it were a plaything.

For the load was indeed a heavy one. The fore seat held two persons. The driver was a tall, well-made, athletic young man, with light hair, and a keen quick eye, dressed in a blue box-coat with many capes, which disguised his whole figure. But it could not disguise the graceful ease combined with firmness of his seat, the quick delicate strength of his fingers as he mouthed his high-mettled cattle, or the thorough coachman-like skill with which he handled the long English four-horse whip, which he carried athwart his neighbour's person. That neighbour was as different a person as can well be imagined from his companion. He was a man of about fifty years, not above five feet six in height, by about four feet in breadth across the shoulders, and six in girth about the waist, weighing at least three hundred pounds of solid flesh, yet lithe withal, and active. His face was excellent, sun-burned and ruddy, yet with fine small features, a lip curling with a perpetual smile of humour and benevolence, an eye

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gleaming with mirth and kindness, and untaught intellect. That man had the heart of a million. You could not look at him for half a moment and doubt it. Ay! and a soul, too, that would do honour to a prince though the rich men, the would-be aristocrats of our cities, would sneer at him, forsooth, and perhaps cut him in town after sharing his hospitality in the country, because he is rough and not a *gentleman!* A gentleman! Heaven save the mark! I should like to see one of them that could vie with him in any of those points which make the real gentleman; kind heart, and open hand; unwillingness to hurt the feelings of the humblest; respect for everything that is honourable, great, and noble; and contempt for everything that is not so, however well it may be gilded; promptness to fight for himself, or for his friend, when aggrieved; unblemished honesty, and undaunted courage; the strength of a lion, added to the stomach of a man.

But to return to our party. The body of the carriage was occupied by four dogs, as perfect specimens of the camine, as were the nags which drew the vehicle of the equine genus. Two of these were red Irish setters, with coats as soft as silk, deeply feathered and curly on the sterns and about the legs, with soft large dark eyes, and lips and noses black as jet. The others, pointers, were very high-bred, one black as a coal, without a speck of white, the other white as snow, with liver-coloured ears and eye-spots, with a small dot of tan over each eye, and a tan-shadowing round the muzzle not your coarse, raw-boned, bull-headed, thick-tailed, double-nosed Spaniards, but the true thoroughbred English pointer, with tails thin, tapering, and whiplike; feet round as a cat's, strong loins, thin flanks, deep chests built both for speed and power, their coats as sleek as satin, and the outline of their arched ribs just showing through the skin, as if to tell the perfection of their condition.

Two persons now made up the complement, seated in the back part of the wagon, both smoking, the one a Manilla cheroot, and the other a short, very dingy-looking clay pipe. The former was a gentleman a year or two younger and three or four inches shorter than the driver, with a countenance singularly expressive of fun, kindness, and good humour. The other, as was clearly shown by the silver hat-band and the crest buttons of his gray frock coat, was the groom, a stout, short, hard-faced, knowing-looking Yorkshireman, broad-shouldered and duck-legged, with his black hair clipped bowl-fashion round his bullet-head, and that so closely, that had you laid your hand on it suddenly, it would have pricked you like the bristles of a shoe-brush.

There was yet, to make up the company of bipeds and quadrupeds, another of the latter order, in the shape of a superb Scotch deerhound, of the tallest stature, shaped like a greyhound, but of three times the weight and size, shaggy and wire-haired like a terrier, and of a deep tawny brindle, with coal-black eyes and muzzle. This splendid animal trotted along quietly under the hinder axle of the carriage, keeping up, as it would seem without the slightest effort, with the slapping pace of the well-bred trotters.

That was a metry party, and though the wagon, splashed with the mud of some half-dozen different soils, indicated that they had travelled many a mile since day-break, there was nothing of fatigue or weariness to be seen either in the bipeds or quadrupeds of the company.

The latter, as I have said, were trotting along merrily, full of play and spirit; and it was evident, by the cleanness and brightness of their coats, that they had been well rubbed down and polished at their mid-day halting-place. Their harness, too, which was of the slightest make, compatible with strength, plain black with covered rings and buckles, and not a particle of metal visible, except a small crest on the blinkers, had evidently been cleaned likewise. The road had become dryer during the afternoon, moreover, and the cattle were not splashed at all in the same proportion with the vehicle which they drew.

The men were singing, jesting, and laughing all the way, and the wild woods had rung for many a league with their sonorous music; while ever and anon, at his master's bidding, the Yorkshire varlet would produce a key bugle, which hung in its leather case beside him, and wake full many an echo with points of war, or hunting-calls, wildly symphonious.

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"Halloo! Tom," cried he who was handling the ribbons suddenly, as he brought his strain to an end "you are falling asleep, you fat devil you! come, wake up, man, and tell us how far it is to this Dutchman's tavern, you were telling us about."

"Well! well!" responded the fat man, shaking himself; "it's four miles arter you git across the bridge there. We'll be there torights. Why, Aircher, what is't? 'Taint half an hour nohow since we dranked are you so dry already you earn't wait a mile or two? But I can tell you, you'll be jest disappointed if you counts on gittin' anything to drink at Dutch Jake's."

"Why not?" asked the young man from the back seat; "why not? Is Dutch Jake temperance?"

"Jest about as much as you be, little Wax-skin!" answered the fat man, laughing. "No, no! Dutch Jake arn't temperance, nohow; but if he was we'd have a better chance, for I never did know yet a temperance man, but he would licker on the sly like, and they doos always keep the first best rum, I tell you. But bless you, Forester, Dutch Jake don't keep nothin' as a pig could drink; leastwise I can't, nohow."

"A very clear proof that a pig cannot!" said the other, laughing joyously.

"Jest see now, lad, if I don't pay you for that ere when we git out of this here rattletrap," replied Tom; but suddenly changing his note, he cried out sharply "But what the devil's been to do hereaways? By the etarnal! Aircher, the bridge has fotched away! One of the joists is gone, and three of them darned sleepers. We'll niver git across it."

"That we shall not, indeed," said Archer, pulling his horses up. "What the dence is to be done now? It is eighteen miles back to the tavern, where the other road branches off. We cannot get back there to-night, that's clear enough; besides, it's off our road. This is all your fault, you old stupid porpoise! You swore that this was the best road."

"So it be," growled the fat man. "I niver see a prettier nice road in all my life, nor you nuther, and I couldn't tell nothin' about the darned bridge."

"Well! hold the ribbons, while I jump out and look at the ford. The brook is devilish full! Sit still, all the rest of you; don't let the dogs jump out, Tim."

And with the words he sprang to the ground, ran down the steep pitch, by the bridge side, and examined the ford and the further shore with a practised and wary eye.

The deerhound followed his master to the brink, and as he reached it feathered his long stern sharply, threw up his head and snuffed the air greedily, and the next instant would have plunged into the stream, had not his master's rate checked him, before he had even wet his fore feet in the turbid current.

The party in the wagon were too busily engaged in thinking about the road to observe the action of the dog; and when Archer returned, Frank Forester asked eagerly,

"Will it do, Harry?"

"I think so," returned Archer; "at all events we'll try it but it is full and strong there's no denying it."

"It's a darned hole, anyways!" said the fat man, doubtfully.

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"I know it is, Tom," said Harry, "but there is no help for it, that I see. There's one thing in our favour, a deer has gone across it within half an hour "

"Then we'll go clear, sure enough," said Frank.

"That's not so sartain, nuther," replied Tom; "a deer harn't got no dog-cart at his heels."

"Had we not better all of us jump out, and make it a lighter pull?"

"Not by any means, Frank," answered Harry. "The weight is the only thing that will save us. If we were empty, the stream would sweep us over the falls in a moment."

"What do you say, boys, shall we try it? I will not deny that we shall have a squeak for it; but if we do not, we must give up our trip."

"Oh! try it, I say!" answered Forester. "One must die some day, and some one must die every day as well to-day as to-morrow. I say try it, by all means."

"I say so tew!" Tom took up the word. "But I arn't a goin' to be killed yit awhile, now I tell you there arn't no stream hereaways that can begin to dreawn me!"

"I should think not," said Harry. "It might as we undertake to drown a whiskey-barrel."

"T' rocks moight be bre-aking thee, ay reckon, tho', interposed Timothy with perfect gravity; "ay've seed pooncheon stove in, vary quickly."

"You never saw a feather-bed broken, did you, Timothy?" asked Forester.

"Noa, sur!" replied Timothy, with a grin; but his face changed as they came down the summit of the pitch, and looked down upon the red turbid stream, and the steep rocky cleft below it, down which the water were raving fiercely. "Ey deary me! but there's a heavy fresh on! ay doot we'se never win across't."

"We shall soon know," said Archer, gathering the horses well in hand, and shaking loose the thong of the four-horse whip. His face was grave, for he knew that there was danger; but his eye was bright, and his lip firm.

The stream was about twelve yards over. The leader entered quietly, and for two or three steps the water did not reach their knees. But in the middle there was a strong current, with a heavy swirl.

"Come, come! it is nothing, after all!" shouted Frank, joyously.

"Arn't it though?" replied Tom. And as he spoke the leaders were weltering up to the saddle-laps, and scarcely able to keep their footing. The next moment they were swimming, and the wheelers plunged into the deep hole, the wagon following them. The broad-side of the carriage was now opposed to the full weight of the torrent, for such indeed it almost was, just as all the horses had relaxed their pull, and were floundering heavily in the water. The hind wheels were swept round, and the whole carriage began to yield sensibly, and drive towards the rocks.

By this time the leaders were on sounder ground, and in shallower water, and their pull dragged the wagon deeper into the hole, but at the same time helped the wheelers somewhat, and enabled them to touch bottom with their fore feet, at least. At this critical moment, Harry rose quickly to his feet, gave his reins a shake, uttered a shout, and brought his sharp lash down in a figure of eight, striking all the four horses nearly simultaneously, and that so keenly that the blood sprang from the leaders.

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Together they all bounded to the lash with snort and plunge, amid the flashing water. Everything strained and creaked about the wagon and the harness, as if it must have gone to pieces. Had anything broken at that moment, they must have been swept down the fall.

But nothing failed at the pinch. The next moment the leaders were straining up the further bank the wheelers had found good foot-hold on the gravel-bank. A violent jolt followed, as the fore-wheels were dragged over a block of stone at the water's edge, when crack crack both the traces of the near-leader parted; and almost at the same moment, with a shivering crash, the off horse's bar broke in the eye. The leaders were loose but for the reins; and for a moment, though happily the wagon was stuck fast, and out of the stream's way, all was in confusion.

Not a word had been spoken since Harry's shout, but now all was merriment and bustle.

"Jump out, Tim! Jump out quick; to the leaders' heads! Never mind the water."

The hardy groom was out in a moment. He scrambled through the water, and up the bank, as fast as his duck legs could carry him.

He had the horses by the bits in a second, and Harry flinging loose the leaders' reins, which were unbuckled, they were led off and tied to a tree, in less time than it takes to describe it.

"What's to be done now, Harry?" asked Frank. "How the deuce is this to be righted?"

"You'll see! Sit still, that's all! Get away, lads!" he added, touching the wheelers gently with the whip.

A steady pull released the wagon from the stones and drew it up the bank to the spot where Tim stood with the leaders.

"Now look alive, lads. Forester, just unhitch that spare set of bars from the back of your seat there don't you see them? Get out the spare traces, Timothy and the wrench from the harness-trunk that's it, look alive, for it's growing dark apace."

And by dint of deliberate activity, and well directed exertion, not ten minutes had elapsed before the broken bars were removed, and the spare set substituted; fresh traces buckled on, and the fragments of the old ones thrown into the bottom of the wagon.

Within a quarter of an hour they were rattling away along the road all a-taunto, and without a trace of their recent accident, merry and noisy, through the fast-fading twilight which waned betimes, in the deep gorges of those woodland hills.

CHAPTER II. THE NIGHT-DRIVE.

The wolf's long howl from Oonalaska's shore.

Campbell.

The sun had entirely set before Archer's gallant team had whisked the shooting wagon over the summit of the first ridge beyond the scene of their quickly-repaired accident.

There was still, however, a lingering crimson flush on the western sky, against which the broad-backed mountains stood out erect, massive in purple majesty as if they had perpendicular ramparts of granite. High

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overhead, the stars were twinkling clear and bright in the dark azure vault, up which the thread-like crescent of the young moon was climbing, with one large lustrous planet at her side.

The atmosphere was pure and breathless, and so still that not a sound of any kind was to be heard, except the quick clatter of the hoofs on the frozen road, and the slight rumbling noise of the well-built carriage.

About a mile distant from the broken bridge, the by road which crossed it entered a broader and more beaten way, lying at right angles, or nearly so, to its previous course, and running through a glen of the same character with that through which the travellers had been journeying, though somewhat wider, and watered by what might be called a river.

In order to reach this valley, the road they had been following, which hitherto had wound in and out among the hills, through twenty little dells and basins, crossing at most but the lower spurs of the wooded ranges, here breasted by the main western ridge, scaled it boldly in a series of steep zigzags, partly scarped in the hill-side, partly supported by piles and breastworks of timber.

The branches of the trees crossed overhead, forming a roof like that of a gothic aisle; and, as is usual, the frosts of autumn had taken much less hold on the foliage where the upland soil was dry, although rich, than it had done in the sour and watery swamps of the valley.

Not a ray, therefore, penetrated the dense canopy of boughs, and the road was as dark as a closed room at midnight.

Harry was laughing and talking merrily as they left the line of the valley, and, to say the truth, took no note of the darkness so long as the road continued straight. But after it had ascended, perhaps a hundred yards in a right line, there was a sharp and awkward angle. The leaders, as is usually the case, tried to turn too quickly, and as the side of the road to which they were bearing was that which fell abruptly down into the valley, Harry met them with a firm hand, holding them to the hill, though unable to see a foot in front of the wheels.

Luckily, at this moment, the fore wheels rose over a little mound, plunged down on the other side, and were followed by the hind wheels, with the same uneasy jerking motion. The next instant, Archer pulled up the horses, backed them the least in the world, and they stood motionless, with their traces slackened, and the vehicle prevented from backing down hill by the jog, as it is called, or little gully, made to prevent the wintry rains from washing the steep roads, as is generally the case in those mountain regions.

"Tim!" exclaimed Harry, quickly, almost before the wagon had become motionless.

"Ay! ay! sur," answered the sharp-witted Yorkshireman. But to Tom Draw's huge amazement, and something, he it added, to that of his master likewise, the short sonorous response came from the heads of the horses, and not, as both had expected, from the back seat of the dog-cart.

"Tim, we must have the lamps," said Harry, well knowing that in the *nil admirari* lies half the secret of being well and promptly served. "The road is as dark as a black dog's mouth. I cannot see the gray wheeler's ears, let alone the leader's."

"Ay's warrant it," replied the groom. "Ay kenned that varra weel, afore at you quit t' valley. Soa thinks ay to mysen, there's be a fash enow, wi' t' leaders, an' ay'll be needed at t' heads on 'em laike. Soa I joost slipped out ahint t' wagon, and well it is, ay wot, ay thought on't, for t' leaders wud hae been doon t' bank in anoother minnit."

"Quite right, Tim, quite right!" said his master, approvingly. "I was thinking of something else, or I would have lighted up before we got into the woods. Now look alive, man; you have got candles in the lamps, I hope?"

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"Ay! ay! sur; two i' t' great lamp unner t' foot-board, and one in each of t' others. Boot t' matches are i' t' tool-chest, yonner. Now, Measter Forester, gin you'll please joost joomp out, an' stand to t' leaders whaile ay get 'em, we'll have laight enoof enow."

"Good Lord! *jump* out, indeed! I shall break my neck, and go head-over-heels down the crags," he responded, half in fun, half in earnest, and with a sort of dolorous tone, that showed he was far from being sure that his words would not be realized.

"Get out on the off-side, Frank, between the wagon and the hill; you'll do well enough there. That is it."

"What you say right is perfectly true, Harry," replied Frank, scrambling out of the bearskins, in which he was rolled up so snugly, and making for the horses' heads, which he reached in a minute. "But what the plague have you done with old Tom? I haven't heard a word no, not an oath, even since we stopped. Punch him in the ribs, Harry."

"No! no!" shouted the fat man, lustily. "Don't you dew that don't you dew that, I say. I swan, I'll fix you, little Wax-skin, when we gits to Jake's."

"Oh! you're awake now, are you?" replied the other, laughing. "Was he asleep, Harry?"

"I rather think not, Frank," answered Archer, "for I have heard a noise for the last ten minutes, not quite so loud as Niagara, it is true, but about as loud as Paterson Falls, I should say a constant, gurgling fall, as if of a good strong river; and there's a devil of a smell of rum here now."

"Taint rum," responded the fat man, indignantly, "it's good old apple-jack. Little Wax-skin, there, would give his eyes for a sup of it. That's good; there comes the lamps," he added, as Timothy, after bustling about, and jingling for some minutes in the tool-chest, made his appearance with a small glass lanthorn, and some matches, by aid of which he soon lighted the lamps; and these, with their strong magnifying-glasses, made the whole road as clear as day, and cast a broad white glare upward upon the many-coloured leaves, which formed the vault overhead.

"Don't put it out, Tim," said his master, "we'll blow a cloud directly. That will do, Frank, lad. Just turn their noses into the road again, and then jump in and make yourself comfortable. The big cigar-case is under your seat, there; just hand it out and help yourself, and then pass it forward; I have not one left in my pouch."

"Now, then!" he added, after a minute's pause, during which three Manilla cheroots were kindled, and a rich odour of the Indian weed diffused through the cold still atmosphere.

"All's right!" responded Timothy, and sprang in a moment into his seat, just as Archer, gathering his reins, and reaching his whip from the socket, uttered a low soft whistle, and a "Get away, lads!"

There was a rattling of bars, a clash of hoofs, and a pebble or two flew high into the air; and then, without more ado, the four fleet horses were in merry motion.

The clear light flashed along the road, silvered the mossy bolls of the huge trees, and cast strange wavering sheets of alternate shade and lustre through the deep forest-aisles. Several times, as they were whirled along at ten miles an hour, a heavy flapping of huge wings, and a wild dolorous screech from some tall tree, announced that their lamps had aroused some large nightbird from its slumbers; and once, just as they cleared the woods and issued into an open field on the mountain's brow, a long protracted howl rose fearfully into the silence, not, as it would seem, above fifty yards behind them.

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"What in the devil's name is that?" said Frank, hastily, laying his hand almost instinctively on the but of one of the long duelling-pistols, a brace of which, in leathern holsters, were attached to each seat ready for instant service.

"Yon's a varra oogly noise, is yon!" exclaimed Timothy, astonished, which by the way was for him a rare state of mind.

"I swan that's a wolf!" shouted Fat Tom, answering the question and the observation at the moment of their utterance. For all three spoke simultaneously.

"A woll, is it?" said Forester, quietly removing his hand from the weapon, for he knew the habits of the animal, though he had never seen one, too well to anticipate any danger. "I did not know you had any of the varmints here."

"A wolf!" exclaimed Timothy, making a plunge under the bearskins for his master's rifle; "heart aloive! we's be all eaten oop i' noa time."

"Nonsense, Tim," replied Harry, laughing, "there's no danger. Wolves never meddle with men here nowadays. But I did not think there were any left in this quarter."

"Nor I nuther," interposed old Tom, scratching his head and cogitating. "Nor there aint been none hereaway these six or eight year. We're a goin' to have a hard winter now, I reckon. Leastwise they say hard weather to the norrad brings down the tarnal critters this away. But I'm right glad to hear him howl, hows'ever."

"Glad! why the deuce are you glad, Tom?" asked Harry. And this again was rather an unusual occurrence; for so well did Archer understand the bent of the fat worthy's genius, that he but rarely asked an explanation.

"'Caze when you hears a wolf howl, Aircher," he made answer, "you may be sure game is either very plenty or very scarce, one or other. Now it aint nohow possible as that chap should be druv by hunger to make that 'ere dismal screechin', for everybody here knows that the woods is full o'possums and rabbits. So it must be 'caze deers is plenty that he's hollering; that's why I says I'm glad, Aircher. I'd a thought, too, you'd have had sense enough to a knowed it."

"May it not be that it's because possum's plenty that he's 'Kollering'?" asked Frank slyly.

"No!" answered Tom very gruffly, as he inhaled a long puff of smoke, and blew it out again slowly. "No, and you knows it."

"Indeed I do not, Tom," replied Frank, with a laugh which he vainly endeavoured to stifle. "I know nothing about wolves nor possums either. Do tell us."

"You lie, boy! you dew know. And you'll raise no foolin' out o'me, I can tell you. So quit. Now, Timothy, git out your old bull's horn and blow up. Them lights as you see down yonder is at Jake's, and I can see by the way they're a fixin' and manoeuvrin' that they're a gittin' things fixed to go to bed to-rights. Put on, Harry! put on, boy; it's all good road now, though it be's down hill a leetle."

It certainly was down hill a *little*, for the road lay at an angle of some forty-five degrees. Yet Harry took the old Trojan at his word, and put the nags along, and, holding them well in hand, it was with the jingling of trace and curb-chains, the clatter of the bars, rattling against the wheelers' houghs, and the roll of the rapid wheels, that they thundered down the slope; while loud above all the din rose the clear mellow notes of Tim Matlock's well known bugle, making the gorges of the Blue Hills to resound with the unusual cadences of "God save the king."

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As they came wheeling round the angle, into the broader valley, they passed a foaming mill-dam, barring the little river, overhung by a dozen large weeping willows, the foliage of which was still full and verdant. A large, calm pool, reflecting the bright starry skies and the dark tufted masses of the precipitous hill which walled its further side, lay close to the left hand of the road, and was but slightly separated from it by a rough fence of unbarked cedar poles from the mountain. On the right, all the level space between the road and the other hill, not exceeding fifty yards in width, was covered with a beautiful second-growth of oak, hickory, and maple, overhanging a thick underwood of cranberry and wintergreens, interspersed with the glossy leaves of the calmia, the azalia, and the rhododendron.

Among this rich woodland was the little tavern, to which they were bound, nestled so closely that its existence might have remained unsuspected until the traveller was almost in front of its long, low, Dutch portico, formed by a projection of the shingled eaves, and of its stately signpost.

Harry, however, knew the *locale* right well, and had his horses in hand; and as he shaved the trunk of a huge chesnut, which formed the boundary post of the little green before the door, he pulled up instantly, amid the light of a dozen candles and lanthorns; for the well-known sound of his key-bugle had roused all the inhabitants, and it was in the midst of a deafening shout of cacophonous laughter, and of "Ky! Masser Harrys!" announcing half the company, at least, to be Dutch negroes, that the friends jumped to the ground, their night-drive pleasantly concluded.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNTER'S YARN.

By night I heard them on our track,
Their troop came hard upon our back,
With their long gallop, which can tire
The bound's deep hate and hunter's fire.

Mazepa.

The room, into which our sporting friends were introduced by Dutch Jake, himself, was a long and narrow apartment occupying the whole breadth, and one-third of the length of the whole house. It was lighted by day by six small windows, three on each side, and by two narrow glass-doors, that through which our sportsmen had gained admittance, and a second directly opposite to it; and by night, as in the present instance, by half a dozen sconces, with marvellously dirty tin reflectors, attached to the wall, each containing one large home-made tallow candle. Had this been all the illumination, however, of the long, dingy, low-ceiled room, it would have barely sufficed to make the darkness visible; but, as it was, a huge pile of hickory logs, blazing and snapping in a vast open fire-place, sending broad sheets of flame up the wide-throated chimney, and great volumes of smoke, at intervals, into the room, diffused both warmth and lustre through the place.

At the right hand of the door by which they entered, was the bar itself, with a narrow, semicircular counter, protected by stout wooden bars, and a sliding-door. The shelves of this sanctum were garnished with sundry kegs of liquor, painted bright green, and labelled with the names of the contents, in black characters on gilded serolls. These, with two or three dull-looking decanters of snakeroot-whiskey, and other kinds of "bitters;" a dozen heavy-bottomed tumblers, resembling in shape the half of an hour-glass, set up on the small end; a wooden box of whity-brown crushed sugar, which professed to be white, and a considerable array of tobacco-pipes, constituted all the furniture of Jake's bar, and promised but little, as Tom Draw had forewarned his young associates, for the drinkableness of the Dutchman's drinkables.

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Unpalatable, however, as they appeared, and as they would probably have turned out on a trial, to the refined tastes of our sporting epicures, it seemed that they were looked upon in a very different light by the assembled magnates of the neighbourhood, who, in great numbers, and great glee, came thronging towards the door to gape at the new-comers.

They had just ceased from a regular breakdown Dutch dance, which they had been plying most uproariously and most industriously to the obstreperous braying of a fiddle, worked by a fifty-horse-power coal-black white-headed negro, assisted by a shrill squeaking flute and a jingling tambourine, shrieked on and hammered, with proportionate energies by his sons, as it was easy to perceive by their precise similarity in hue and feature with the old fiddler.

All the three, despite the difference of hue and race, appeared to be on the best and most intimate footing with all present; and the whole crowd, seeing that the new-comers were neither friends nor acquaintances, crowded to the bar, and took advantage of the temporary cessation of the breakdown, to liquor on the largest scale and in the most promiscuous fashion, men and girls, black and white, altogether.

"Hallo! Jake!" exclaimed Fat Tom, as he entered, affecting to stare about as if he could hardly see, "what in creation makes it so all-fired dark in here? why, I can't see my way to the bar, if so be there be one."

"Vell, Mishter Traw," responded the old Dutchman, "I ton't see tat it pe so tark put to teyfil! it most pete shmokes, for de tamn'd chimbly"

"No! no! it arn't, Jake," interrupted Tom, "it arn't the smoke nor the chimney, nohow. I'll nose it out to-rights, I tell you. It's the darned niggers, I guess. It's the niggers, sartin! why, there's enough on 'em to make the moonshine dark!"

This most characteristic speech on the part of the jolly publican, called forth a burst of good-humoured and resounding laughter from the black portion of the company, the blackest of whom are wont in mirthful or angry objurgation to vituperate one another as "brack niggas;" but it was by no means so complacently received by the white company, many of the younger members of which were aware that out of the Dutch settlements it is looked on as a reproach to hold the slightest intercourse in hours of relaxation with the free negro, much more to eat at the same board, or drink in company with him; and several of these were not a little disposed to resent the bold jest of the bluff speaker.

Little cared jolly Tom for that, however; but seeing the bended brows and lowering looks of some of the gigantic Dutchmen, he would in all probability have proceeded in a strain yet more offensive, and would very likely have produced a general row, if Harry, who entered the room a moment after him, had not interposed promptly and effectively to preserve the peace.

"The poor old man's very drunk, gentlemen," he said, with his frank and cheery smile; "a thing. I'm sorry to say, that happens to him very often; but he's mad now into the bargain, which I don't wonder at, for he wanted to kiss a very nice young wench as we came along, and she wouldn't have him on any terms!"

"Kiss the dev " Tom began to reply, furiously indignant, but he was interrupted by about a dozen voices, eager and loud in inquiry into particulars; for so seriously had Harry spoken, that half the young men believed him to be in earnest.

"Do tell," said one; "where was't?"

"I ton't know of no naice yong venches on de roat to York," cried another.

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"I cannot exactly tell you, gentlemen," replied Harry, still preserving his gravity admirably; "as I am not well acquainted with your country, or with the names of places. But I think I can describe it to you. You all know the old beaver-dam, I fancy, and the bridge; well, just beyond that there's a big hill; and, beyond that again, a deep wet swamp; and across that a mountain, with a toll-gate on the far side "

"Yes, yes I know I know ferry vell. Dat's Hans Schneider's dole-gate. Vell! dere's no yong vench dere!"

"No, no not there but in a little hovel about two-thirds up the mountain. The road was so steep that I made the fat man get out and walk up, and just as he got opposite the door, *she* came out with a tin pail to fetch some water, and he tried "

"Mein Got! It's old Shuno dat he meansh; old Tave's fraw!"

"Tousand teyfiles! She pe olter nor a huntert year."

"Ant oglier as de ferry Olt Nick!"

"Tid he, py Cot! vant to kish olt Shuno? Donder ant teyfil! vat a peasht!"

"Ant she voult'n't haf him no vays. By Got! I ton't vonter as he pe mat mit de colour peoples, arter tat."

What were Fat Tom's emotions, at this strange invention of Harry's, it would be difficult to say; for in the first instance his face turned as red as fire, and his eyes gleamed angrily from beneath the overhanging pent-house of his heavy gray eyebrows; but at the numerous wondering expressions of the credulous and astonished Dutchmen, at the abhorrent and disgusted looks of the girls, many of whom were very young and plump and pretty, and above all at the intense delight of the negroes, who stamped, and yelled with laughter, and positively rolled on the floor in their mad glee, the old man's face relaxed. A joke was always too much for him, even if it were, as in the present instance, at his own expense.

"Well, well," he said, "boys, t'aint jist right to tell tales on the party. See if I beant quits with you afore long! But so be you *has* told, I don't see but I've got to stand treats for the company. Jake, you darned old cuss, look alive, carn't you? and make a gallon of hot Dutch rum, torights; and if that ar'n't enough for all hands, make two. If I carn't kiss wenches, I'd be pleased to see if some of these all-fired pretty white gals won't be a-kissin' me, afore the night's done, anyhow."

"I von't den, anyhow, for fon!" said a very pretty little blue-eyed girl, with a profusion of long light brown curls, who had been listening with her bright eyes distended to their utmost.

"For *fun!*" exclaimed Fat Tom, intentionally misunderstanding her meaning, and making at her with a moment's hesitation. "By the Eternal! 'tarn't for fun I kisses, I'd have you to know it's in right down most all-fired airnest."

"No, no, old man!" interposed Harry, stepping between Tom and the girl. "Don't be afraid, my pretty lassie, he shall not touch you, he's too old altogether for such a pretty girl as you."

"Ant ferry moche too ogly!" answered the girl, laughing joyously.

"Here's metal more attractive, perhaps," said Harry, seizing Frank Forester, and dragging him forward as he spoke.

"No, no. He mosen't mettle mit me neider," said the girl, still laughing. "I'd all as fon pe a kissing te old cat, mit all tat nashty hair on his lip, shost as pad, mine Got, nor fon olt racoon!"

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A fresh burst of laughter, from the whole room, now followed this peculiarly acceptable repartee, in allusion to the thick yellow moustache which covered the whole of Frank's upper lip; and under cover of the laugh, Harry snatched a hearty kiss from the laughing lips of the little coquette, saying, as he did so

"It's hard if one of the lot won't suit you!"

"It ain't you den, mit your impudence," she answered, blushing a good deal, and fetching him a crack on the side of the head, which made his cheek tingle, and his ear burn for half an hour. "Kiss me again, den, von't you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," answered Harry, nothing daunted and suiting the action to the word, he caught her in his arms, and bestowed upon her, not one, but half a dozen long and sonorous busses; which, as he afterward asseverated, though she affected to struggle and resist with all her might, she returned with good interest.

Most of the company laughed loudly at this interlude, which seemed to pass as a matter of course; but one rawboned young Dutchman, who had been dancing with the girl half the evening, began to look something more than minacious, when the Dutch rum made its appearance, and the rich, spicy odour dissipated in a twinkling his fast-rising choler.

The strange compound of Santa Cruz rum, boiling water, allspice, brown sugar, pepper-corns, and start not, gentle reader, when I add butter, passed around with clattering of glasses, gurgling imbibition, and loud laughter, under cover of which our friends stole away, by a door close to the fireplace, leaving the rustic ball to recommence with new din and spirit, after an interruption which had turned out so acceptable to all parties present.

"Now, Jake," said Harry to the landlord, who had ushered them into a sort of sanctum, in a projecting wing of the old stone tavern, which had a separate communication with the rest of the house "you can get us something to eat, I suppose; we have not had a mouthful since one o'clock, and are half dead with hunger. You got my letter, I suppose, to tell you we would be here to-night?"

"Sartin," replied old Jake. I cot it yeshtertay. Mein Cot! yesh. I can kive you fresh eggs and ham, and de shmoke peet, petter as nothink!"

"Well, look you here, we have brought up some cold meat with us. Do you have some potatoes roasted in the ashes, and let us have some of your best butter, and brown bread, and let my man Timothy do whatever he wants to do in the kitchen. Send a couple of your boys to take care of the horses; and let another run over to Dolph Pierson's, and tell him we are here, and want him to come up to supper."

"Tolph vas here not an hour since, ant I dolt him as you vas a comin'; ant he'll pe here mitout my sendin de poy. Vell! I'll ko stret away, ant pid de women volks purn de potatoes, ant sent de pooter ant de preat, ant make de hot vater for de poonch you'll pe a vantin poonch anyting elshe, Mishter Archur?"

"Yes! have you got any ice?"

"A plenties!"

"Send in a good big tub full of it, broken small. Do that first will you, Jake?"

"I fill," answered the old man, "and see, here cooms de man Dimoty. You tell him vat you'll pe a vanting, ant fe'll pe a doing it raight any vays."

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And as he spoke he left the room while the little Yorkshireman entered it from the offices, clean-rigged, and washed already, and followed by two negroes, carrying, the one a couple of champagne baskets, and the other a large and apparently heavy chest of live-oak board with iron at the corners. Timothy himself bore a smaller case of Russia leather, which he deposited on a side table, the negroes arranging their burthens on either side the fire-place.

"Noo, bring t' goon caases in," said Timothy, "and t' little leather troonk wi t' shot and t' powther," and then turning to Harry, he continued "T' horses is sorted doon bonnily, and all four on 'em are tooking into t' oats laike bricks, Measter Aircher. You'll be a wantin' soopper noo, ay reckon, at least, ay sure mysen, ay's varra hoongry."

"So are we, Timothy; and I trust you have something eatable in the travelling-case; for there is nothing to be got here but bread and butter."

"Ay've got twa brace o' t' cauld larded partridges a brace o' t' soommer dooks ready for broiling a cauld ham simmered i' champagne and a goose-paie, 'at ay maad mysen, fit for t' Queen, God bless her!"

"Excellent well, indeed, Timothy. You are a caterer worth a thousand. Ah! here comes the ice. Now look sharp, get out four bottles of champagne, and stick them into that tub. We'll keep the wood-duck and the goose-pie for to-morrow. We'll have a brace of the larded grouse, and the ham to-night. You go and see to the roasting of the potatoes, and make a good big omelet. Have you brought any parsley with you?"

"Lots on't, sur and a doozen or twa little ingans, and soom tarragon. Ay's mak a first-rate omelet, ay's oophaud it."

"Very well, then look quick about it, and leave us the keys. We'll get the things out, and lay the table, this time, for it's growing late. What liquor have you brought, beside champagne?"

"A gallon demijohn o' t' paine-apple room, 'at Measter Forester aye laikes sae weel, and anither o' t' auld pale Cognac; and anither yet o' t' Ferintosh to fill t' dram bottles."

"Let us have the pine-apple rum, and some water screeching hot. Now, mizzle. Come, Frank, pull that big round table into the middle of the room; I'll open the boxes."

And suiting the action to the word, he unlocked the large chest, which displayed at the top a shallow tray containing a supply of cutlery and napkins; a coffee-pot and spirit-lamp, and a small breakfast service, with a silver stew-pan and gridiron. This tray removed, several tiers were discovered of bright tin boxes of various sizes, piled one above the other, such as are used by restaurateurs for sending out hot dinners to their customers.

Just as this was done, the door opened and a buxom Dutch serving-girl entered with a large table-cloth of very coarse but very clean home-made linen, followed by another carrying several plates and dishes empty, in addition to a magnificent brown loaf, and butter, like that set before Sisera, in a lordly dish.

"That's my good lasses," exclaimed Harry. "Now if you'll get us the big punch-bowl and ladle, and bring us a kettle of hot water, we'll see to all the rest. Now, Frank, the big dish. It will just hold the ham. Look you here, is it not a fine one? Pure Yorkshire, and how beautifully brazed! There, set it at the head of the table; and give me that other dish for the larded grouse; we shall sup as well as if we were at home, at my shooting-box. Now, then, I'll open the leather case, and get out the glass and *siller*; do you fetch the napkins and cutlery, and see that you fold the napkins in right form, or Timothy will laugh at you. It's no lark to me to eat a good supper with two-pronged steel forks, or to drink champagne out of their vile glass an inch thick."

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"I'd be all-fired sorry," interposed Tom, "to be a bottle of champagne afore you, if so be that you were a bit dry, in a quart pewter mug, or an earthen "

"How should you like to be a pea, Tom," Frank interrupted him, "and he with a two-pronged pitchfork?"

"It 'ud take a most onmighty pitchfork to hoist me, if I war a pea."

"You'd make a tolerable *marrow-fat*, I think, Tom. I'd bet on your taking a premium at the agricultural."

"It would require an infernal gizzard to digest him," said Archer, laughing.

"Why, yes," said Frank; "I don't think he'd agree very well with the man who ate him; as poor Sidney Smith wished the new Bishop of Zealand that he might do, when he was on the eve of sailing for his diocese."

"Better a darned sight be in a diocess, whatever it may be, nor on the pint of a pitchfork," said Tom grinning. "But come, boys, come I could eat I could eat "

"Could you eat a young child with the small-pox, Tom, as Alick Bell says, when he's peckish?" asked Frank.

"You darned eternal little beast," replied Tom, aiming a back-handed lick at him, which would have felled an ox, much more little Frank, if he had not dodged it. "You'd spile a horse's stomach, with your all-fired filthy talking."

"Hear! hear!" exclaimed Harry. "If that does not beat Satan preaching against sin, I will say no more, now or for ever. But I do wish Tim would come, and that Dutch hunting fellow."

"Shall you wait supper for the hunting Dutchman?"

"Wait h !" cried Tom, savagely. "I'd see every Dutchman out of all Jarsey, and Pennsylvania arter that, in the tother place, afore I'd wait a minute. Wait supper! The boy's mad! This comes o'what he calls breedin'! Darn all sich breedin', I say. It'll breed nothin' I knows on, if it beant maggots in a body's brain."

By this time, Frank had disposed four plates in orderly array, with upon each a neatly-folded napkin, and a thick hunch of brown bread in its snowy bosom; had placed the ham and cold grouse, with their carving-knives and forks in bright symmetry beside them, and was looking on with an air of extreme satisfaction, while Harry drew out of the leathern casket a set of neat castors, replenished with every sauce and condiment that Bininger can furnish, each bottle secured, like a smelling-flask, by a screw top of silver. These placed on the centre of the board, he produced next two silver salt-cellars, a dozen table-spoons, and as many forks of the same metal, and last not least, four tall pint beakers of clear crystal, and four yet more capacious tumblers of New-Castle cut glass.

A moment or two afterward, the bowl made its appearance; the kettle was hung upon the crane above the glowing pile of hickory; and the lemons and loaf-sugar were disposed near the China bowl, whose vast gulf was destined soon to entomb them.

Then the door was again thrown open, and Tim Matlock made his *entrée*, bearing a tray with four wax candles lighted, the hot potatoes, and the omelet *aux fines herbes*, sending forth volumes of odoriferous steam, which alone could have won an anchorite from his fasting.

It was a curious scene such a scene as never before had that small room, with its narrow casements, and dark wainscoting, and home-made rag carpet, witnessed. Cookery which Ude would not have despised; game, such as Hawker would have given five years of life to shoot; wine, that would have been called excellent at Crockford's;

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silver, of Storr and Mortimer's best fashion; glass, such as might glitter worthily on the queen's table; and wax candles, shedding over the whole their pure strong lustre.

And then for the guests the two elegant, well-formed, high-bred gentlemen, who would have been esteemed an acquisition to the most courtly company; and the grotesque, original, rotund, rough-visaged, tender-hearted yeoman; who had the racy wit of Jack Falstaff without his abject cowardice, his sensuality without his selfishness, his honest bearing without his hollow heart that king of native sportsmen! that trump of trumps! honest, brave, witty, kind, eccentric Tom Draw of Warwick.

And now, just as the supper was all ready, and the appetites of all still readier, the door communicating with the bar-room, or ball-room rather, was thrown open, and thereat entered one whom I must stop a moment to describe Dolph Pierson, the Dutch Hunter.

It might be almost sufficient to say, that this man was in all external parts, and in many mental qualities, the very converse of Tom Draw but he is a real picture, and as such, I will paint him.

He was three inches above six feet in height, and of bone and frame which were almost gigantic, whereas honest Tom was nearly a foot shorter than his rival sportsman, and so light of bone, that it was difficult to understand on what principle the vast mass of flesh which he bore about with him was supported; much more how it was moved, at times, with so much agility and sprightliness. Then again it appeared, at first sight, that there was no flesh at all between the angular massive bones, and the parchment-like skin, of the new-comer while honest Tom's hide was distended almost unto bursting, by the preternatural bulk of "too, too solid *fat*," which cushioned his whole form, and made every line about him, if not precisely a line of beauty, at least a line of sinuous rotundity.

Dolph Pierson's face and features were as sharp and as angular as the edge of an Indian tomahawk; his brow was low, but neither narrow nor receding; on the contrary, it displayed considerable amplitude in those parts which phrenologists are pleased to designate as the seats of ideality; and some prominence in the point which the same learned gentry assert to contain the organs whereby man appreciates the relations between cause and effect. Across this forehead the skin was drawn as tight as the parchment of a drum, indented only by one deep furrow, running from temple to temple. His hair was thin and straggling, and what there was of it was as white as the drifted snow, as were also two tufts of ragged bristles, which stood out low down on the jaw-bone, a little way below his mouth, alone relieving the monotonous colour of his otherwise whiskerless and beardless physiognomy.

As if to set off the whiteness of his hair, however, and of those twin tufts, his eyebrows, which were of extraordinary thickness, were as black as a crow's wing, running in a straight line, without any arch above the eyes.

The eyes, themselves, which were very deeply set, and, in fact, almost entombed between the sharp projection of the brow, and the almost fleshless process of the cheek-bones, were dark, twinkling, restless, never fixed for a moment, but ever roving, as if in quest of something which he was anxiously seeking. His nose was of the highest and keenest aquiline, starting out suddenly at one acute angle from between his eyes, and then turning as abruptly downward, in a line parallel to the face, the point at the curvature, or summit, appearing as if it would pierce through the skin.

The nostrils were rather widely expanded, and their owner had a habit of distending them, as if he weresnuffing the air; so that many of his neighbours believed that he actually was gifted with the hound's instinct of following game by the scent.

His mouth, to conclude, was wide, straight, thin-lipped, and so closely glued down upon his few remaining stumps of teeth, that it seemed as if it had never been intended to open; and indeed it was the abode of an organ, which, if not endowed with great eloquence, had at least a vast talent for taciturnity.

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Such were the features of the man who entered the room, walking in-toed, like an Indian, with long noiseless strides, with a singular stoop, not of his shoulders, but of his neck itself, and with his eyes so riveted to the ground, that it appeared very difficult for him to raise them to the faces of those he came to visit.

He was dressed in a thick blanket coat, of a dingy green colour, with a sort of brown binding down the seams, and a sash of brown worsted about his waist. On his head he wore a sort of skulleep of gray fox-skin, with the brush sewed across it, like the crest of a dragoon helmet, about four inches of the white tag waving loose like a crest from the top of the crown. Two cross belts of buckskin were thrown across his shoulders, that on the right supporting an oxhorn, quaintly, carved, and scraped so thin that the dark colour of the powder could be seen through it in many places; and that on the left garnished with a long wooden-handled butcher-knife in a greasy scabbard. A tomahawk was thrust into his sash, its sharp head guarded by a sort of leathern pocket, and from the front of the girdle was suspended a pouch of otter-skin, containing balls, bullet-mould, charger, greased wadding, and all the apparatus necessary for cleaning the heavy rifle which he carried in his hand, and which, at least in his waking hours, he was seldom, if ever, known to lay aside.

To complete his costume, his feet were shod in Indian moccasins, and his legs encased in stout buckskin leggins, supported by garters rich in embroideries of porcupine-quills, and laced over his rough homespun pantaloons.

Archer was standing at the head of the table whetting his carving-knife on an ivory-handled steel, preparatory to an attack on the ham, when the old hunter entered; but as he saw the gaunt raw-boned figure, he laid it down instantly, and stepped forward with extended hand to greet him.

"Ah! Dolph, how are you? I am glad to see you, man; I was afraid you would not have come in time for supper."

The hunter raised his eyes for a moment to the expressive face of the speaker, but before it had dwelt there a moment perusing the well-known features, it had wandered away to decipher the visages of the other tenants of the seats at the table. A pleasant smile, however, dimpled his cheek and twinkled for an instant in the dark eye, as he pressed Harry's hand cordially, and made reply.

"Middlin' well, Mister Aircher. I supped six hours ago how is't with yourself?"

"What if you did, boy?" interrupted Fat Tom, before Archer could reply. "You must have got ongodly hungry in six hours, I guess. Sit by sit by darn all sich nonsense."

"I niver eats only twice of a day," replied the hunter, without a smile, and without moving a muscle of his face. "And I niver eats hog, nohow, nor birds neither," he added, quietly, after a moment's pause, during which he had looked over the fire, the gun-cases, and all the baggage in the room, not excluding Timothy, whom he seemed to regard as the greatest curiosity of the whole. No one, however, had seen him look toward the table, the burthen of which he named so accurately.

"Do you drink iver, Dolph?" asked Tom, half jeeringly, in the intervals of masticating the wing of the cold ruffed grouse, with a modicum of the thin-shaved ham.

"When liquor's good, and I'm adry!"

"Niver, when you're not adry, Dolph?"

"Niver!"

"Then you're the darnedest stupid Dutchman I iver comed acrost," replied the fat man. "Leastways onless you're always dry, like I be. Another glass of that'ere champagne, Timothy."

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"Come, sit down, sit down, Dolph," said Harry, "and if you really will not eat anything, at least take a drink with us."

"Well, I don't care if I do!" responded the man of few words, depositing his rifle in the corner of the room, and taking his seat, quietly, between Archer and Tom, who was already steeping his soul in the third beaker of dry champagne.

"What will you have, Dolph? Champagne, or "

"Some of the rum, Mr. Archer," answered the man, with perfect readiness, while Timothy stared at him with inexpressible astonishment, more than suspecting him to be what he would have called in his native dialect, a "wise mon," meaning thereby, neither more nor less than a wizzard.

At a glance from his master, however, the Yorkshireman so far recovered himself, as to hand a square casebottle to the hunter, who forthwith decanted about half a pint into the largest tumbler, and, disdainfully waving away the water, which Tim offered to him, made a circular nod to the company, muttered "Here's luck!" and swallowed it at a gulp.

Then he shook his head approvingly, winked his eye hard, and snuffed the air repeatedly, and after that mute but expressive pantomime, held forth the empty tumbler to Timothy, with a gesture towards the pitcher, indicating that he desired it filled with water.

When he had received, however, the pure element, he paused, as if unwilling to remove the delicious aroma from his palate.

"I knowed it," said he, thoughtfully, as he again shook his head; "jest as I'spected, adzactly. Them's prime sperrits."

At this unusually long speech, Harry smiled, knowing his man, and made answer

"Since you like it, had you not better repeat the dose?"

"Not this night, if I knows it."

By this time, Frank, who had never before met this original, and who had been studying his characteristic answers, inquired, with a view to drawing him out

"Pray, Mr. Pierson, if you never eat hog or birds, may I be allowed to ask what you do eat if it's not impertinent?"

"It's not imperent at all," said Dolph. "I eats a'most any wild crittur what runs; deer, or bar meat, or possum, may be."

"Did you ever eat a skunk, Dolph?" asked Harry.

"A skunk killed *dead* at the fust lick, and well cleaned, 's not bad eatin'," interposed Tom. "Say, Dolph, did you iver eat wolf?"

"Niver nor no dog nuther, Mister Draw!" replied the hunter, somewhat testily, as if he fancied they were quizzing him "No, nor no *calf*, nuther. I don't think much," he added, looking at Tom, as if to pay him off, "of a man, what eats *calf*, nohow."

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"Nor I, Mr. Pierson, nor I," put in Frank with great alacrity, delighted to find an auxiliary in one of his crotchets, which was an absolute contempt for veal in all its combinations. "I never eat it myself; in fact, I had about as soon eat dog."

"I niver knowed a raal sportin' man as wouldn't!" answered the hunter, evidently gratified by Frank's adherence to his opinion; whereupon that worthy resumed, filling his glass with champagne

"Well, if you will not join us, allow me to drink your health. I have heard of you from Mr. Archer, often."

"Yes, Mr. Aircher knows me," said the hunter, quietly, and apparently unaware of the intended compliment.

"Do tell, Dolph " Tom put in, at this moment, what my poor friend, J. Cypress, Jr., was wont to call his lingual oar, with the evident intent of kicking up a row, "Do tell us, Dolph you said you niver eat no wolf did no wolf niver eat you?"

"Niver! whar's your eyes? Don't you see me?"

"Guess you'd a made 'em sick. They couldn't eat you, nohow."

"They comed darned nigh to it oncet, inyhow."

"Did they? By George! you never told me that," said Harry.

"I'm no great things at talking. If you want to hear bragging, you must set Draw agoin'. Well! well! there *was* wolves them times."

"There are wolves *now*," replied Forester.

The hunter looked at him doubtfully, yet with a wistful eye.

"Not hereaways," he said, at length. "Leastwise I hain't heerd none, nor seen no track of none, this six year. Yet I some thought to-day they mout a gotten back, like."

"They *have* got back," said Frank earnestly. "We heard one howl, to-night, scarcely a mile hence."

Doubtful, perhaps, as to the certainty of Frank's information, and science in wood-craft, Dolph cast a quick glance of inquiry at Harry; and on receiving his affirmative nod in reply, brought down his hand with a heavy slap on his sinewy thigh, and cried aloud, in tones far more apimated than he was wont to use

"Darnation, if I isn't glad on't!"

"Why?" exclaimed Forester, hoping to detect old Draw in some blunder, as to his previous reasoning.

"Caze I hates, wust kind, to be mistaken and I half thought last night they'd got back agin."

"And pray, what made you think so?"

"Why, I camped out nigh the Green Pond last night, seein' I'd sot some lines for pickerel; and bein' it was sorter cold, I kinned up a fire, and sure enough, an old doe, with two well-grown fa'ans at her side, comed right up into the circle of the blaze, and scrouched down in the fern, not ten yards from my camp-fire. I knowed they must a' been skeart orfully to come down on a man o' purpose."

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"How do you know that they came on purpose?" asked Frank, more intent on fathoming this man's, to him, incomprehensible sagacity, than even on gaining information.

"How did I know? Didn't they come up wind on me? They knowed I was there a mile off and they did right, by thunder! I'd not a hurted a hair on 'em for a hundred dollars."

"I'm sure you would not, Dolph," replied Harry, "But come Timothy has cleared away the eatables, and I am going to brew a bowl of hot rum punch. You must break your rule for once, Dolph, and take another glass to oblige me; and blow a cloud, and spin us a yarn about the wolves coming nigh to eating you."

"I'd do a'most anything to obleege you, Mister Archer, and you knows it. But I'd ruther not drink, nohow and that's along o' the wolves comin' so nigh as they did to eatin' me, too, I tell you."

"Well I'll press no man to drink against his better judgment," said Harry, as he brewed the fragrant compound.

"I knowed you wouldn't, when I telled you I'd ruther not."

"Well, as I do not, you will blow a cloud with us, and spin us the yarn," said Archer. "Forester and I are dying to hear it."

"Sartin I will," replied Pierson; "and I'll blow a cloud too; but the yarn's like to be a short 'un."

"Pass up your glasses, boys; let me help you. This is prime, and after a cold night-ride and a cold supper, it will do none of us a thought of harm. Hand the cheroots round, Timothy. Those are good, Pierson."

"I smokes in an Injun pipe allus, with Kinnekininck. I larnt that, when I hunted years and years agoe with the Mohawks in these hunting-grounds. Ah! they was hunting-grounds in them days!"

"Now then for your story," said Harry, when the pipes were all lighted, and the punch tasted and approved. "Begin as quick as you can, and after that we will to bed instantly for we must be afoot early."

"Sartin we must, if we means venison. Well, well! It's nigh forty years agoe, it is, and I could shoot some then, and was right and smart and strong, I tell you but I did spree it oncet in a while like not to say that I was a drunkard for sometimes I'd go weeks and months on cold water; but then, agin, I'd git right hot, I tell you, for a week, maybe, and spend half my airnin's like, and be good for nothing for a month arterward. Well, well! there was few houses in them days, nor no clearin's nigher than the Coshocton turnpike. There was no village here, nor no store nigher than Jess Wood's, clear away beyant Hans Schneider's toll-gate. I lived here all alone, where I lives now. I'd a putty nice log house, and a log stable for old Roan, and a leanto for my dogs, jest on the pond's edge. Well it was winter time, and winters in them days was six times as cold as they is now. There was nigh six foot of snow on the level, and in the hollows it was drifted twice as deep, all on it, I reckon. Well deer was a hundred where you'll find ten these times, and *bar* a thousand on 'em. I'd had good luck all winter, and it was nigh the holydays, and I'd got out o' lead ean a'most, and putty short of powder. It fruz ivery night sharper nor nothin, and there was sich a crust as mout ha' borne an elephant but there warn't elephant them days seems to me they grows plentier as *bar* grows scacer, and beaver ain't none left. Well I rigged up a jumper, and loaded it with peltry, and hitched up old Roan, and offed to Jess Wood's twenty mile, I guess through a blazed wood road, meanin' to git me a keg or two of powder and some bars of lead, sell off my plunder, and be back same night. Off I went sartin but when I comed to Jess's, there was a turkey-shoot you see, and a hull grist o' boys, and we shot days, and dranked and played nights and to be done with't, 'twas the third day, putty well on for night, when I started, and I putty hot at that Well it was moonlight nights, and I got along smart and easy, till I got on the hill, jest above the beaver dam. The beaver dam warn't broke then, and the pond was full, but it was fruz right sharp and hard, and I went over it, at a smart trot, and was thinkin' I'd be hum in an hour, when jest as I was half ways

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over I heerd a wolf howl, and then another, and then another, and in less time than I can tell you, there was thutty or fawty of them devils a jabberin' as fast as iver you heerd Frenchmen, on my trail; and afore I was well acrost, I could see them comin', yelpin' and screechin' all in a black snarl like, all on 'em together, over the clear ice. Well I whipped up old Roan, and little whip he needed, for when he heerd them yell, he laid down his ears, and laid down his belly to the snow, and by thunder! didn't he strick it though! Over rough, over smooth, up hill and down hollow and oncet I thought we should a run clear out of hearin' on 'em. But goin' up the big mountain, when we was nigh the crown, I carn't tell how it was adzactly, but pitch down we went into a darned rocky hole, and the fust thing I knowed I was half head over in the snow, and the jumper broke to etarnal smash, and old Roan gone ahead like the wind and I left alone to fight fawty howlin' devils, and putty hot at that. Well, I tuk heart, and fixed my rifle, and as they come a yelpin' up the hill, I drewed stret, and shot one down, and run like thunder, aloadin' as I went, for I knowed as the bloody devils would stop to tar' the one I'd wounded into slivers, and while they was a tar'ing him for sartin, their screeches mout a' made a body's hair stand up on his head like but they soon quit that fun, and took my trail agin in airnest. Well, I got loaded, and I went to prime, and darned if my flint hadn't got smashed to pieces. I felt in my pouch, in my pockets not a flint! I was hot, as I telled you, when I quit Jess's, and left them on the bar. Oh, warn't I in a fix! and there warn't no big trees nuther; and if there had a been, it was so bitter cold I thought a man must a' died afore it was mornin'. But I thought it warn't no use to *say* die, no how so I run for the biggest tree and clum it. It warn't thicker nor my body much, a stunt hemlock, not over fifteen feet, or eighteen at most to the fust limb, and none higher that would bear my weight, and a tight match if that would. Well, I clum it and there, from eleven o'clock of a winter's night, I set perishin' with cold and a'most dead with fear I arn't easily skeart nuther with them fawty devils howlin' under me, and lickin' their bloody chaps, and glarin' with their fiery eyes, and ivery now and then a big 'un jumpin' within three feet of the limb I sot on, and the limb crackin' and the tree bendin', 'at I thought it 'ud go ivery minnit. Day broke at last, and then I hoped they'd a quit but not they. The sun riz still thar they was a circlin' round the tree, madder nor iver, foamin' and frothin' at their jaws, and oncet and agin fightin' and tearin' at one another. Gentlemen, I was a young stout man, when I clum that hemlock, and my hair war as black as a crow's back. When I fell down, for *come down* I didn't, I was as thin and as bent, ay! and as white-headed as you see me. Since then, I niver dranked only when I war dry, and then niver over oncet in the mornin' and oncet agin at night."

"But how, in Heaven's name! did you escape them?" asked Forester, who was interested beyond measure in the wild narrative.

"By Heaven's help!" answered the hunter, solemnly. "Some chaps chanced on old Roan's carcass in the woods, arter they devils killed him, and knowed whose horse he war, and tuk the back track, and come down on the mad brutes from to leeward, with seven good true rifles. They killed five on 'em at the fust shot, let alone what they wounded; and the rest made stret tracks; but I didn't see it. For at the crack of the fust shot, my head went round and round, and I pitched down right amongst them. But they was skeart as bad as I was, and hadn't no time to look arter me. Well, Mister Aircher, my tale is telt, and my pipe smoked, so I'll go lie down on my barskin by the kitchen fire, and you'll be for bed, I guess for we must rouse up bright and airly. I telled Jake to have breakfast two hours afore sunrise."

"We *will* go to bed. Thank you for your tale. I will never ask you to drink again. Good-night."

"Good-night."

And catching up his rifle, he left the room without any further words.

"That is a singular and superior man," said Forester, as he closed the door.

"Yes, indeed is he!" replied Archer.

"Putty smart for a Dutchman," said Tom.

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"He speaks better English than you, Tom," answered Forester.

"Better H ! He's as Dutch as thunder! Goodnight, boys."

And so they broke up the *sederunt*.

CHAPTER IV. THE STILL-HUNT.

Mark! How they file adown the rocky pass,
Bright creatures, fleet, and beautiful, and free,
With winged, bounds that spurn the unshaken grass,
And swan-like necks sublime, their eloquent eyes
Instinct with liberty, their antlered crests,
In clear relief against the glowing sky,
Haught and majestic!

The autumnal morning was yet dark as midnight, when Dolph Pierson, arising from his bearskin, awoke Harry, who ere long had the whole house afoot and stirring. The kitchen clock was striking four, when the party assembled in the little parlour in which they had supped but a few hours before; yet so smartly had Timothy bestirred himself, that not only had all the relies of the supper been removed, but a hearty extemporaneous breakfast had replaced it on the large round table.

There was the Yorkshire ham, which had not suffered so deeply by the last night's onslaught, but that enough remained to furnish forth sundry meals even for hunters' appetites. There was the huge brown loaf; the dish of golden butter; the wooden bowl, full to the brim with new-laid eggs, wrapped in a steaming napkin; and last, not least, two mighty tankards smoking with a judicious mixture of Guinness's double stout, brown sugar, spice, and toast; for to no womanish delicacies of tea and coffee did the stout huntsmen seriously incline.

As they entered the room, the old hunter, who was busily employed drying a pound of rifle-powder on a pewter plate, heated on the wood embers, raised his eyes from his occupation, and kept them riveted on the figure of Harry Archer, for a far longer period than it was his wont to bestow on anything of mortal mould.

After gazing at him for some moments thus, he nodded his head approvingly, as who should say "Not such a bad turn-out, after all!" and then resumed his somewhat perilous occupation of stirring the powder in the plate with the point of his long wood-knife, as he held it an inch or two only above a glaring bed of hickory embers; but neither on Frank Forester, nor on old Tom Draw, did he youchsafe to bestow one second's observation.

And in truth, Harry in his hunting-dress was an object worthy of some consideration, so perfect was every part of its equipment, both in its fashion, and its adaptation to its peculiar use.

On his head he wore a cap exactly like that of an English whipper-in, or huntsman, with this exception only, that it had a projecting rim behind, to shelter the back of his neck from rain, or the dewdrops which might fall from the branches, and that in lieu of being black, it was of a deep umber-brown, to correspond with the colour of the autumnal leaves.

The black silk handkerchief, knotted about his sinewy neck, displayed not an inch of white linen above it, and was itself partially concealed by a buckskin hunting-shirt, exquisitely wrought by the hand of some Indian maiden, far in the forests of the west. Prepared with skill peculiar to those wild tribes, this garment combined the suppleness, the warmth, and the durability of leather, with the high finish and rich colour of the best broad-cloth. That colour was a nameless hue, between brown and purple, approaching nearly to the tints of the copper beech, or rather to something between that and the cinnabar brown of the buckeye, or horse-chesnut. It was fringed handsomely, and embroidered in places with black porcupine-quills; and was girt about his waist by a black leather girdle, with a

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buckle of blue steel, supporting a pouch of martin skin, and a hunting-knife with a buckhorn hilt, and a blade, a foot in length, of the best Sheffield steel. He wore no tomahawk; but his powder-flask, made of a buffalo horn mounted with dark blue steel, was slung across his left shoulder by a plaited whip-thong of black leather.

His nether man was clad in a pair of Pike and Elphick's elaborate buckskins, which had bestridden the pig-skin many a day in Leicestershire, and soared in flying leap over the bankfull Whissendine. Not now, however, were they resplendent as of old in the glory of white pipe-clay, but wore a more harmonious if less striking hue of dull olive-green, as did the leggins of the same material, which reached to his knee and covered the fastenings of his firmly-wrought Indian moccasins.

Two things only remain to be noticed of all his accoutrements that in the buckskin garter which secured the buskin of his right leg he had a short strong two-edged dirk, the knee-knife of the Highlander; and that he bore a superb double-barrelled rifle by Moore, that prince of makers, warranted, at two hundred yards, when held by a steady hand, to put both balls through the same bull's eye; a feat many a time and oft performed by its present owner.

In spite of its weight, which was nearly twenty pounds, it was both a manageable and handy weapon; for not being very long, and the metal being heaviest at the breech, it was so admirably balanced in the hand, as to fatigue the arm far less, whether at a trail or a present, than the much less ponderous but longer rifle of the Dutch hunter.

The barrels were browned to a nicety, and all the mountings tempered in wood-ashes to so deep a blue, that, like all the rest of Harry's dress, there was no fear of a stray sunbeam glistening from any brilliant point, and so betraying his approach to the fearful quarry.

Tom Draw wore as usual his dark home-spun suit, with heavy boots, and a dark gray felt hat, which garb, if it possessed no beauty, had at least this advantage, that it was inconspicuous and quiet. His buckshot cartridges for he eschewed the rifle and copper flask were buried in the vast pockets of his voluminous unmentionables, and from a slit in the side of these, like that in which a carpenter carries his wooden rule, peered the stout haft of a gigantic butcher-knife.

His other weapon was the huge ten-pound double-barrelled shot-gun of twelve-gauge, with which he was wont to exterminate all *genera* of game, from the minute sandpiper to the huge brown bear.

Frank had as usual been exceedingly elaborate, but as usual also somewhat unfortunate in his attire, for, inclining somewhat at all times to the kiddy in the style of his dress, he had unluckily leaned to it at the very time of all others when it is least admissible, and had mounted a hunting-shirt and cap, the latter adorned with a waving bucktail, of the brightest pea-green plush, with fringes of the same colour. His buck-skin breeches were of as fair a white as he would have donned to meet the Quorn at Billesdon Coplow; and his legs were encased in stout russet gaiters, and his feet shod in strong ankle-shoes. His knife was silver hilted; his rifle, which was of much smaller calibre and lighter fashion than his friend's, and his powder-horn, were silver-mounted; and, in a word, his whole appearance was much fitter for a fancy ball, than for a still-hunt in the forest.

Archer knew all this, it is true, quite as well as the hunter, and felt its absurdity quite as keenly; yet, though with Forester he had been for years on terms of more than brother's intimacy, he had given him no hint on the subject, and as they sat down to the sociable breakfast, he suffered his eye to run over Forester's gay dress, when he knew that Dolph was observing him, and then catching the eye of the latter, addressed to him an almost imperceptible motion of the head, which the old hunter understood as well as if a volume had been spoken, though he could not conceive the reason of it.

The fact was simply this, that Harry was so well acquainted with his friend's character, that he did not doubt for the moment, that if Frank should be advised to don a graver garb, his pride of woodcraft would take alarm, and he

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would swear that deer were *attracted* by gay colours, and would persist in wearing them as *de rigueur*; whereas, if left to himself, he would probably discover his error in one day's hunting, and learn by his own experience that which he would surely refuse if urged by another.

All this, at an after period, Harry explained duly to the old hunter, who merely shook his head in reply, and marvelled to his heart's content; but at the moment, beyond the glance and slight gesture, no sign or word was exchanged between them.

The ham and eggs were speedily despatched, and the tankards drained to the lees by all except old Pierson, who quietly addressed himself to a bowl of milk, produced by mine host at Dolph's especial desire. This done, some sandwiches were prepared, the dram-bottles filled, the rifles and shot-guns loaded and capped, the contents of powder-flasks and pouches investigated, and then all was pronounced to be ready for a start, and that before they had been half an hour out of their beds, and while the stars were yet shining brightly in the cerulean sky, and ere one flash of dawn had appeared in the eastern horizon.

"Tim," said his master, "it will be of no use for you to go with us to-day, and it will make too many. So look well to the nags, will you? and see if you cannot get us something eatable for dinner. Did you not say, Dolph, that you had some venison?"

"I telled my boy to bring 't down the fust thing. He'll be here afore it's light. Yes, its a prime saddle; two inches of fat all over 't."

"Divide it into haunches, Timothy, and roast it yourself. You know how covered with puff-paste."

"Ay! I ken brawly. But what o'clock must I have t'haunch ready? It winna do to keep't waiting loike."

"No, indeed, it will not. What time shall we be back, Dolph?"

"Not afore seven, if then; there's no saying."

"At eight, then, we will dine; make some soup, if you can get either beef or mutton. And hark you, I daresay you can catch some yellow bass, or pickerel; there are both in the pond here you can take my tackle. If you cannot, see and buy some eels, and let us have a *matelot*. With the soup and the haunch, that will do. Have the champagne frozen to-night. And now go and let Smoker loose."

"What's Smoker?" asked the hunter.

"The best deer-hound American eyes ever looked upon. Fresh from the Highlands a present from Mr. Scrope, by the way almost as great a deerstalker as yourself, Dolph."

"Do you mean to take him along?"

"Not, if you say `No.' But if we wound a buck, he'll pin him certainly before he's gone a mile."

"I dar' say; but his yell will lose us ten for every one he catches. Beside, the Dutchmen hereaway will shoot him sartin. They're death on all hounds, and wun't have no huntin' here nohow, 'less it's still-huntin'."

"Smoker never hunted except still in his life. If you catch him speaking once to the hottest scent, I'll give the Dutchmen leave to shoot him. If they shoot him without leave, Brown Bess here," and he tapped the breach of his ponderous rifle as he said the words, "will take part in the conversation; and when she barks, she is apt to bite, you know."

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"I know. But that wouldn't bring the dog back, nuther. Hows'ever, if he runs mute, and fights mute, they won't harm him, nor carn't, nuther. What breed is he?"

"He will run mute, fight mute, and die mute, I'll warrant him; though I hope not the last, yet awhile."

"Well, what you says, you says; and what you says you knows; so I'm agreeable. But you haven't telled me what breed he is."

"You shall see; you shall see. Here, Smoker, Smoker!" and at the word, the door, which had been left ajar, flew violently open, and a noble Scottish wire-haired deer-greyhound came bounding into the room, and at a gesture from its master, reared erect, laying his shaggy paws upon his shoulders, and gazing into his eyes, face to face.

"By thunder! he's a beauty," cried the impassive hunter, for once moved by surprise and admiration out of his wonted quietude. "He could a'most pull down a heifer, single-handed."

"He *has* done that same! and no deer can stand before him one half mile in the open."

"I dar' be sworn on't. Great Jehu! what a leg! my old arm's a fool to it. And for his chest, it'll out-measur ar' a man here."

"Not forgetting Tom Draw," said Harry, laughing, "who only measures sixty-two inches round his chest, while Smoker is just sixty-seven."

"I niver see sich another."

"Nor I. Yet I have seen scores of the breed I might almost say hundreds. No, indeed, Smoker is a non-such, and he's as good as he's handsome. Well, shall we take him?"

"'Twould be a sin to have him hurt, I swan; and sartin as death, if he hollers on a trail, some of them Dutch fellows will make him smell H!"

"They may, *if* he hollows!"

"Take him, then, sure! I'd give ten dollars to see him pull one down."

"If we wound one, you shall see it."

"By thunder! then I'll wound the very fust one I shoots at this good day."

"Then you won't bring home nauthen," sneered Tom Draw.

"Jest twice what you will, with t'other gentleman, I'll stand treats," cried Dolph.

"Done!" shouted the fat man.

And "Done!" replied the hunter, confidently; and then he added, "but we'll git nothen, none of us, if we stays here much longer. Let's up traps, and track it."

No sooner said than done; five minutes more and they were all in the open air, under the calm, cold azure canopy of heaven, with its myriads of bright stars twinkling with that peculiar brilliancy which they at all times derive from a slight touch of frost.

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The mountains, on either side the narrow glen, loomed up superbly dark, like perpendicular walls, of the deepest purple hue, opaque, solid, earthfast, against the liquid and transparent blackness of the starry firmament. The broad, clear mill-pond at their base lay calm and breezeless, with no reflection on its silvery breast, save the faint specks of purer whiteness which mirrored the eternal planets, motionless, sad, and silent, yet how beautiful. The dews were still falling heavily, and there was in the air, among the trees, on the waters, that undefinable soft rustling sound, which yet is scarce a sound, which we cannot determine, even when sensible of it, whether we hear or feel; but other sound of man or beast there came none through that deep and narrow valley. Ever near morning, although before the earliest east has paled, the accurate observer will find in nature the deepest stillness.

The shrill cry of the katydid, the cicada of the west, which carols so exultingly all the night long over her goblets of night-dew, has lulled itself at last to rest. The owls that hooted from every dell and dingle, so long as the moon rode the heavens, have betaken themselves to their morning slumbers. The night-frogs have ceased to croak from the wooded hill; the very cocks, which have crowed twice, are silent; and the watch-dogs, feeling that their sagacity will be required but a few hours longer, have withdrawn to their cozy kennels.

There is in this stillness something peculiarly grand, solemn, and affecting. Involuntarily it reminds one of the morning sleep of the young child, which, perturbed and restless during the earlier watches of the night, falls ever into the soundest and most refreshing slumber, when the moment is nearest at which it shall start up, reinvigorated and renewed, to fresh hope, fresh life, fresh happiness.

And in the mind of Harry, ever alive to thick-coming fancies, thoughts such as there were awakened, during their swift walk up the vale on that clear still autumnal morning, far more than the keen sportsman's eagerness, or the exciting ardour of the chase.

After they had walked, however, some twenty minutes in complete silence, the whole programme of the day's sport having been abandoned to the old hunter's sagacity, Harry became curious to know what were his arrangements for the contemplated still-hunt.

Withdrawing, therefore, from his mouth the cigar which he had been sedulously cultivating, he said to the hunter in a low voice

"Well, Dolph, how is it to be?"

"You goes with me, in course. We'll take the birch canoe at the bridge, and follow the crick down, still as death, to Green's Pond. It's like we'll catch them as they come down to drink, at gray daybreak. Then, when we reach the pond edge, we'll round the western end, and so creep up the brook that comes down through the cedars, clear from the mountain top, and work up that to leeward, 'till we strikes Old Bald-head yander;" and as he spoke, he designated the huge crest of a distant hill, crowned, far above its robe of many-coloured foliage, with a gray diadem of everlasting granite. "There's a green feedin'-ground jest under yan bare crag, with nothen only a few stunted yellow birches and a red cedar here and there, where there's a herd a'most allus; and if so be we happen on 'em there, they've no chance to wind us, nor to see us, nuther, unless they've got a doe set out, sentinel-like, up the rocks; and then we'll stalk the whole west mountain down to the outlet, where we'll meet the rest on 'em, and take a bite and sup at something, maybe; and then we'll send the boys with the ponies to fetch up the game, if so be we've the luck to kill any on't; and we'll all paddle up the crick agin at night, and so take chance to git 'em at the evenin' drink. The flies has quit botherin' 'em, since the cold has sot in, and we wunt find none in the pond, I'm a thinkin'."

"But what will you do with Draw, and Mr. Forester? You must remember that old Tom cannot foot it now "

"Not as he used to could," replied Dolph, "not as he used to could, I allow; still it 'ud take more nor a slouch to worry the old critter down. And that green-coated chap; I guess he ar'n't no great shines at travellin', no how "

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"Ah! that's just where you're out, Dolph, and you're not out very often either. He can travel like a hunted wolf, I tell you; and he's a prime sportsman, and a crack shot at small game, though not much used to work of this kind. But you must send them where they'll get shots, or they'll be mad at us; and it would not be fair either, to throw them over."

"In course not; I counts to put them on the best easy ground. When we take the canoe, three of my boys will meet them with two ponies, so they can ride down to Cobus Vanderbeck's mill, on the outlet, where it's broad, and full of islands like, and channels. They'll git canoes there sure, and two o' the boys will paddle them, and the t'other, why he'll follow with the ponies. It'll be all they'll do to git to the pond by the time we strikes it, though we've got fourteen miles to walk, not countin' what we crosses over and agin' in beatin' like. Oh! that's prime feedin'-grounds, them islands, and the boys, they knows every inch on 'em; and they'll come on the deer quarterin' upwind, too, so they won't smell 'em. I wouldn't wonder, not one mite, if they was to git ten shots this day. But, Lord, heart alive! we'll beat 'em some."

"Why, how many do you count upon our getting?"

"I'll be most mighty onsatisfied, now I tell you, if we don't git six fair ones."

"Six won't beat ten."

"You knows better nor that; you and I'll kill five out of six, sartin."

"So will Tom, easy."

"Yes; if they stand still and wait for him. Don't you tell me; if we get six, and they ten shots, we'll beat them to eternal smash."

"I hardly think we shall get sixteen shots among us."

"I do, Mister Aircher. Deers is as plenty this fall, as they's been scace these six years agone."

"Here we are at the bridge; but I don't see the boys or the ponies."

"Oh! they'll be here torights. I'll call 'em." And putting his fore-finger into his mouth, he produced a long shrieking whistle, which rang through the hills more like the cry of some fierce bird of prey than any sound of the human voice.

Such as it was, however, it found a reply in a second, and directly afterward the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard coming rapidly down the hard road; and a minute after the boys, represented by one white lad of some eighteen years of age, Dolph's second son, and two of what Tom Draw called stinkin' black buck niggers, came in sight, with a couple of rough, hardy-looking, low, round-barrelled ponies.

"Here we leave you, Frank. You and Tom go to-day with Dolph's son," said Harry Archer. "You will ride about three miles and then take the canoes. You have the best ground and the easiest walking or I should rather say the least walking; for yours will be almost all boat-work. Dolph says that you will get ten shots to our six; so look sharp, that we don't beat you."

"I wisht to heaven you may git ten and we six, boy," cried Tom, "and then you'd see who'd beat, I reckon. Oh! I am most onmighty glad to see them ponies. You've been comin' too fast for the old man, altogether another mile would have busted me up clean. I am glad, by Cin! to see the pony."

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"It's more than the pony is to see you, if he has any *nous* at all," said Archer, and so they parted.

And weary work was before them, ere they met again at the outlet of the lake, at which they were to arrive from two diametrically opposite quarters.

Harry stepped lightly into the birch canoe, which lay moored in very shallow water, and the sagacious hound, accustomed of yore to every variety of field sport, crept into it, as gingerly as if he were treading upon eggs, and coiled himself up in the very centre of the frail vessel, as if he knew exactly how to balance it, in a position from which nothing could have disturbed him short of the absolute command of his master.

Last Dolph the hunter entered, and assumed his place in the stern, Harry occupying the bow, but with their faces toward the head of the canoe, and the grips of their rifles ready to be grasped at the shortest notice.

"Ready!" said Dolph, in that low guarded tone which is peculiar to the forester of North America.

And "Ready!" responded Archer, in the like wary accents. And at the word each dipped his paddle in the clear water, and away shot the light vessel, propelled almost without an effort on the part of the rowers; and in two or three minutes at farthest they had lost sight of the rustic bridge, and the group assembled to watch their departure. The stream was in this place very narrow, in no spot above twelve or fourteen feet across, but proportionably deep and rapid, flowing over a bottom of yellow sand and gravel, through a wide boggy meadow.

"Are there trout here, Dolph?"

"Lots on 'em, clear down to the pond. But no one niver cotched none in the pond; nor no pickerel, which is plenty in the pond, up hereaways in the crick; and that seems to me cur'ous."

"Not at all, Dolph. Not at all curious. The pond water is too warm for the trout, and this spring brook is too cold for pickerel."

"Likely. I ar'n't no fisherman, nohow."

"How far do you call it down to the pond? I have forgotten."

"Six mile."

"And how far to the first chance for deer?"

"That's it," he answered, pointing forward to a low tract of scrubby brush wood, at about half a mile's distance, into which, some twenty minutes afterward, the canoe was borne by the rapid current of the brook under a deep arch of emerald verdure.

"Lay by your paddle, and take up the rifle now, and lie flat on your face. I'll keep her goin' as slick as can be."

No sooner had he spoken than Harry did as he was directed, and making his rifle ready for the most sudden emergency, he stretched himself out horizontally in the bottom of the boat, with his keen eye alone gleaming out watchfully above the sharp bows, and lay there as quietly as if he had been a statue carved in wood.

At this instant the birch canoe shot under the arch of dense umbrage, for the most part still verdant, where it was composed principally of alders, but in places coloured by the autumnal frosts with almost every hue of the rainbow, and varying from the deepest crimson to the most brilliant orange and chrome yellow.

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By this time the sun had risen, and a pale yellow lustre had crept inch by inch, as it were, over the pale horizon, till the stars were all put out, each after each, according to the various degrees of their intensity, and the whole universe was laughing in the glorious sun-light.

Mile after mile, they floated on in silence unbroken except by the dash of the mute hunter's paddle now darting across lonely pools, encircled by tall trees, clad in all gorgeous tints, and carpeted with the broad smooth green leaves of the water-lily pools from which the gay summer-duck, or the blue-winged teal flashed up on sudden wing before their glancing prow now shooting down swift rapids, overarched by bushes so densely umbrageous that it was difficult to force a way between their tangled masses.

Still no sight or sound met their eyes or ears which betokened in any sense the vicinity of the wild cattle of the hills, and Archer was beginning to wax impatient and uneasy, when suddenly, bursting from out a thick heavy arbour, the canoe shot into a little pond, as it were, below which was a quick-glancing rapid, divided into three channels by a small green island, nearly before the boat's head, and a huge block of granite, a vast boulder, which had been swept down in some remote period from the overtopping hills, farther to the left. The island was not at the utmost three yards across, yet on it there grew a tall silver-barked birch, and under the shade of the birch stood two beautiful and graceful deer, one sipping the clear water, and the other gazing down the brook in the direction opposite to that from which the hunters were coming upon them.

Neither of the three channels of the stream was above twelve or fourteen feet across, and that to the right was somewhat the deepest; it was, therefore, through this that the hunter had intended to guide his boat, even before he saw the quarry.

No breath of air was stirring in those deep, sylvan haunts, so that no taint, telling of man's appalling presence, was borne to the timid nostrils of the wild animals, which were already cut off from the nearer shore before they perceived the approach of their mortal foes.

The quick eye of Archer caught them upon the instant, and almost simultaneously the hunter had checked the way of the canoe, and laid aside his paddle.

He was already stretching out his hand to grasp the ready rifle, when Archer's piece rose to his shoulder with a steady slow motion; the trigger was drawn, and ere the close report had time to reach its ears, the nearer of the two bucks had fallen, with its heart cleft asunder by the unerring bullet, into the glassy ripple out of which it had been drinking, tinging the calm pool far and wide with its life-blood.

Quick as light, as the red flash gleamed over the umbrageous spot, long before it had caught the rifle's crack, the second, with a mighty bound, had cleared the intervening channel, and lighted upon the gray granite rock. Not one second's spade did it pause there, however, but gathering its agile limbs again, sprang shoreward.

A second more it had been safe in the coppice. But in that very second, the nimble finger of the sportsman had cocked the second barrel; and while the gallant beast was suspended in mid air, the second ball was sped on its errand.

A dull, dead splash, heard by the hunters before the crack, announced that the ball had taken sure effect, and, arrested in its leap, the noble quarry fell.

For one moment's space it struggled in the narrow rapid, then, by a mighty effort rising again, it dashed forward, feebly fleet, keeping the middle of the channel.

Meanwhile the boat, unguided by the paddle and swept in by the driving current, had touched upon the gravel shoal and was motionless.

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Feeling this as it were instinctively, Harry unsheathed his long knife, and with a wild shrill cheer to Smoker, sprang first ashore, and then plunged recklessly into the knee-deep current; but ere he had made three strides, the fleet dog passed him, with his white tushes glancing from his black lips, and his eyes glaring like coals of fire; as he sped mute and rapid as the wind after the wounded game.

The vista of the wood through which the brook ran straight was not at the most above fifty paces in length, and of these the wounded buck had gained at least ten clear start.

Ere it had gone twenty more, however, the fleet dog had it by the throat. There was a stern, short strife, and both went down together into the flashing waters. Then, ere the buck could relieve itself, or harm the noble dog, the keen knife of Archer was in its throat one sob, and all was over.

"I swon," cried the hunter, "them was two smart shots inyhow and that 'ere dog's hard to beat. Let's liquor."

Liquor they did accordingly and after that proceeded to disembowel the two deer, to flesh the gallant Smoker, and then to hoist their quarry up into the forks of two lofty maples, where they should be beyond the reach of any passing quadruped or biped plunderer.

This done, they again paddled onward, and shortly after ten o'clock reached the Green Pond, without obtaining any other shot. An hour more carried them around the head of that great forest lake, but without moving any worthier game than a team or two of wild ducks, and two or three large blue-winged herons.

At the lake's head, they moored their little skiff, and thence struggled up the difficult and perilous chasm of its head waters, through brakes of tufted cedars, over smooth, slippery rocks, up white and foamy ledges to the gray summit of the mighty hill.

Three hours had been consumed in this strong toil; and though every tuft of moss, every sere leaf that might bear a footprint, had been wistfully examined though every trunk against which a stag might fray his antlers had been noted, no trail had been found, and their hearts began to wax as faint as their limbs were weary.

Both were toil-worn and broken when they reached the summit, but even so the hunter declined the proffered cup of Ferintosh; and, content with bathing his brow and hands in the cold element of which he dared not drink, so weary was he and so faint, he soon announced that he was ready to proceed.

A few steps brought them to the very crest of the huge mountain, and there casting himself down on the bare rock, he wormed his way like a serpent to the brink, which overhung the valley, and signed Harry to follow his example.

For nearly ten minutes they dragged themselves painfully over the rough gray stones, before they reached the abrupt ledge of the rocky platform. A moment before they did reach it, however, Dolph Pierson paused, took off his cap, and laid it on the rock, looked to the caps of his rifle, and made a gesture of his hand, indicating the necessity of the greatest caution.

Ten seconds afterward they had reached the extreme verge, and carefully advancing their heads beyond the brink, they gazed anxiously down into the valley at their feet.

CHAPTER V. THE DEATH OF THE STAG.

It was a stag, a stag of ten,
 Bearing his branches sturdily;
He came stately down the glen,

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Ever sing hardily, hardily.

Lady of the Lake.

Gods! what a view was there! The sheer and perpendicular precipice fell down at once above two hundred feet, in one vast wall of primitive rock, with here and there the stem of a bleached and thunder-splintered pine, thrusting its ghastly skeleton forth into the mid air, from some crevice or fissure wherein its roots had found a little casual mould to support its precarious and difficult existence.

Beneath this gigantic mountain wall, the hill-side sloped away, very steep and abrupt, but unbroken by any knoll or crag, for several miles in length, to the margin of the clear lake, which lay embosomed in its pine forests, like a mirror surrounded by a wreath of evergreens, to so small a size had it dwindled from the distance; with the bright brook which rushed into it, rapid and turbulent, from the westward, and the pellucid brimful river which stole forth from it in the opposite direction, winding among the verdant meadows, and many-coloured woodlands, like a long silver ribbon.

Beyond the little lake stretched miles and miles of gorgeous autumnal woodland to the south ward, miles and miles of dark piny forest, with here and there a cultivated clearing laughing out among the foliage, its white-walled cottages and village steeple glinting back the long sunbeams; and farther yet aloof, still other lakes isledotted, and other streams blue glimmering; and leagues away on the horizon a long line of blue mountains, scarcely distinguishable from the azure of the sky, veiled as they were by the thin golden haze of an American autumn, and flooded by the unrivalled splendour of its shimmering sunshine.

Glorious as was that scene, however, and rich with all accidents of light and shadow, sweet to a painter's eye, and well adapted to call forth all the latent romance of a young and imaginative intellect, and such preeminently was the intellect of Harry Archer, it must be confessed that for once his eye strayed over it unconscious of its beauties, or, if not unconscious, at least careless.

The hill-side, between the rocky wall and the lake, had been swept by fire not many years before, and was now covered with a rich growth of tall grass, and low bushy shrubs, with here and there the black scathed trunk of some gigantic cedar towering up, a monument of past devastation, from its verdant slope, and here and there a group of young graceful trees, which had shot up vigorously from the ashes of their sires towards the clear skies, and bright sun, which they could now behold, no longer cowed and opposed by the tyrannous verdure of their gigantic ancestry.

This was the famous feeding-ground, to overlook which our hunters had toiled so painfully to the summit of that towering precipice; and, as Dolph had observed, rarely was it, indeed, that its rich and succulent pasture could not display one herd, at least, to the sportsman's ken.

The gentle south-west wind blew full and fresh into the faces of Harry and the hunter, so that no taint could be carried from the persons, by the nimble atmosphere, to the delicate organs of their intended. It was the quick eyes, therefore, of the sentinel does only, that it was necessary for them now to avoid.

The first glance was enough to fill a hunter's heart with rapture, for, close below the crags, and within easy shot of the platform on which they lay, a noble herd was pasturing; three gallant bucks, one of the first head, and twice the number of slim and graceful hinds; besides a seventh, which stood a few hundred paces from the rest on a little knoll, or gentle elevation lower than what we should term a knoll, with head erect, ears pricked up and expanded to catch the smallest sound, widely distended nostrils snuffing the breeze, as anxious to detect some taint on its fresh balmy breath, and eyes keenly and warily roving over the whole expanse of rock, wood, pasture, lake, and river.

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No rash or boyish excitement at the view prevented those skilful foresters from taking an accurate survey of all that lay within the range of their vision; no burst of eager impulse led them to discharge their rifles at the nearer herd until such time as they should have accurately scanned the whole pasture range, to see if there might not be some other deer within reach, which it might be possible to circumvent before pulling trigger on these; which might be considered as completely within their power.

Their scrutiny was speedily and well rewarded; for in three several points of the landscape did they detect the noble animals of which they were in quest, tranquilly feeding on the long grass, and incumbent branches of the underwood, entirely unconscious of the vicinity of their deadly enemies.

In one little open glade about a mile to the eastward, there was a noble hart of the largest size, with a yearling buck, or prichhorn, and two barren hinds. Among the dense coppice-wood, yet half a mile farther to the east, the wood-brown backs and hornless heads of several more hinds might be distinguished by a practised eye, though it was not easy to make out their exact number. Far away, to complete the tale, on the margin of the woods skirting the lake, a yet larger herd, than any of those nearer to the sportsmen, were lying down to rest, licking their glossy coats, or scratching their ears with their cloven hoofs, in perfect security and fearlessness.

In a word, from the elevated station on which they lay overlooking the wide valley, not less than forty or fifty head of deer were visible at once, among which the hunters had been at the first glance able to detect with certainty two harts of the first head, or what in the Scottish forests would be called harts royal, and two other stags of six or eight branches, besides the yearling prichhorn. The farthest herd was too distant to admit of their distinguishing the age or even the sex of the animals which composed it.

Ten minutes were perhaps devoted by the hunters to this survey of their scene of action, during which neither of the two moved hand or foot, or indeed gave any sign of life except by the keen glances of their watchful and roving eyes. At length, when each was apparently satisfied with that which he had himself seen, their eyes met, with a look of mutual intelligence; and drawing back their heads as warily as they had thrust them forward, they wormed their way backward foot by foot over the craggy platform, until they reached a little hollow of the rocks at about a hundred yards' distance from the brink, and then, safely out of eyeshot and earshot of the wary herds, they paused in consultation.

"Well, Mister Aircher," the old hunter began, "yanis a noble sight for a hunter's eye, is yan! You niver seed jest sich another, I'm a thinkin'. There's fawty head of deer on the range, if there's one. Do tell now, did you iver see the like?"

"Many's the time, Dolph, many's the time, on Braemar, and from the craigs of Ben-y-Ghoil. But never mind that now. How do you mean to work them? and how many can we get? I make four parcels, within eye-range, that may be worked up to; but one of the four is all hinds, and of no account."

"Four passels," replied the hunter, doubtfully. "Four passels there be, sure enough; but how the heavens and airth you'd work up to the big lot by the pond edge, is more nor I can calkilate. No, no, boy. There's three passels, only, 'at can be shot at by this party; and, as you says right, one of them's all does, and of no account. That nighest bunch to the eastward has got one fine biggest sort of buck in it; but if we goes to shoot it fust, and I won't say as it can't be shot, cause the rocks is a plaguy sight lower thereaway than they is here; if we goes, I say, to shoot it fust, I'm afeard that the wind, which takes a swirl like, oncet and agin, amongst these big gray stones, will bring down the scent of us, and mayhap the crack of the rifles too, and so skear these away. I guess it's best to pick the three bucks out of this nighest passel, and let the others go."

"I think not, Dolph," replied Archer, confidently; "and I assure you that there are four parcels, beside that by the lake. Your eyes, good as they are, have failed you for once. You know the deep narrow gully that forks from the glen we came up to the mountain, and cuts right across the pasturage from the west, eastward "

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"Katycornered like," interrupted the hunter. "Yes, I knows it, and knowed it afore iver you was thought on; what on't, Aircher?"

"Why, about twenty yards below it, there lies a great round-headed gray rock, what I call a boulder, which must have fallen from these crags ages since; and a hundred yards again, or thereabout, below that, there stands a tall black half-burnt cedar, with a thicket of briars and wild raspberry-bushes about its foot look here, Dolph," he continued, pointing to the scathed top of a pine projecting from the face of the crags, "bring that white pine top into a range with the spot where the feeder comes into the Green Pond, and you will have rock, cedar-stump, and all, in one range. Well, that done, look close in at the bottom of the cedar; and among the briars you will see a monstrous stag, couched all alone. I do think, Dolph, it is the big mouse-coloured hart you wounded last fall on the northern slope; the hart, I mean, that we tracked thirty miles in the snow, and lost after all."

"Do you though, Aircher? By H we must have him, if so be, it be he. He had twelve branches on his horns then, and he'll have thirteen now don't you mind that, for sartin?"

"Surely I do; but he is too far off now for me to mark that distinctly; and, as we lay, I could not get my glass out. Here it is, fit it to your focus, and creep forward and examine him; I would rather have your judgment than my own, by one-half."

"I dun' know I dun' know," replied the old hunter, gazing at him with not a little of admiration, and perhaps a slight shade of half good-humoured envy; "them eyes o' yourn is young, and I thinks as how they grows younger like and keener ivery year; and mine's a failin' me for sartin. I'll go, though, I'll go, boy. But fust tell a feller how you thinks to do with them so I'll be able to make out and settle all slick and to rights. We moun't be creepin' any more to the edge like, if we don't want to skear 'em. What's your plan, say?"

"My plan's soon told, Dolph. It is that you should lie here on the brow, keeping that royal hart under your rifle all the time. That I should creep down the ravine, or gully, to the gray stone; and if I can once get to that, I can fetch him sure. There's a strong run of water in the gully, and the ripple of that will drown the noise of my feet; and the ravine is so deep, and its face on this side is so steep and broken, that I think this light wind will sweep right over it, without bringing any taint of me to the nostrils of that knowing doe. Then, if I can manage it rightly, and shoot the big hart before he bounces, there'll be nothing but the rifle-crack, which will only sound like a squib in the open, and a puff of smoke, which, if they neither see nor smell me, will scarce alarm them. But if it do, and you shoot down the old stag, as you can do certainly, the herd will either strike down hill toward the east end of the gulley, where I can race for it under cover, and perhaps get another double shot at them; or, they will dash directly eastward along the base of the crags, taking that other big hart, the prickhorn, and the two does along with them; and in that case you must head them along the cliff-tops, where they trend northerly away; when you will probably drive the whole of the two parcels down to the outlet, where Tom and Frank Forester will be ready by that time to give an account of them. Again, if none of them take the alarm, I'll steal up the gorge back to you, without bleeding him or breaking him up, till after we have done with all the other parcels. Then I can creep along the summit here, till I get opposite the big stag, and the prickhorn, when perhaps I can get both of them, while you knock over this chap here below you. That's all; what do you think of it, Dolph?"

"I dun' know yit awhile," replied the old forester, as he brought Harry's glass to the right focus for his eye. "I'll go off and see how 't looks, and be back torights, and we'll fix it one way. Seems to me the wind is kind o' breezin' stronger up, and drawin' westerly more, and that'll be agin your not skeerin' 'em. But we'll see."

And off he crawled for the second time, leaving his rifle and his cap behind him, and carrying Harry's fine Dolland telescope carefully in his right hand, while with the left he wormed himself along the surface of the ground.

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Archer, thus left alone, applied himself to a careful examination of his rifle. He took off the caps, to see that the powder was well up in the nipples; and, satisfied that all was right, wiped the cones with a piece of greased leather, renewed the caps, ran his rod down the barrels, and finding that everything was in right working order, drew out his dram-bottle, ate a sandwich, and washed it down by a moderate sup of the old Ferintosh.

This done, he shook himself, with a well satisfied air and expression; raised the heavy rifle two or three times to his eye, and as he laid it aside muttered to himself: "I'll have that hart royal for a thousand!"

As he spoke, Dolph returned from his reconnoissance, and as he thrust the joints of the telescope together between the palms of his horny hands, "All's right," he said, "Mr. Archer. Your plan is the best, I think. We'll git the two best bucks so, inyhow, and maybe another. But, as it is, I'd rayther have that 'ere big 'un of all, than three common-sized. The wind has hauled a pint more to the westward nor it was; and its kind o' freshenin' up, so I kind o' thinks as your shot 'll skear this passel; but I'll keep well ahead on 'em to the eastward, when I shoots, and show myself like, and if you hears me shout, then strick it down like anything along the holler. Now, be off with you. That big fellow lies still yet awhile. But if I shoots afore you git to the gray rock, then you may know as he's bounced, and come stret back to me. I'd like to git a good shoot to-day like, for I'm afeard it'll rain to-night or to-morrow."

"Let it rain," replied Archer, cheerily. "I'll have that mouse-coloured fellow, anyway. I say, Dolph, keep you Smoker here, and after you shoot at this herd, point them to him, and wave your hand well eastward as he starts, and ten to one he'll course them right down to me. Good-bye, old boy!"

And with the word, he dropped the telescope into his pocket, snatched up his rifle, donned his cap, and after motioning Smoker to lie quiet, until such time as he should return, stole away quietly for a few yards, till he had cleared the plateau of rocks, and then dashed down the mountain gully, at a pace widely different from the toilsome labour by which they had dragged themselves to the upper from the lower elevation within half an hour. Now racing rapidly down the soft peaty margin of the brook, where it spread out into marshy swales; now bounding fearlessly from rock to rock, where it flowed among big round boulders; now swinging himself by the pendulous arms of hemlocks and cedars from ledge to ledge, where it fell in mimic cataracts and rapids, over long rifts of slaty limestone; he effected in less than twenty minutes the descent of the gorge, to ascend which it had cost him and Dolph Pierson above two hours of difficult and painful labour.

By this time, he had reached the point at which a large fresh spring boils up from the bottom of the bed of the brook, and leaving the old stream to persist in a direct course to the lake below, shoots off at an acute angle between two shoulders of black dripping rock, and forms the ravine, of which I have spoken as diagonally crossing the green pasturage, or as it is generally termed in that part of the country, "The burnt feeding grounds."

At this spot the view does not extend fifty yards in any direction; for the new stream turns a second angle before it strikes the open ground, and the whole space about the forks is covered with so dense a forest of pine, hemlock, and cedar, with a few tamarack about the edges of the brook, that the sight is circumscribed within very narrow limits.

Here Archer paused for a moment to recover his breath; bathed his face and hands in the cool stream, and then turned down the gorge to his left, with a wary and crouching step, very different from the free bounding pace at which he had dashed down the precipitous hill-side.

Within five minutes he reached the jaws of the ravine, where the wood broke off in sparse masses to the right hand and the left, and the little torrent, rushing through a scarped natural pass, plunged down a pitch of some forty feet into the deep gravelly trench through which it seethed and chafed on its way to join the distant outlet.

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Here again Archer paused, and looked warily abroad. From his altered position he could now see only three of the separate lots, or parcels, as they are more correctly termed, five of which he had noted from the summit: The large solitary hart, which had arisen from his lair, and was now browsing lazily among the boughs which had of late afforded him their shelter the great herd in the bottom of the valley by the lake's edge and the lot composed of three bucks and seven does, which had moved, though without taking the alarm, some hundred yards nearer to himself.

This was of course all in his favour, since, if his taint, or the smell of his powder, should reach them, it would find them embayed, as it were, in the angle between the crags and the gorge, so that Dolph would have every opportunity of heading them again, and driving them down to the mouth of the ravine.

A minute sufficed him wherein to observe all this, and throwing his rifle, half-cocked and ready, to a long trail, he stole down the centre of the streamlet's bed, above knee-deep in water, stooping low and with every sense on the alert, toward the well marked point, directly opposite the big gray boulder, which was his guide and landmark.

Before he struck the water-course, however, he took his bearings accurately, well knowing that he could not lift his head above the verge of the ravine to ascertain his whereabouts, without the certainty of terrifying the animal of which he was in pursuit from the place at which he was likely to fall an easy victim to his rapid and unerring aim.

This was soon done, for a stunted oak grew on the left side of the water-course, exactly opposite to the rock, so that he had nothing to do but to steal silently, keeping his head low, to that tree; with the certainty of success should he reach it undiscovered.

Meanwhile, old Dolph, with Smoker crouching at his heel, had again crawled to the brink, and, with his rifle ready for instant service, was watching with anxious eye the movements of his young comrade.

The deer which it was his peculiar duty to keep under his aim had indeed moved a little further to the westward, but he cared not for that; well knowing that on the sound of Harry's rifle below them, they would come, if alarmed, directly toward him; since, lying to the leeward of him, they could not discover him by the exquisite acuteness of their olfactory organs, any more than the great hart could discover Harry, his lair being farther yet to windward.

The same cause, however, militated against Harry; for crawling, as he was, down a gorge midway between the little pack and the solitary stag, the same wind which favoured him in regard to the latter was directly adverse to him in respect of the former, so that the operation in which he was engaged was as nice a one as any that can be imagined in the whole range of deerstalking.

And admirably well did he perform it. The eye of the veteran marked him, as he appeared and disappeared, and reappeared again, among the sinuosities of the wild gorge, never raising his head sufficiently to let the keenest eye catch a glimpse of it above the grassy banks, or exposing his person to the gusts of wind, which were now beginning to sweep fitfully across the open and bleak hill-side.

Dolph rubbed his hands in ecstasy as he observed the care, the toil, the active yet deliberate patience, with which his pupil made his way toward the goal, at which he aimed. "Ah! he's a great 'un," he muttered to himself inaudibly, "for all he's a Britisher. I niver seed his like nohow, for quickness at kitchin' inything. I wisht one of my boys 'ud take arter him, but Lord! they ar'n't half a beginnin'. He'll git that stag yit, I swon; and not start them long-yearred sluts o' does nuther, and that's what I'd not a' promised to a' done, in my youngest and spryest days. He's as 'cute all for one as a Feeladelfy lawyer, as true as a good hound dog's nose, and as quick as quick as a greased bullet out on a smart-shootin' rifle."

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But while he was yet speaking, Harry had reached the point where the most care and management was needed, to escape discovery.

The banks had for some time been gradually becoming lower and less abrupt; and the brook, instead of flowing on a declivity parallel to the top of the ravine, had found so hard and even a bottom that it ran over it tranquilly for above a hundred yards in length, scarcely a foot below the level of the surrounding slope at the end of this hundred yards, there was a deep rapid by which it burst down to a yet lower level, some sixty feet beneath.

Should the young hunter once succeed in crossing the hundred level yards unseen, and conveying himself to the lower level, his success might be esteemed certain; but to do so appeared well nigh impossible, since through the whole of that distance he was all but exposed to the quick glances of the does above, and of the hart below; while it seemed almost certain that the wind must strike his person, and carry the tell-tale odour up hill to the pasturing herd at the crag's foot.

But he had decided on all his measures beforehand, and they were executed in an instant. His heavy rifle was secured in its sling on his shoulder and his copper caps and greased patches transferred to the crown of his skull-cap; his powder-flask he secured about his neck by the thong, and held it up in his teeth; then turning his head to the source of the stream, he worked his way down the centre of the current, which was some eight or ten inches deep, flat upon his belly, until he reached the verge of the fall, down which he suffered himself to slide, retarding the rapidity of his descent by clutching at the ledges with his hands; a perilous attempt even for a practised cragsman, but in his case fully successful; for in less than five minutes from his entering the dangerous pass, he stood at the bottom of the cataract unseen and unsuspected.

Dolph clapped his hands in ecstasy and seeing that Archer's success was now certain, looked to his own rifle, and prepared himself for his share of the action.

Harry, meanwhile, as he stood dripping from his ice-cold bath, shook himself like a water-dog, drew a long breath, imbibed a deep draught of Ferintosh, unslung and examined his trusty rifle, and then, having reached the spot opposite to the gray boulder, as indicated by the gnarled oak stump, crawled up the western bank, with his thumb on the rifle-cock, and the nail of his fore-finger close pressed on the trigger-guard.

Now he attained the brink, crouching low, and keeping his whole form concealed among the long grass and low bushes which crowned the abrupt steep. Only his eye glanced quickly through the dry stems and sere leaves. For a moment, he fancied that his quarry had escaped him; for it no longer occupied the station at which he had previously observed it; but just as he was beginning to despair, a quick rustle caught his ear from the right hand, or the direction opposite to that in which he had been gazing, and turning his head quickly, he saw the noble beast standing within twenty paces of him, tossing his "beamed frontlet to the sky," and snuffing the atmosphere eagerly, as if he suspected the presence of a foe, though ignorant as yet of his exact whereabouts.

With the speed of light the rifle rose to Harry's unerring eye, a quick flash gleamed through the brushwood, a small puff of smoke rose into the cloudless air, a flat quick crack without an echo followed it; and before the small puff had cleared away, so truly was that snap-shot aimed, the gallant hart had fallen lifeless, literally without a struggle, on the green sward.

Lowering his but instantly, Harry poured the measured powder into the muzzle, drove down the well patched ball, applied the cap, and was ready for another shot in less time than it has taken to describe the operation.

The next moment another rifle exploded on the hill above him; but this time its sharp crack was reverberated and repeated in a hundred ringing echoes from the rocks and the gnarled trunks among which the shot was fired; and instantly a long clear whoop, in the well known stentorian voice of Dolph, announced that the upper herd was in motion.

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At this sound, Harry raised his head the least in the world; and looking back, perceived the two second-rate stags, with the seven does preceding them, coursing at all their speed along the base of the crags due eastward; while along the summit he could descry the tall gaunt form of the Dutch hunter bounding forward with what seemed almost supernatural agility, with the dog Smoker at his heels, in the hope of yet cutting them off and forcing them toward the ravine in which Harry stood, half doubtful, half expectant.

"Well!" Archer soliloquized, "he has shot the stag. That is two royal harts in one day's stalking; not so bad, faith! but we shall not get a chance at the others. Come, since there's no hope left of them, I'll e'en bleed this fellow."

And with the word his keen blade was out, and buried in the weasand of the superb animal, which lay out-stretched lifeless and motionless on the greensward, which it had trod but a little while before, so full of graceful life and fiery vigour.

"A splendid hart, by heaven! twenty stone, horseman's weight, I'll warrant him, after he's *gralloched*. He never stirred after the ball struck him. It must have pierced the cavity of the heart. Halloo! What the devil's that?" he continued, as the deep bay of a hound struck his ear. "It's Smoker's tongue, for a million! but surely, surely, he is not going to run musical, and get himself shot nowadays by these cursed Dutchmen!"

The cry was not repeated, but Harry's telescope was out in a moment; and by its aid, he saw the fleet deer-hound dashing down a fissure in the rocks, and heading the two stags, which he had cut off from the hinds, directly down upon the ravine within which he was still standing.

In his impatient joy at finding a pass by which he could descend upon his quarry, the staunch hound had given vent to his pleasure in that one wild cry, and was now running, as was his wont, fleet as the wind, and silent as the night, upon the track of the game.

Now came the tug of war, the rapid and exciting ace, which renders deerstalking in the Scottish High-lands the most severe and toilsome of all field sports. Not once in years does such an opportunity occur in the woodland tracts of North America, wherein deer-stalking, or still-hunting as it is appropriately termed, is almost invariably practised in forests so dense that the eye can rarely distinguish objects at above thirty or forty yards distant, and that craft, wariness, and patience are of far more avail than the eagle eye, the unfailing breath, and the iron sinew of the mountaineer.

Nor is it probable that standing, as Harry Archer stood, even as the two stately harts came bounding down the slope, with the fleet hound hard upon their haunches, right toward the lower end of the ravine, one man in fifty, who had not been used to Scottish deer-stalking, would have so much as thought of being able to obtain a shot.

But as the fleet and graceful animals came dashing down the hill, clearing the scattered bushes and blocks of rifted stone, which were strewn here and there on their course, with long and easy bounds, Harry almost instinctively perceived that they had not as yet scented him on the wind, though they were well to leeward of him, owing to his position in the deep channel of the stream.

At about a mile's distance below him to the eastward, the gorge of the stream melted away into the level plain on the border of the lakelet; and it was at this point evidently that the deer intended to cross the water.

If therefore by dint of his utmost speed Harry could reach that point, ere they should cross it, he was sure of at least one shot. And instantly, as he noted the direction of their course, he dashed, reckless of all impediment, at the top of his pace down the gully.

There was no space of level ground on either side the brook; for wherever it had not cut its way sheer through the solid rock, the gravelly or peaty banks, washed by the rains of spring and autumn, fell steep and sheer from the

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plain above to the water's level.

The channel of the stream was his course, therefore, and a right difficult course for such a headlong race it was.

Yet he sped fearlessly and fleetly onward; he could not of course now see anything of the chase he was pursuing; but he needed not the aid of the eye to know that they would hold their course straight and unaltered to their point.

Here he leaped with long active bounds from block to block of granite, as they peered with their slippery white heads above the chafing current; here he splashed recklessly through the swift rippling shallows, seeing the swift brook-trout dart through the eddies from before his feet; there, again, he floundered almost waist-deep in the dark pools, where it flowed through peat-bogs, and tussocks, springing the English snipe with its sharp shrill cry, and the mallard with its hoarse note of alarm, from the rushes by the margin.

Onward he sped, still onward, long-breathed, and unwearied; and ever and anon, he learned by the long cheery huzzas of the old hunter on the hill, that he was holding his own at least; if not gaining on the chase.

It must be understood that the lines on which Archer and the two harts were running, lay nearly at right angles to each other; Harry having about one mile to run, and the deer about twice that distance, before their courses should intersect one another.

Harry had now cleared above two-thirds of the distance, and without slackening his pace had pitched up his rifle into the hollow of his left hand, and was examining the caps as he ran, to see whether they had been damaged by the water dashed up from his feet in his headlong career.

The banks grew gradually lower, and the stream, spreading over a wider bed and running on a bright gravel bottom, afforded him a better foothold than he had hitherto encountered.

At this moment a long piercing yell from Dolph, who from his station on the crags could see everything that was passing, gave him notice that the crisis was at hand.

An instant more, and before he had even checked his pace, scarce twenty feet apart, with their proud heads aloft, their wild eyes glancing fearfully around them, and their nostrils distended to the utmost, the two harts dashed across the gorge.

It almost seemed that they were no sooner in sight than they disappeared; so rapid was their transit, and so completely did the bold bank conceal them, after they had once cleared the channel of the stream.

But swift as was their transit, swifter yet was the motion of hand and eye, which brought the ponderous rifle truly and surely to the runner's shoulder, and discharged both barrels, in such quick succession that the two reports were almost blended into a single sound.

No eye of man, however near or quick-sighted, could have noted that either of the balls had taken effect; but the deerstalker had another sense by which he was assured that neither of his messengers had failed to perform its errand. For a dull flat *thud* met his ear almost simultaneously with each discharge, which he recognised at once as the sound of the ball plunging into its living target.

Before he had lowered the weapon from his eye, Smoker had swept across the stream at one long swinging leap, and was away on the traces of the quarry, still mute, although the slaver on his lip, the glare in his fierce eye, and the wiry bristles erect on his back and shoulders, proved clearly how earnest and how fiery was his excitement.

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Scarce was he out of sight over the ridge, before his master scrambled up out of the gorge, and, scaling the right-hand bank, found one of the two harts prostrate and struggling in the death agony, which his sharp knife soon mercifully terminated; while he might see the other, now some three hundred yards away, striving, with desperate but useless efforts, to escape the pursuit of the stanch deer-hound. Casting down his unloaded rifle by the side of the slain hart, and fixing the spot in his memory by a marking glance, he now bounded onward, over the open, to the aid of the gallant hound; who, he perceived, would ere long overtake the wounded stag, and would in all probability receive some injury, should he attack it single-handed.

Fast as he ran, however, exerting himself till every sinew in his frame appeared to crack, and till the sweat rolled in big drops down his face, despite the coldness of the weather, his speed was put forth to no purpose. For, wearied soon by its gigantic efforts, and weakened by the loss of blood which flowed freely from the large wound made by the ounce-ball of Harry's rifle, the hart turned to bay.

But it was all too late, for, as he turned, the fierce dog sprang, fastened his sharp white tusks into his gullet, and bore him to the ground in a moment, before he had time to strike with his cloven hoofs, or aim a thrust with his formidable brow-antlers.

Then followed a desperate and confused struggle. The hart, strong in its last extremity, rose to its knees again; tossing its antlered head frantically in fruitless endeavours to break the hold of its cruel enemy, bleating and braying piteously the while, with the big tears rolling down its hairy cheeks, and the blood and foam issuing from its distended jaws.

For a second's space, it seemed that the stag had the advantage; but it was for a second only. Again, with a sharp angry growl, the dog tore him down; and ere he could struggle up again, the man was added to the strife, with all his pitiful and tender feelings absorbed for the time in the wild fury of pursuit, and the fierce joy of capture.

His foot was on its neck, his knife in its gullet one sharp gasp, one long heaving shudder, and the bright eye glazed, and the wide nostril collapsed; and for the fourth time, since the dawn of that sweet autumnal morning, had Harry Archer, as tender-hearted and as kindly-souled a man as ever trod on greensward, taken that life, which but *One* can bestow, un pitying and relentless.

And now, weak himself with the violence of his exertions, and overcome with toil, he waved his cap in the air above his head, and sent forth his note of triumph in a long-drawn "Who-whoop" to which a cheery shout replied from the lips of Pierson, who was now running toward him, midway between the cliffs and the streamlet.

But ere the shout had well died from his tongue, Harry staggered and sank down beside the slaughtered game, half fainting and almost insensible.

CHAPTER VI. THE GRALLOCHING.

The raven sat nigh, with her sullen croak, Waiting her bone when the deer was broke.

Two minutes had not passed between Archer's sinking to the ground exhausted, and Pierson's arrival on the scene of action. For, seeing his young companion fall, as it seemed to him, so suddenly, he imagined that he had received some hurt from the antlers of the wounded stag, in its death-struggle, and in consequence redoubled his pace down the uneven slope, throwing away his rifle in order to reach the place more speedily.

During the few seconds that Harry's insensibility lasted, Smoker had applied himself assiduously, in the height of his dog-affection, to licking the face and hands of his master, over and over again, until he had communicated to them no small quantity of the blood which had flowed from the hart's death-wound, and which he had been

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lapping greedily. So, that when Pierson came up, he presented a singularly ghastly and almost appalling spectacle; for, between fatigue, loss of breath, and excitement, his face was ashy pale, and the streaks of frothy arterial blood which crossed it in many places, gave it exactly the resemblance of the countenance of one violently slain.

A loud exclamation of dismay and grief burst from the lips of the rude forester, as he knelt down by Harry's side, raised his head upon his knee, and gazed wistfully into his face.

At this moment, however, the brief fit of exhaustion and faintness passed away; and, as Archer's eyes reopened and fell full upon the hard angular features of the Dutch hunter, grotesquely distorted from the effects of sorrow and apprehension, he burst at once into a loud hearty laugh, which instantly reassured his friend, and satisfied him that he was not seriously endangered.

"That's right; that's right, Mr. Aircher!" cried the good fellow cheerfully, though a big tear, the offspring of strangely mingled feelings, was rolling down his dry withered cheek "laugh at the old fool e'en as much as you will; right glad I am to hear you laugh inyhow. I niver thought to hear you laugh agin, I didn't."

"Why, what the deuce ails you, Dolph?" eried Harry, springing to his feet, as brisk as ever; "or what should ail *me*, that I should never laugh again? The devil's in it, if, after running two miles over such ground as I have just run, and at such a pace too, a fellow may not lie down on the grass and rest himself. I was dead blown, old fellow, nothing more. A good pull at the Ferintosh will bring me about in a jiffy."

"But what's all that 'ere blood comed from, say?"

"Blood! what blood? man-alive, I believe you're drunk or dreaming!"

"On your face, Mister Aircher. Arn't it *your* blood? well, I thought it was, for sartin!"

"I do not know," said Areher. "No, it's not my blood, I'm not hurt;" and as he spoke he raised his handkerchief to his face, and with the aid of a little water from the brook soon washed away the filthy witness from his face. Then seeing Smoker, who, relieved from all anxiety about his master, had buried his sharp muzzle in the wide death-wound of the buck "There is the culprit," he added; "poor devil, I suppose he fell to licking my face, when he saw me lie down."

"Well, yes, he was a kind o' nuzzlin' at you, when I seed him, and I'm an old fool, inyhow, not to have thought of that afore. But do you call that lyin' down? It looked a darned sight liker fallin'."

"Well, well, never mind which it was, Dolph. All's right now; so don't say a word about it, when those chaps come up; Fat Tom would crow for a whole month, if he got hold of such a story on me."

"Niver a word, I," replied the hunter. "But come, it's past now, and we've got e'enamost more nor we we can do, to git these four bucks broken and hung up, so as we can jine old Tom and that 'ere fancy chap down at the outlet."

"Well, let's be doing," answered Harry; "but first run to the brook, Dolph, won't you? and fetch us up your big tin-cup full of water. For all the water's so cold, I want a long drink, I tell you."

"Here 'tis," replied old Dolph, as quick as light. "I've drinkt out on't, myself. But I guess you won't stand for that."

"Not I, indeed," said Harry, bolting the liquor. "Now I'm your man for anything what's to be done first?"

"Fust! why fust we've jest got to go and find our rifles, and load up. Where's yourn?"

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"By the other hart, on the brook's edge. I threw it down that I might help Smoker with this fellow, who would, I thought, prove too tough a match for him. Where's yours?"

"Somewheres on yan hill-side; I throwed it down when I seed you fall. I dun' know wheres but I can find it, inyhow, by taking the back track."

"Look here, then, let us gralloch this hart first, and hang him somewhere. We'll have to carry him a hundred yards, to that tree; and as we have got four to look after, we must lose no time, and take no steps twice over. I'll break him up," he added, tucking up his sleeves and drawing his long knife. "Do you run and cut a ten-foot pole, stout enough to carry him, in the coppice yonder."

No sooner said than done; and before Harry had cleared the carcass of the offal, on which Master Smoker blew himself out till he could hardly stir, Dolph returned bearing a young straight dog-wood tree, of some three inches diameter at the but, by ten or twelve feet in length, which he had hewn down, and shaped radely with his keen tomahawk.

"That's your sort, Dolph!" cried the young Englishman, who had by this time interlinked the legs of the hart through the perforated sinews, as cooks will do those of a partridge before roasting. "Shove it through here. Put your shoulder to that end, and I'll hoist this. Oh-he-ave!"

And, with the word, they raised the noble buck, pendent from the pole, back and head downward, and walked away cheerily under the heavy load, to the spot where the other had fallen close to the ravine's edge. Here Archer's rifle was recovered, and duly loaded; and the operation of breaking, or butchering, having been performed on that hart likewise, Harry mounted to the fork of a young hickory which grew hard by, and, with Pierson's assistance, hoisted one up on either side the stem, and left them hanging there, a noble trophy, the one with six points, the other with seven, to its widespread and formidable antlers.

Thence they had a long and tedious walk up hill to the spot where Dolph had east down his rifle, and a weary search ere they found it. A search rewarded only by success at last, in consequence of the extreme sagacity of the Dutch hunter, and the houndlike instinctive skill with which he tracked the light prints, invisible to any eye less practised than his own, of his own bounding footsteps on the dry grass, and among the leafless bushes.

Archer, who had attained not a little of that Indian art of following the trail, had long been at fault utterly; and, quite unable to discover any sign where Dolph asserted positively that he could see clearly his whole footstep, heel and toe, had given up all hope of finding the weapon.

This task at last accomplished, and the unerring piece loaded with the minute and patient exactness which is so perfectly characteristic of the true back-woodsman, the hardy pair set forth again; and after scrambling up the tangled and broken slopes of the burnt pasturage for something better than half an hour, reached the foot of the cliffs at about half a mile's distance from the mouth of the ravine through which Harry had descended. Here the same ceremony was performed on Dolph's stag which they had already completed on the others, and when he had been drawn up by the heels to a dwarf oak, which shot out of the crag's face, nothing remained for them to do, but to descend leisurely by the brook's edge to the scathed tree, at the foot of which lay the great mouse-coloured hart, which had rewarded Archer's toilsome descent of the gully.

"It's him, by the Eternal!" cried old Dolph, the moment his eye fell on the carcass of the monstrous animal. "It's him, Aircher, else I'll niver pull a trigger arter this day! Give us your hand, boy; you've done that this day, as 'll be talked on hereaways, arter we're both cold and under the green sod. Yes, yes, it's him, sartin. There's the crook horn, and there's the white spot on his hither side, whar' poor Jim Buckley's bullet went clar through him, as I've heern say by them that was alivin' them days, these fourscore year agone, and better. And they do tell as he was *then*, what *you* dalls a hart royal, with a full head I means. There's not a hunter in the range, as his father and his

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grand'ther hasn't run this fellow, as lies here now so quiet, with hounds, and on snow-shoes, in light snows and on deep crusts fifty times, and niver got within rifle range, 'ceptin Jim Buckley, and he lied in wait for him like, over ten nights in May, up in the crotch of a big tree, whar' he come bellin' for his hinds, nigh whares he'd seen the frayin' of his horns like, on the ragged stems, and so he shot him through and through, with an ounce-bullet from an old-fashioned yager, as was tuk from them Hoosian chaps at Trenton in the Jarseys but Lord a' massy, Mr. Archer, he stopped no mores for that ounce-bullet, than you'd stop for a darned musquito bite when the hounds was makin' music in a run way. He rared right stret an cend, and shuck himself, and looked kind a savage like at Jim, and went off through the woods jest the same as though nauthen ailed him and nauthen did ail him, likely." Here the old hunter paused, looked about him with a furtive and uneasy eye, and then added in a low voice, as if he were half ashamed of the thoughts to which he was about to give utterance, or fearful of uttering them. "But su'thin ailed Jim Buckley arterward, they doos say, Mr. Archer, for that same day one year arter a rifle went off of itself like in his partner's hand, and the ball struck him nigh the blade-bone of his right shoulder, and quartered through him, and comed out jest in his flank under the lowest rib jest the identical shot as he gave the stag but Jim was a dead man in five minutes; and the ball, it warn't nauthen but a little triflin' fawty to the pound slug. I'm kinder sorry arter all that you shot him; they doos tell 'at no one niver had no luck arterward that had so much as chased him, let alone shot him."

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Archer merrily "Why, Dolph, old lad, are you beside yourself this fine morning! Why, to my certain knowledge, you have hunted him with me three several times yourself, and shot *at* him once, and I never heard yet of any very bad luck that had befallen you "

"Nor of none very good, nuther, I'm athinkin';" interpolated Dolph, with an incredulous shake of the head. But Harry proceeded as if he had not heard him,

"And for the rest, Dolph, you may be perfectly easy for this time, I think. For you had certainly no hand in this job from the beginning to the end. It was I, who viewed him from the crags with my naked eye, when you overlooked him; it was I who recognised him for the old crookhorn, with my glass; I who stalked, I who shot, I who bled him; and I, Dolph, who will bear the brunt right merrily of anything that is like to befall me in consequence. Come, man alive, don't look so wo-begone after the best morning's work that has been done on the burnt pasture, these ten years or better."

"These twinty year, I guess. But I ar'n't downcast none, nor I don't believe the one-half of their parleyin'. But you keeps a askin' me ivery now and then to tell you the old talk of our wood-lads hereaways, and then when I doos, you laughs at me."

"Not I! not I!" said Archer, who had been busy cleaning the carcass, while Dolph was ruminating on the old-time superstition "By the Lord Harry! four inches of clear fat on the brisket!" he ejaculated on a sudden. "I will dissect a dozen or so of these short ribs, Dolph, and with a bit of salt and pepper out of my pouch, we will make a broil down by the lake-shore, yonder, and with the hard biscuit and cold pork and onions, and the drop of Ferintosh, we will have a feast fit for kings, by the time those fellows come along. I'd ber a trifle they haven't beat us yet awhile."

"There ar'n't no *two* men on this airth as kin," replied the old hunter, looking with an admiring eye at his companion. "For I will say that afore your face, as I've said many's the time ahind your back, yourn is the quickest eye, the steadiest hand, the coolest heart, and the fastest foot, I iver see on hill or in valley. Mine ar'n't so quick, or sure, or cool, by many a sight, nowadays. I dun' know as they iver was; and for fastness, why when I was a boy, you'd have outrun me jest as I kin a mud-turkle; and then for knowin' sign and followin' trail, and specially for puttin' things together, and seein' what the hull sum of them tells though you was green as grass, and helpless as a year-old babby when I seed you fust there's not a many as kin beat you hereaways, nor in the far west nuther. Now, if I'd bin and done a wrong thing inyhow, and kivered it up close so's no one should find it out who dun it, and then med tracks, I'd rather fifty times have fifty Feeladelfy lawyers, and half the woodmen in the range arter

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my heels, as jest you onaccompanied like."

"Hush! hush! Dolph, you'll put me to the blush, old boy; whatever little I may know of the woods and woodcraft, I owe it all to you."

"There ain't nothin', Archer, in hearin' the truth, or in tellin' the truth, right out, up and down, as should make no gal blush, let alone no man. And it's truth that I tell you. Hallo! what's that?" as the distant crack of a rifle came up the light air to their ears, from the lake-shore.

Both turned their eyes instantly toward the point whence the sound came, and a thin wreath of bluish smoke was seen to curl lazily above the underwood and to melt into the transparent skies. A moment afterward, at about two hundred paces' distance from the spot where the smoke was disappearing, a noble buck darted from the covert at full speed, and plunging into the lake, oared himself with his fleet limbs gallantly across the limpid sheet, his graceful neck and antlered crest showing like the prow and figure-head of some stately galley, with the blue water rippling before the smooth velocity of his motion.

A minute afterward, a man showed himself, rifle in hand, examining the bushes and the grass under foot, in search of blood or hair, or the track of the bullet, thereby to judge whether his shot had been effective.

"Ay! ay!" said Archer, laughing, as he recognised the gay garb of his friend by aid of his telescope, "you may look there these ten years, Master Frank, and find no sign. That was a clear miss; hey, Dolph?"

"In course it was. Who iver see a man in sich fancy garments as them are, do anything but miss?"

"He does not always miss, I can tell you, by a long way, Dolph," said Harry. "But come, let's be tramping. They are nigher to our meeting-place than we are."

"But we'll do the distance in jest half the time."

"True. But let's do it easy."

CHAPTER VII. THE TRYSTING-TREE.

Hail, cool, refreshing shade! abode most dear To the sun-wearied traveller, wandering near.

Within a gunshot, or less, of the lake's brink, at a point where the open ground meets the water without any intervening fringe of wood or coppice, there stands a gigantic pin oak, alone and older far than any of its neighbours, and so immense in the spread of its branches that it is commonly said by the foresters and woodmen of that region to overshadow more than an acre of land. Its limbs do not, however, sweep so low to earthward as to prevent the growth of a soft and mossy greensward even to its roots, or to exclude entirely the play of the sunbeams, or the currents of air which are ever vocal among its branches.

To this delightful canopy it was, that Harry Archer and his comrade now bent their way, down the long declivity of the burnt pasture, taking it easy indeed, as the former had proposed to do, but still clearing the ground at a very respectable rate, favoured as they were by the descending surface.

The consequence was that they reached it, as Pierson had predicted, long enough before Frank Forester and Fat Tom had made their appearance; and had already set about their culinary preparations, while the jolly Boniface, sorely overdone and discomfited, was plunging and crashing through the thickets of wild raspberry and cat-briars, and stumbling over the burnt logs, barking his shins, and stubbing his toes at every step, among oaths,

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imprecations, and obscenities which might have been heard at half a mile's distance.

"I swon!" said Pierson suddenly, stopping short in the act of transfixing a fat venison collop with a thin stick of red cedar, which was destined to supply the place of a spit, as an appalling burst of execrations came down the wind from the eastward, "that 'ere Tom Draw's a buster inyhow! I'd as lieve take a steam ingyne a still-huntin' with me as that chap. Why, Lord a'massy, he'd skear ivery buck 'twixt here and the beech-woods with his cursin'."

"You don't catch him cursing, as you call it, Master Dolph," replied Harry coolly, exposing the third steak he had spitted to the fire, which was beginning to burn up brisk and clear, "when there's the least likelihood of getting a shot. The old man knows, as well as you do, that we are down here on the shore, and that we have swept the whole of the burnt pasture ahead."

"'Taint no ways, nohow," muttered Dolph, "to be amakin' sich a racket in the woods; I'm eenamost ashamed to be seen companyin' with sich an awkerd squad."

"Tush! tush! shut up, *we* have done well enough, I should think, to satisfy you for one day. Look to that steak, too; it wants turning, if I'm not mistaken. You've let it burn, Dolph, while you have been scolding about nothing."

"Hilloah! hilloah!" at this moment, there arose a clear cheery halloo from the wood, at some hundred yards' distance, through which the new comers were advancing.

"Who-whoop!" responded Archer; and thereupon a merry laugh succeeded, and a loud exclamation in Frank Forester's blithest tones: "Come, come on, you old villain! I told you I'd back my nose against your eyes and ears, any day. Don't I smell the fat of venison dripping down on the brown crisp biscuits? Come along, do!"

"Nose I'll be sworn you do; nose out anything to eat, or to drink either, you little gormandizin' cuss, a mile off and better but I'll fix you, boy, I'll fix you torights."

And therewith, bursting through the green boughs, the two worthies made their appearance, neither of them, to tell truth, looking a great deal the better or the livelier for their tramp; for Forester's gay verdant toggery was sorely besmirched, and the fine broadcloth of his jacket torn into ribbons by the thorns and jagged branches: while poor Tom, sweating beneath his load of lesh, literally "larded the lean earth," as he shook it with his ponderous strides, and blew, as Forester said, who in spite of all his disasters was in tip-top spirits, like a grampus in shoal water.

"How be you, boys?" exclaimed the fat man, as soon as he could recover breath enough to speak. "Which on you'll do a good thing jest for oncet like, and give a chap a drop o' suthin'? That little cuss has bin and drinkt up the hull of his own liquor, and then hooked mine and drinkt it dry. He got so darned drunk, Archer, now I tell you, that he missed the etarnal biggest, fattest, nicest, first-rate, six-year old buck, in the brush thereaways, not ten yards off on him, the most all-fired easiest shot I iver did see."

"No! did he, though?" said Archer, winking to Dolph to hold his tongue, as he handed the big flask of Ferintosh to old Draw, who incontinently applied the neck to his mouth, in utter contempt of the silver cup which covered the bottom "What do you say to that, Frank? I can hardly believe such things of you. We heard the shot; did you not fetch him?"

"I can't lie, Harry," replied Frank, with a sort of bashful grin. "I believe I *did* miss him clean; and he gave me a pretty fair shot, too; though not at ten yards, as that most mendacious of all mankind, if he should not rather be called *devillcind*, says; but at some thirty or forty. Yes, I did miss him clean. I looked out sharp enough, but the deuce a drop of blood, or bit of cut hair could I find; nor could I even trace where the ball had barked the bushes."

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"We saw you, Frank! we saw you," said Harry, laughing heartily. "It is well for you that you stuck to the truth, for if you'd told the least bit of a story, we'd have fined you champagne for a dozen. But what sport have you had? what have you done?"

"Torn my new jacket into ribbons; scratched my hands so that I shall be obliged to wear gloves for the next three months; and got a most furious appetite!"

"No doubt about the last item," said Harry, laughing, "but what in the shooting line? How many pair of antlers?"

"I'll trouble you, Mr. Pierson, for that steak nearest to you. Exactly! Upon the biscuit, if you please, with a pinch of the salt, and just one dash of the red pepper," said Master Frank, turning a resolutely deaf ear to all questions in relation to vert or venison.

"Well, Tom, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nauthen much, nohow," responded the fat man, scratching his head, doubtfully; "that 'ere darned little Wax-skin, atween his peagreen jacket and his silver rifle, and his eternal awkward ways, and his hollering, whenever he got a little ways off in the woods, for all the world like a peacock in rainy weather, skeart all the deer clean off the range. We might have had ten nicest kind of good fair shots, for we've seen more nor that, but he got jest one shot, and that, as you sced, he missed shameful, and I I "

"Well, you? what next? out with it, or it'll choke you what did you do?"

"I kilt *one*, as he skeart, and it comed kind o' quarterin' acrost my track. It war a plaguy long shot, tew, but I downed it."

"*One!* ah! that was the first, you mean. Well, and how many since?"

"Why *one*, I tells you darn your eternal stupid head! earn't you so much as understand a chap, when he speaks right down English?"

"Oh! one more. Well, how did you kill him? was it since you struck the burnt pasture?"

"I telled you afore. It was one as he skeart, and it comed kind o' quarterin' like acrost my track. It was a plaguy long shot, tew, but I downed it "

"Confound you! that is the same you told us about first of all. The second, I mean how did you get the second?"

"There ar'n't no second."

"No second! why you said *one*; and when I asked you how many *since*, you said *one*; that makes two, as I learned when I went to school."

"One's one; and you knows it, darn you! You carn't make two out of one, nohow."

"And you, I think, can scarce beat us two, with one buck between you. We'll treat all the town tonight, and Dolph, here, will have to get drunk, wolves or no wolves!"

"How many have you got, Aircher? More nor one? say!"

"Tell him, Dolph. He's such a Turk, he won't believe *me*, if I tell him the truth."

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"Well! we've got six, I reckon. And if I'd only a' had two barrels, it might jest as well a' been siven! But it's a good day as it is, inyhow; and so," he added gravely, "we'll be thankful, and not swear none, if you please, Mr. Draw."

"Sartin?" replied Tom interrogatively, his eyes glistening eagerly, between envy and admiration; for, having in view the Dutch hunter's well known veracity, he did not for a moment question his assertion. "Six! Did you for sartin, though? and how many on 'em did that plaguy critter git?" and he pointed to Harry as he spoke.

"Pretty nigh all on 'em, for that," responded the Dutchman. "He's too much for me, Mr. Draw, iny-ways; and I guess that means for you too we're gittin' old and stiff, and you're gittin' fat "

"Getting fat!" shrieked Frank, who, by aid of the fat juicy venison steak, and two or three deep libations of the Ferintosh, had recovered his impudence at least, if not his equanimity "I wonder what the devil he will be, when he has *got* fat!"

"Fat be darned!" replied the Falstaff. "Fat niver hinderad no one of doin' nauthen yit, as I knows on; and I can tell you, I can outwalk, outdrink, outshoot, outrun, out "

"Lie!" interposed Frank.

"Out-*do* " continued Tom, "these cussed Yorkers at iverything; let alone lying, which iverybody knows Forester here whips creashun at. Didn't you niver hear, Dolph, how he was brought up to give evidence at Newark, in the Jarseys, and he swore right stret up and down, and sticked to what he swore uncommon hard; and the more the lawyers they tried to bother him, why the more little Wax-skin couldn't be bothered nohow; but kind o' bothered them back wust kind, so as they couldn't make nauthen on him; nor nauthen on the case nohow! For you see jest this time, kind o' for fun like and to make folks wonder, Frank he wor tellin' pretty nigh the truth 's nigh as he could tell't, inyhow and his ividence was a raal stumper; there warn't no gittin' over it, and the defendant's attorney seed that too a darned eternal 'cutest kind o' small chap *he* was a leetle mite of a chap to have sich an ungodly sight of brains I'll stand treats twenty times for him, if iver we comes together well, he upped, and he summed up to the jury; and he made an all-fired long talk on the other witnesses, and showed as all they said warn't nauthen; and so it warn't nauthen, inyhow; and the jury they didn't want tellin' that, I reckon. Well, when he got to Frank here, he says, `Now, gentlemen, we come to Mister Forester's ividence, gentlemen; and mighty darned strong ividence it is tew; if only so be as one could believe one word on it.' Then Forester here, he began to twist up thim darned long moustaches, and tried kind o' not to laugh, and to look savage tew; and the jury they began to stare, and to wonder, likely, what was acomin' next. Then torights he went on agin, and says he `But the trouble is, one carn't believe a word on it; and nobody won't nor nobody don't believe a word on't bekase how's they agoin' to believe, or how's *you* agoin' to believe, gentle *men*, intelligent and enlightened and idicated men as you be, as a man what makes his livin', what airns his daily bread, gentlemen, and his daily brandy tew and a darned lot of the last, I reckon by doin' no one thing but writin' G d d n lies, kin *tell* the truth if he wants to? Gentlemen may say what they pleases about oaths, and the sanctity of oaths; but I tell *you* that habit are stronger and more sancterfied than oaths allus, and if a man airns his bread by writin' lies, why it stands to reason as he carn't help *tellin'* lies tew, and the more he'll try not to lie, why in course the more he *will* lie, gentlemen" And so he sot down; and the jury they riz up; and gave a vardict for the defendant stret away. You harn't got nauthen' to say agin' that, Forester, no-how."

"Nothing whatever," replied Forester, gravely. "Nothing. It is quite true, upon my honour. And the foreman of the jury said afterwards, I believe, that it didn't matter so much for Pet that was the lawyer's name showin' as Mr. Forester wrote *lies* for his part, he thought no one shouldn't be believed on his oath, as could write at all, leastways more nor to keep a set o' books, or make out a bill of sale."

"Be that true though?" asked Dolph, who had been listening very attentively, and who in his plain untutored common-sense had been able to discover no fun in such petty low-minded iniquity "be that true, sure enough?"

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"True that the lawyer made those remarks, and that the jury gave that verdict? perfectly true, upon my honour!" replied Archer. "I was staying with Frank, at the Cedars, at the time, and heard it."

"And what did the Newark chaps dew to that ar' jury? We'd a' ridden 'ern on rails, I guess, here, iny-ways; and gin 'em a lick o' tar, and a dash of feathers."

"They did not. `They werry much applauded wot they had done,' because Mr. Forester is something of a gentleman, and gentlemen are not popular in those diggings; and because he *can* read and write, which is esteemed very vulgar by the rich *would-be's*, who for the most part *cannot*."

"It's a darned shame, inyhow," said Dolph.

"You must remember that small countryfied cities are not the country the free open honest independent country, Dolph; and that pedlars, and traders, and petty manufacturers are not yeoman and landholders, any more than they are merchants, or gentlemen."

"They think they is, I guess," responded Dolph. "At least to judge from the airs they take on with us countrymen."

"Who could buy and sell the whole of them both for means and for manners both for intelligence and uprightnes! but away with them! give me a cup of Ferintosh, I must wash the taste of hats and sole-leather out of my mouth, before I shall be worth a farthing for the rest of the day."

"That's all quite right, as you says, Harry," put in old Tom; "but how many o' them six deer did you kill, Harry, I'd be pleased to larn?"

"I killed five, Tom. Two double shots and one single. And what's better yet, I fetched the big crooked-horned mouse-coloured hart, that they talk about so much here; the old fellow, I mean, which they say has been known on this range, these hundred years."

"These hundred and fawty years," said Dolph, quietly. "I wish you hadn't killed him, Mr. Aircher, though. There'll be blood come on't afore the year's through I knows."

"Tush! tush! Dolph. Take a drop of Ferintosh, man, and drive such nonsense out of your noddle. We've done stalking, for this day, I fancy. For Tom and Frank, here, seem to be pretty thoroughly done over, and I don't know whither we should go, to look after more game."

"Nor I nuther; leastwise, unless we was to cross for the range beyond the black crick; and that's ten mile away."

"And if it were not *one*, I would not meddle with it, for it is to be our to-morrow's beat, is it not, Dolph?"

"I reckon so."

"Well, then, we'll cook another round of steaks and biscuits, and take another pull at the flasks, and then we'll have a smoke; and by that time it will be none too early that we should think of starting on the homeward track."

"But whar's the boys, Tom?" inquired Dolph. "I hopes you harn't left them down at the mill, like. Leastways, if you have, I don't know how the plague we'll get the deer home as we've killed; and I wouldn't like to let them be out hereaways all night, I tell you."

"No, no. They'll be here torights; black Jake he's a bringin' one o' them ponics along the skirt o' the wood where the ground is the smoothest, and your boy's fetchin' the big batteau from the mill, and a canoe at the tail on't."

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They'll be here to-rights; I swon. Look! here's black Jake a-comin' now!"

"So he be, so he be," returned Dolph. "Well, I'll stop and give him his orders, for I guess he won't understand you so slick as he will me; and then, while he's bringin' the deer, what we've killed and cleaned, down from the hill, I'll away down to the cedar crick and bring up our canoe what we came in, Mr. Archer."

"And how are we to work our cards after that, Dolph?" inquired Frank, who, having partaken heartily of the second steak, had lighted his pipe, and stretched himself out in the full autumnal sunshine, with a cup of delicately tempered Ferintosh at his hand, a picture of the *dolce far niente*.

"Why, Mr. Forester, I've bin athinkin' that this fat man, what doos iverything better nor no one else, is pretty much used up; and you, I guess, would jest as leeves set still upon your hinder eend, as walk another five miles through them pine woods "

"What you say right is perfectly true, Dolph. I honour you for the acuteness and correctness of your views."

"There's nauthen so very cute's I see, in knowin' when two chaps is nigh dead beat. But 's I was sayin', I've bin athinkin' that the best way'll be to let Jake ride the pony back, arter he's brought all the deer down from the hill, to the road at the mill; and Ben 'll take the batteau with the four bucks we've got hereaways down the inlet, and I'll tell him whar' he'll find the other two 's Mr. Archer shot at the fust go to. And then I'll paddle one on you and Mr. Archer paddle the t'other along the lake to Cobus's mill; and then you and Tom 'll take the ponies, and I and Mr. Archer, why we'll foot it."

"A capital plan, Dolph," said Harry, "all but one thing. Ben will never get the batteau up the inlet to the bridge, while the world lasts, with those six deer in it. No, no. Put two of the four we've got here into the batteau, and let him pick up the other two on the way; he will have work enough, I'll take my oath of it, to pole them up, and he won't get through so without touching. Jake can load the last two I shot on the pony, as he goes home, take it through the woods to the main road, and so to Dutch Jake's tavern. For the rest, Tom can ride, and Master Frank must foot it down with the rest of us!"

"Well, well, if he kin," replied the Dutch hunter, with a dubious shake of his head, "if he kin, I'll not gainsay as it's the best plan. But I dun' know "

"You don't know what? that I can walk six miles this fine evening?" cried Frank, indignantly. "Let me tell you, Mister Pierson, I can walk *sixty* of them, if I take a fancy to it! Six miles! why, bless your heart, I'll bet you five to four, I'll do it in an hour!"

"Don't you bet, Dolph; don't you bet!" cried Harry, quickly. "He can do it like a shot. He's as lazy as anything can be, when he's not driven to it, but shove him, and he can put, I tell you."

"The tallest kind, he can," interrupted Tom. "I won't hear no one sayin' nauthen' agin little Wax-skin, for all I tucks it into him myself, a little. He'd walk you into fits, you long Dutchman, any time. I'll go you a single X on it."

"For quickness he might, maybe, but not for hold on, old as I be."

"Speedy's a good dog, but Holdfast's a better," said Frank, merrily. "But I can hold on a few, for all that, Mr. Pierson."

"I've known him walk twelve miles, five minutes within two hours; and a hundred, between five o'clock on Saturday night and twelve on Monday night, without training," said Archer. "Don't bet with him, Dolph; he's hard

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to beat, I tell you, any way that you take him."

"He's half hoss!" said Tom, clapping his protegé on the back, "though he did skear all the deer with his gimcrackery to-day."

"Well, how does my plan suit?" asked Archer, looking to Frank.

"Oh! I'm agreeable, provided only we go home the same road we came," said Frank; winking his eye knowingly at Tom.

"Why? what the devil do you care, by which road you go home?"

"I want to have another look at something I saw this morning."

"A woman, hey, Frank? By George! you've got ahead of me! I never heard of anything attractive in this quarter."

"Have you not? ah! what do you say, Tom?",

"The prettiest piece of gal's flesh I've laid eyes on, since I see that gal you was asparkin' down to York, Aircher that time as you wouldn't know old Tom in Broadway."

"It's false, you old thief! I never cut you at all! Though, heaven knows, it is not for the want of your deserving it oftentimes enough. But was the girl so pretty, Frank?"

"Pretty, no! not at all! That's not the word. She was beautiful lovely exquisite. The loveliest thing I ever saw, except Lady Ellenborough, Harry. A profusion of golden hair, large soft dark-blue eyes, a Grecian profile, a mouth that you would die, ten years before your time, to kiss once a complexion like snow; and a figure not to be equalled by anything I ever saw alive or in marble."

"A lady, Frank?"

"Decidedly, *not* a lady!"

"Where did you see her?"

"At the door of a small but very pretty cottage, a mile or so beyond the mill on the homeward side."

"Ah! I don't know, indeed. A good hunter used to live there, when I was up here last, two years ago; but there were no womenfolk about the house then. Holloa, Dolph," he continued, turning to the hunter, who was busy instructing his negro where he would find the carcasses of the slaughtered deer "who is this beautiful girl, these two noodles are half mad about?"

"How should I know?" replied Dolph, rather shortly. "Now then, Jake, you understand me, make tracks, and keep the pony goin', for we've no time to be alosin'. Now, Mr. Aircher" he added, turning round to that worthy, having seen the negro depart, "what's this about gals? I niver knowed as you was a gal man."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Tom. "I'd be pleased to know who is, if so be Aircher isn't!"

"What gal is't, inyhow?" added Dolph. "I knows o' no gal oncommon pretty. There's quite a chance o' good-lookin' ones, but none 's I know oncommon."

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"They saw her at the door of the house, as far as I can make out, that used to be Harry Barhyte's, but he has got no sister, that ever I heard tell of. Who can she be, Dolph?"

"Other than a good 'un," responded Dolph with a sort of groan, his whole countenance changing as he spoke.

"What! what! a naughty woman up in these wild woods?" cried Forester, laughing, for he had not seen the bold hunter's face, or noticed his expression, as he spoke. "I had no idea such things were to be found so far from cities."

"They're to be found, Mister Forester, wherever *women* are found!" replied Pierson very shortly. "And it will be well for you, if you don't learn as much some day."

"Or rather," interposed Archer, "wherever *men* are found to make them evil. Before God, and on my honour, I believe that the worst woman that ever lived was better in many points, and those the finest of our nature, than the best man. But who is this girl, Dolph Pierson?"

"The wife of Harry Barhyte."

"Indeed!"

"Ay! indeed; and she's half crazed, and hull ruined, the finest lad in this quarter; and all for a mean, cringin' cuss, as isn't to be talked of alongside of Harry, more nor a shot-gun is alongside of a true-grooved rifle."

"Ah! I am sorry to hear this," replied Harry, thoughtfully. "Harry Barhyte was a fine fellow, and did me a great service once. What is it? Taken to rum, hey?"

"I'm afeard so. And she, as should hold him back, eggs him on, hopin', I'm athinkin', as he'll drink himself dead one of them houts, so's she can folly her own wicked notions."

"A very fiend! Who *was* she, Dolph?"

"Why, you've seen her fifty times, and more; and held her on your knee in past days, Mr. Aircher. She's barly seventeen now. You'll remember pretty Mary Marten?"

"Great God! that sweet, merry, innocent little child! How horrible! how horrible! but sit down, sit down, Dolph, and tell us all about it. You have said too much to stop now."

"I ar'n't got time now; look ye here, Ben's confin' down the pond like a strick, and Jake's got the deer from the cliffs, and the big mouse-colour, and 's makin' tracks this away. I must be off arter the other canoe, or we'll niver git started, nohow. But don't you be afeard, I'm not agoin' to shirk off. I'll tell you all as I knows on it, arter supper, at Dutch Jake's tavern. I will, Mister Aircher. You knows what I says I'll do, I doos."

"I know it," said Harry; and lighting a cheroot, he too stretched himself out on the turf, and began to smoke diligently. But a damp had been thrown over the spirits of the party, even more by Pierson's manner than by his words, and little more conversation passed until Dolph returned, and almost simultaneously Ben arrived with the batteau, and the negro, with the two finest harts.

The rest of the arrangements were speedily made; and in less than ten minutes the whole company was afloat. Ben Pierson sweeping the big batteau, loaded with the noble quarry, toward the inlet of the pond; Dolph paddling Frank Forester, to carry whom Archer had absolutely refused; and Harry piloting old Tom toward Cobus Vanderbeck's mill, with the gallant Smoker swimming along as staunchly and as fleetly in the wake of the canoe,

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as if he had not run a mile since daybreak.

The sun, now near its setting, poured a flood of intense golden lustre over the transparent lakelet, among which floated the clear shadows, purple and emerald green, of the near woods and distant mountains. Not a breath of air rippled the bosom of the serene water, or waved one branch of the loftiest trees on its wood-girdled shores. Not a sound was to be heard, but the measured dash of the paddle, and the gurgling of the foam heaped before the bows of the sharp, fleet vessel; and now and then, the caw, mellowed by distance into a pleasing murmur, of the homeward crows. It was an evening in itself all peaceful, and such as would have inspired thoughts of peace to any soul that could mark its beauties, and be penetrated by its delicious influence.

But how many are there not, even of those whom the world calls good and wise and great, who cannot spare the time from their all-engrossing race after sublime imaginations, which are in truth less than nothing, to mark the beautiful sublimity of nature, and learn the love of the Creator even from the loveliness of his created things?

What wonder, then, that the rude and ignorant and lowly, whose life is one fierce struggle against suffering and sorrow, should dwell among such scenes unconscious, and creep from their cradles to their graves, unsoftened by the influences which move the poet's soul even to tears though not of sadness!

CHAPTER VIII. THE HOUSEHOLD CURSE.

The very fiend's arch mock To lip a wanton and suppose her chaste.

Shakspeare.

It was already dark when the hunters arrived, travelworn and hungry, at the hospitable portico of the country tavern, where they were received by the indefatigable Timothy with tidings, that there were "no but faive minnits to spare afore 't dinner's be upon t' teable; so it behooved them look raight sharp an if they thought to shift themselves."

"I think to shift myself, for one, Tim," said his master, good-humouredly; "so bring up some hot water to my room as quick as you can."

"Ditto," said Frank, before Tim had time to reply.

"'Thet wathur is bin i' boath your ro-ooms this 'our and better," he replied, half disgusted as it would seem by the insinuation that a valet of his discretion should have been guilty of such a solecism as to allow gentlemen to retire to their dressing-rooms unprovided with the first requisite of the toilette.

"It is pretty cold water, I should fancy, then, by this time, Timothy," said Frank, with a laugh at his own sharpness as he conceived it.

"Noo, Measter Forester, did you iver ken me to do a varry simple thing?"

"I cannot say that I ever did, Tim."

"Weel, and ay reckon 'at you niver will, gin you were to live mair nor a hoondred years, and a hoondred upon 't back o' them. And ay think it wud be a varry simple thing i'deed to tak t' hot wathur oop into twa cauld chammers. Nay, nay, Measter Frank, that's not the way as things is doon i' t' West Raiding. There's twa good blazing fires i' t' stoves, laike, and t' kettles boiling atop on 'em. But gang your gait, gentlemen, or t' dinner 'll be overdoon, and then ay's be bla-amed for 't, ay's oophaud it."

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Within ten minutes, however, their ablutions performed, and fully rigged from head to foot, Harry and Frank made their appearance in the little parlour, where the table awaited them, spread with its clean white linen and decorated with its glittering glass and silver, and its four tall wax-lights.

Here they were speedily joined by Tom Draw, who had contented himself with a wash under the pump, Dolph declining to form one of the party, but promising to join them as soon as they should have got through dinner.

Then, without further delay, Timothy set upon the table a large tureen full of the strongest and most delicious mutton broth, as hot as lava, and as perfectly concocted as the most fastidious palate could desire.

This capital potage was followed by a matelote of eels from the neighbouring mill-pond, which Frank, having imbibed a large bell-glassful of dry straw-coloured sherry after his soup, pronounced equal to anything that he had ever tasted, even at the *Rocher de Cancale*, the house *par excellence* of all the world, be it known, for fish.

"I don't think much of eels, nohow," grumbled Fat Tom, holding out his plate for a second helping, "but that ar' rich gravy with the onions and spices and Madeira wine doos help them some, I swon. Now, then, Tim, ar'n't you agoin' to open one of them long-necks?"

Tim glanced a doubtful eye toward his master.

"Not for your life, you varlet, until the venison's on the table. Champagne with fish, indeed! It's as bad almost as Tom Dragon, who would eat *ham* with his canvass ducks at Snedecor's. It spoiled my appetite for the day, and I could drink nothing for a week afterward. Another such shock to my gastronomic nerves would surely kill me. No! no champagne; give him a tumblerful of whiskey, if he wants it, and me a thimbleful "

"And me ditto!" chimed in Frank Forester.

"And then bring us the haunch! and that done, Tom shall be gratified with a dash at the *Sillery see!* Upon my word!" he added, as the smoking haunch made its appearance, covered with two inches of fat, crisply embrowned to the most delicate golden hue; "it is as fine a one as I have seen these three years. Fill up the glasses, Tim; we'll drink Dolph's health for this, at all events in his absence. Another slice, Tom? It eats short, don't it, Frank?"

"As short as puff-paste a glass of champagne with you, Harry?"

"With pleasure."

"And what the d I have I ben adoin' that I carn't be let into that 'ere party? With only three men, it's a burnin' shame for two on 'em to be guzzlin' by themselves selfish like! Besides, 'taint fair nowadays, for when we all gits tight, you'll be aswearin' I was drunk fust, or some sich thunderin' lie."

"Help yourself, man alive; but don't think, much less talk about getting drunk, there's no such work as that to be done to-night. Let me give you another slice, Frank; I've got a prime cut yet, with a beautiful streak of fat."

"You are irresistible, Harry. But won't you keep me company?"

"To be sure I will. I am only beginning to eat. I'm a whale at venison, as poor Mac used to say."

"Poor Mac, indeed!"

"Fust-rate stuff that creawn wine o' his was. I hain't niver tasted nothin' like that, niver since," said Tom with a sigh of regret, not for the excellent fellow who had departed, but for the excellent wine the memory of which yet

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dwelt on his palate.

"Nor ever will, I fancy," said Harry. "The taste for champagne in this country is as bad and as false as it can be, and I think the wine gets worse every day. If it is tolerably dry it is as thin as vinegar, if fruity and strong it is as sweet as molasses. This is about the best in the market, but it is poor thin stuff to my fancy."

"What is it?"

"They call it the Thorn."

"Let them call it the Thorn! What else have you got for dinner, Timothy?"

"Some Stilton cheese and caviar, sir."

"Fill round the end of that champagne, then; and let us have a bottle of the old port with the cheese."

"Ay, ay, sur! It's been doon afore t' fire airing laike sin' you set doon to t' teable!"

"I hope not too near. If it is too warm it will be all day with it."

"Nay! nay! sur, ay's oophaud it's raight. Noo, mun ay get t' poonch-bowl?"

"Of course you must, and the devilled biscuits, and the pipes; and that done, see if you can't scare up old Dolph somewhere or other."

"He's waiting i' t' bar-room whaile you've got dean."

"That's well. What the deuce is the matter with you, Tom? Don't be sick upon the table, man alive! What ails you, spitting and sputtering in that way?"

But up got the old man, in spite of all exhortations, rushed to the window, heaved it open might and main, and spit out a mouthful of the caviar which he had taken, utterly unconscious what he was absorbing an action which was followed by a burst of most vehement imprecations, and by a reiterated appeal to Timothy for brandy, a tumbler full of brandy without the darned drop of water, to wash out the taste of that ere filthy pison stuff, what Aircher 'd sot upon the table jest to kill a fellow with.

It was a long time before Frank and Harry could pacify him at all, for their enormous and irrepressible laughter at first confirmed his idea that a premeditated trick had been played off upon him, and that he had been induced to eat what he styled "some all-fired ongodly nastiness, of Aircher's fixin'." And it was only on seeing Frank and Archer apply themselves to the odious dish with the gusto of genuine epicures, that he transferred his abuse from the filthiness of the caviar to the bestiality of them that could eat such "stinkin' trash."

A brimming bumper or two of port did much, however, to mollify his indignation, and by the time that the punch made its *entree*, accompanied by pipes, Turkish tobacco, and devilled biscuits, the serenity of his visage and the amiability of his demeanour were perfectly restored.

By this time, also, Dolph had come upon the scene; and, having filled his pipe with kinnekinninck, and accepted a single rummer of the fragrant punch, at Harry's bidding he began the narrative anent Harry Barhyte and his handsome wife:

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"Well, Mr. Aircher, there ar'n't much of a story no-how, and what there is, is right sad and dismal. It's two year since, no longer, that Harry Barhyte, as you knowed him in them days, the smartest and likeliest of all the young chaps hereaway, and the best with the rifle a great sight, began to be a followin' and hangin' round like, arter Mary; she was scarce fifteen year old, and the purtiest gal the sun shone down upon; but she was wild and flighty then, and I niver thought no good would come on't; seein' I'd noticed how, the year afore, she carried on with black Ned Wheeler, till old Marten he concaited as things had gone far enough that away, and turned Ned out o' doors; and arter that *he* turned wickeder, and wilder, and more drunkener than iver, and it 'ud well nigh make your hair rise stret on eend to hear how he'd rave and rip and roar, and call down cusses on the gal and all her kin, and swear vengeance on any one as should so much 's look at her, let alone like her. Well, arter a spell like, he 'listed and went off South some wheres, Florida ways, I reckon, and warn't heerd tell of for a many a day. And Mary she did nothen but laugh and jeer like, and grew wilder and merrier and flightier than iver; and carried on wusser nor afore, only she carried on jest alike with all the boys now, where afore she only carried on with Ned like. Still I concaited as she liked Ned, as well as her triflin', vain charakter 'ud let her like iny one; and so I telled Harry Barhyte. But bless you, Mr. Aircher, he was as crazy as a loon, and rared right up on eend, and swore she wor the best and modestest and lovin'est gal in the hull range; and hollered at me so as I couldn't stand it nohow. So he and I kind o' cooled off like, and hain't niver bin right friends since. Well, for six months, or better, Harry and she wor one day sparkin' it the sweetest kind, wanderin' about in the woods, with his arm about her waist, and her hand clasped in hisn, or sittin' down by some clear brook-side, with her head leanin' on his shoulder, and her big blue eyes lookin' up into hisn as tender and as melancholy as a faan's. And the next day agin, she'd start right round, and likely carry on jest as free with some other chap, and not so much as throw a word to Harry, or give a civil answer when he'd speak to her. But it warn't no use, nohow. He seemed to be all the keener arter her, the wuss she used him, and what should a' turned him right agin her, sot him the stronger on her side. And I dun' know how 'twas at last, but she made Harry believe as she loved him, and it warn't nothin' but her youth, and light heart, and merriness; but I knowed I did that them was signs of a *bad* heart, not a *light* one, and of a devilish char *acter*. But jest so it was sot to be, and so it had to be, and so it was; and arter quite a spell of sparkin' and foolin', off and on, why they got married; and Harry tuk her home; and he had iverything fixed nice about her; and provided raal well for her; and niver went to the tavern like, but passed his evenin's to hum allus, and was the steadiest, best-doin'est, and fondest husband in the country. And for awhile she seemed to be contint, and happy, and proud of Harry as he wor of her, and with more cause, I tell you, for if she had good looks, he had good natur'; and what's raal is better nor what's seemin', inyhow. Arter awhile, agin, she kind o' got weary, it seemed, and uncontent at hum, and kept on the run to the neighbour's houses like, and carried on agin with the young boys, like as if she hadn't bin a married woman; but Harry he wouldn't see no harm in it, though it was plain to see as he was sad bytimes, and thoughtful, and grieved badly, that she couldn't stay to hum like and be happy by her own fireside. And then black Ned come hum, with his discharge; for he'd got wounded pretty smartly by them Injuns, down in Florida the wuss luck as they didn't kill him! and then there was H in the house right away! For she'd be mopin' haaf the time, and cryin' and sulkin' like a hurt she-bar, and the next minnit agin, she'd be quarrellin' and hollerin', and vexin' Harry's heart out. So that he tuk to comin' down to Jake's, and spendin' all his time there pretty nigh; and drinkin' till all's blue; and what's wuss yet, he got friends with black Ned; for *he* couldn't work none, for his wound like, but loafed round the bar, and now and agin 'ud hunt or fish a spell, and so H to hum drew Harry into idleness; and idleness, *that* led him into drinkin' and drinkin' into friendship with black Ned; and whereaway that ar' will carry him, it's easier guessin' nor knowin'!"

"A sad story, indeed," said Harry, with a sigh. "I am sorry for Barhyte; the other fellow was a scamp always, and I have little doubt a very ruffian. Are Harry and he friends yet?"

"Bless you, yes! Friends! why she's persuaded him to take black Ned to hum, into the very house; and he lives there all as if he wor Harry's brother; while iverybody else can see what Harry's eyes is sealed to. and haaf of his old friends is droppin' off from him; and some says he's a fool, and some says he's poor-hearted, and lowminded, and that he winks hard at his own disgrace. But iny man as says so *lies*, Mr. Aircher. For Harry's blinded by his own trustiness and his own honest natur', and he loves that blackhearted jade with his whole soul; and I'd not hint to him, what we all of us knows her to be, no, not for a thousand dollars, leastways if I didn't want a rifle-bullet

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driven through my brain-pan."

"What strange infatuation! how deplorable! and yet he used to be a clear-headed, rational, strong-minded man," said Archer thoughtfully.

"I've heern say oftentimes, Mr. Archer, that it is jest them very men, cl'ar-headed, and strong-minded, as men can't fool with nohow, as is the easiest and wust fooled by women. How is't? I dun know much about them she-critters, nor doesn't want to know. How is't?"

"I fancy that you are not far wrong, Dolph," replied Archer, with a smile. "But what will be the end of it? Harry must be undeceived some day or other, and then "

"And then, I dreads to think what'll turn up. Harry'll kill him sartin if he should catch him, and I doubt somehow he'd not live hisself long arter."

"And she?" asked Harry Archer, with an expression of strong interest, as he investigated this strange and tortuous plot of rural crime and passion.

"She! she's as safe from him, as if she wor in heaven, where she won't niver be! Why he'd not harm a hair of her head, nor say a word agin her black wickedness, though he knowed all about it. But she's a drivin' him to death and to desperation, and means, I guess, to drive him. I'd not wonder not a mossel, to see Harry Barhyte dead, and Ned Wheeler married to his wife, afore the leaves is green agin upon them hills. He's failin' ivery day, I see that cl'arly. But it's agittin' late, and I've told my tale, and now I'll be movin'. For if we means to scour the black brook range to-morrow, we'd needs be afoot by daylight or afore."

"And that is precisely what we do mean," said Archer. "So good-night, old friend, and rouse us up before the sun to-morrow. I'll away to my bed, myself, shortly."

But, notwithstanding his expressed intention, he did not move, but sat there with his head buried in his hands, evidently pondering deeply on what he had heard, until Frank Forester, who, knowing nothing of the parties, was less deeply moved than Archer, asked him half jocularly what ailed him, that he pondered so gravely on the sins and sorrows of this rustic Mars and Venus.

"Do not joke, Frank," he answered; "it is no joking matter. I know both of these unhappy people well. Barhyte once saved my life, or something very like it, when my foot had slipped, and I had fallen on my back within six paces of a wounded bear, my rifle empty, and neither knife nor tomahawk at hand. The girl, as old Dolph told you, has set on my knees a hundred times, when she was an innocent and lovely child. I cannot think of these things, look first upon this picture then on that, without being deeply moved. Beside which, I know the character of these people so well, that I anticipate the occurrence, even in this secluded valley, of some terrible domestic tragedy."

"Pshaw! Harry, you look too gravely on these matters. People of this kind rarely or never have so keen sentiments of honour, or feel so much abased by degradation of this sort as to have recourse to any very sanguinary vengeance, much less to suicide, which you seem, I think, to apprehend."

"It is you who are in error, Frank, not I. What you say may be very true, probably is true of the small, paltry, peddling burghers of the cities, of the toilworn and brutalized artisans of the factories, nay, even of the dull drudging peasants of the open country. But these men, independent yeomen, wild free foresters, living a life of continual excitement, incurring constant peril, familiar with the use of arms, their whole lives from the cradle to the grave one wild and strange romance, these men, I say, feel wrongs done to their sense of honour as keenly, and avenge such as ruthlessly, as the red Indian whom they have supplanted in these hunting-grounds; and for

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this poor fellow in particular, this Harry Barhyte, I am as sure that he will *not* survive, as that he *will* avenge the loss of his honour, and the robbery of his wife's affections. It makes me sad, and it makes me sick, to think of it, and yet I do not see what can be done."

"Nothing can be done, Harry," replied Forester, who was now as grave as his friend. "Interference in such matters only makes them worse; and involves those who would do good in the catastrophe, if there be one. Nothing can be done, Harry; except what I think the best for both of us, to take one more glass of punch, tumble into bed, and wake up with brighter thoughts, please God, to-morrow morning."

"I believe so," said Archer, with a sad smile at his friend's quaintness; and in a moment or two afterward the night-lamps were lighted, and they retired to rest, tired enough to make it nearly certain that sleep would not long avoid their pillows.

CHAPTER IX. THE DISCOVERY.

He lay where he had fallen. Slain outright,
No parting struggle had convulsed his limbs,
Nor changed the grave composure of his face,
Languid and melancholy.

MS. Poem.

The sun was just rising on the morrow, when Dolph Pierson aroused the friends from the unusually heavy slumbers, which had fallen upon them in consequence of the severe fatigue and excitement of the past day. But once awakened, they were on foot and alert on the instant, and having speedily despatched the ample cold breakfast which was set before them, Harry and Forester got under way with the Dutch hunter. Old Tom, who was completely overdone by the tramp he had undergone, and by the disgust he had encountered in being beaten so disgracefully in spite of all his bragging, prepared to lie by, and try his luck at the Pickerel and Pearch, for which the lake above was famous.

Taught by his yesterday's experience, Master Frank had donned, in lieu of his bright pea-green hunting-shirt, a dingy fustian shooting-jacket, with breeches of the same material; nay! he had even concocted some dark-coloured composition with which to dim the bright silver mountings of his rifle. Dolph looked at him for a moment with one of his grun approving smiles, and then turned toward Archer with a wink so inexpressibly ludicrous, that he could not restrain himself, but burst into a fit of obstreperous mirth; whereat Frank, wheeling upon the culprits unexpectedly, took them both in the fact, and shaking his fist at them good-humouredly

"You villains!" he, exclaimed, "what deuced trick are you playing off upon me now? Out with it, instantly, and I'll forgive you; but if I find it out hereafter, my name is not Frank Forester, if I don't pay you back, with interest."

"No trick, upon my honour, Frank," replied Archer. "Nor much joke, either, for that matter. At least what joke there was is past and over. But come, let us get into the drag, which Timothy has got at the door, and I'll tell you all about it as we drive to the bridge over the Black Creek."

"Yes! yes!" said Pierson, who had resumed all his habitual gravity; "we've got no time to lose, for it's gittin' to be broad day, now, and we should be in the woods afore the dew's off, inyhov."

Within two minutes, one of which was consumed in donning upper benjamins and lighting pipes or manillas, according to the various tastes of the sportsmen, the two friends were mounted on the front seat, Dolph and Timothy occupying that in the rear. The horses sprang at Harry's cheerful whistle, and away rattled the light vehicle, over the well-made limestone road, in the same direction which had been taken by Forester and Tom

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Draw on the previous morning.

"Now then, the joke, Harry!" said Forester.

"Pshaw! it was mere nonsense. Dolph wanted to put you out of conceit yesterday with your fine toggery and bright gun-mountings and I begged him not. That's all, upon my honour!"

"That's all, upon your honour! and a very modest all, too! So you spoiled my day's sport, and won Tom's bet, just to poke fun on me! By Jove, that's too bad! I should not have expected *that*, at your hands!" and Frank's face flushed even to the roots of his hair, as he spoke, from very anger.

"Nor I *this* at yours, Forester," replied Archer, gravely. "But it is of no use minding what you say, you little wasp. I would not let him tell you, because I knew right well that if your costume or your skill in woodcraft were attacked, you would defend them, like Decatur, right or wrong, and wear them, to the ruin of your sport, for a week, perhaps for ever, from the sheer love of paradox. Whereas, by letting you alone, I knew that one day's experience would teach you the truth, and that you would adopt it, as you have done. I think it was the friend's part."

"By gin! that's jest what he telled me, Mr. Forester," put in Dolph Pierson, "and jest what I could a' telled you, only he's worded it some better nor I could. So don't be vexed with him, nowadays."

"It was but a poor compliment to my reason, at all events," said Forester, who had been too much discomposed to resume his equanimity on the instant.

"But a very good one to your aptitude at taking hints from experience," replied Harry. "Come, don't be sulky, old boy; between you and me, that would be something too inexpressibly absurd."

There was no resisting this; so Frank gave his friend an amicable dig in the ribs, that would have pretty nearly knocked the wind out of a rhinoceros, and said, "All right, old fellow; but do you really think I never take advice?"

"I think that if you did you would be a prodigy. I never saw a man who asked for advice until he had made his mind fully up how he should act, at all events. Now, you had not asked advice, but thought you knew, as you said when you drove poor McTavish ten miles above the saw-mill turn to Warwick, responding only 'Don't I know?' to all his suggestions that you were out of the road, all his entreaties that you would inquire your way. 'Don't I know?' carried you that night to Coffee's Tavern, in the Cove, when you would surely have discovered your mistake at the bridge, if he had not pointed out your error, and so roused your spirit of resistance and set you on the defensive. 'Don't I know?' would have kept you in green and silver to-day, if I had let Dolph speak to you. You ought to be very much obliged to me, for now you *do* know!"

"And I *am* very much obliged to you; and, faith! I believe, after all, that one lesson learned of that hard teacher, Experience, is better than a dozen from that soft persuader, Good Advice. For my part, I only hope that you will always stick to your new system; for in very deed I think good advisers are the most odious persons in the universe."

"I will; depend upon it, Frank. So far at all events as you are concerned. I made my mind up to that long enough ago."

"Look here, Harry; this is the cottage, I spoke of to you last night, that we are just coming to, on the right-hand side. Cannot you frame some excuse to stop? I have a curiosity to see something farther."

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"And I. Look quietly behind, and see if Dolph's pipe is out; Timothy is not smoking."

"It is. He has just put it into his pouch," replied Forester, after casting a furtive glance behind him.

"And I threw mine away, half a mile back. Drop yours, as if by accident, get out another, and ask Dolph for a light; and, as I know he has got no flint for his tinder, apply to me in the second place, and as I have forgotten my matches, we shall have to pull up and ask for what Dolph would term a coal of fire."

No sooner said than done. The cigar was dropped as if accidentally, and the next moment Forester took out his cigar-case, selected a cheroot, and, turning his head to old Pierson, said aloud,

"Give us a light, old fellow. I have lost mine."

"My pipe is out too," replied the old hunter; "it has not been alight these ten minutes."

"Ah! we must try a match, then. Come, Harry, out with the Lucifers, lad!"

For a minute or two Archer affected to search in the various pockets of his great box-coat for the desired matchcase, but at length, with a negative shake of the head, he made answer

"It is no go, Master Frank. I have forgotten my matchcase at home; and a devilish stupid forget it is; for I don't see how the plague we are to get lights, any how. No more smoking at all for this day."

"I never *can* stand that," said Frank; "I can as well get along without a drink. Oh! look you, here's a cottage, Harry; pull up, and we'll beg for a light there. By Jove!" he added, as if he had been surprised, "it is the place where the pretty woman lives, about whom we were speaking."

"It is so," answered Harry, gravely. "Well, we will get a light; but mark me, no chaffing."

"Chaffing!" replied Frank, quickly, "I should think not of that, indeed; what the deuce should have put such a thought as that into your head?"

"You know you're good at it sometimes, Frank," replied Archer, with a grave smile. "But don't get savage; I did not mean to offend your high mightiness!"

And as he spoke he pulled up the horses at the door of the cottage, which had once evidently been extremely neat and pretty, with a portico of rustic make, all overrun with evergreens and flowery creepers. It had, however, although still comparatively a new building, already fallen into partial decay, and exhibited those symptoms by which a keen observer would easily judge that the master of the house was a drunkard, or the mistress a slattern.

"What ails you, to be stoppin' here, Mister Archer?" asked the old hunter shortly, and in a tone which indicated anything but pleasure at the occurrence; "we hain't no business here, none on us this is whar' Harry Barhyte lives, as I telled you on."

"I know it, Dolph," replied Archer, "but we have all lost our fire, and we have brought no matches with us, and Frank here for the life of him can't walk the day through without smoking."

"There won't come no luck on it, nohow," responded the hunter. "If so be I'd a knowed this, I'd a brought you by the other road."

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"Pshaw! nonsense!" replied Archer; "what harm can come of it, any way? Halloa!" he added, raising his voice, "is there any one at home?"

Almost as quickly as he spoke, the woman came to the door. She was, as Frank had described her on the previous day, a singularly beautiful, and, for her class in life, a singularly delicate-looking creature, with a quantity of soft light brown hair falling in dishevelled, and, to speak the truth, somewhat disordered masses down her neck; large blue eyes; a fair complexion; and a figure of slender yet symmetrical proportion.

For all this, however, her appearance and the impression she produced on the minds of the young men were the very reverse of attractive or agreeable. There was a bold eager look in her eye when it met theirs directly that struck them as immodest and offensive, and a sidelong glance yet more obnoxious, as she lowered her lids in a sort of affected modesty as Archer addressed her.

Her dress, moreover, was unseemly, at least when viewed in relation to her place of abode in a remote rural district amid wild mountains, and to her condition in life, for it had been originally of expensive materials, and rather tawdry colours, and had been fashioned to display the shape, and reveal far more of the neck and bosom than is usual among country maids or matrons.

"Pardon us for troubling you, madam," said Harry, removing his hunting-cap; "but we have lost our light, and called to see if you would have the goodness to let us have a coal of your fire?"

"No trouble, sir, I assure you!" she replied, with a very peculiar glance, and a still more peculiar expression of voice. "I shall always be too glad to oblige *you* in anything which you can ask me."

And, without waiting for an answer, she tripped into the house, and returned almost instantly, bearing in the tongs a piece of a blazing brand of wood, which she handed to Archer, who passed it over to Frank, and, as if in reply to her last speech, said, in a friendly familiar voice,

"I am glad to see that you recollect me, Mrs. Barhyte, for it is a very long time since you sat on my knee when you were pretty little Mary Marten. I fancied you must have quite forgotten me."

"I do not forget so easily, Mr. Archer," returned the woman, with the same disagreeable sidelong look "*you* especially;" and then, as if aware that she had gone something too far, she hesitated a moment or two, and added "for those were very happy days; and, whatever folks may say about it, I think that it is easier to forget sorrow than happiness."

"It is a merciful gift of Providence that it is so," replied Archer, gravely. "But I am sorry to hear you speak as if you were not happy. I was quite glad when I heard you were married to Harry Barhyte, Mary, and thought it such a nice match. For you were always quite a pet of mine, and he was my friend a man I was *proud* to call my friend," he added with marked emphasis.

"That was when he was his own friend, Mr. Archer," replied the woman, a little sharply.

"And is he not so, now?"

"He is very much changed; very much, since you knew him, sir."

"Ay! is he?" cried the old hunter sternly, and with more vehemence than he was wont to exhibit; "but what changed him? Tell us that, Mary Barhyte tell us what changed him?"

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The woman blushed fiery red, from the very roots of her hair to the edge of her dress, and drooped her eyes and kept silence, abashed and humbled.

In her eagerness to coquette with the two gay young men who sat on the front seat, she had not spared a glance to the inferior personages behind, and consequently had not discovered the presence of Dolph Pierson.

"And where is Harry Barhyte, now?" said Archer, who while observing everything closely, had pretended to be engaged solely in lighting his cheroot. "I should like to see him, before I leave the country."

"He is out with his rifle after deer," she said, raising her eyes again to Archer's, with a half look of invitation; "I scarce know which way he is gone. I think he said toward the Eagle Rock. But if you call in after dark this evening, you'll be pretty like to find him."

"And is Ned Wheeler away with him, too?" asked the old hunter, with a peculiar intonation.

"What would I know about Ned Wheeler?" she asked, very angrily, instead of answering directly; but then, after a moment's pause, as if something flashed upon her mind, she added, quickly: "No, he is not away with him; Henry's been gone since daylight, and Ned passed the door, with his gun in his hand, not ten minutes since; you'll overtake him, I reckon."

"Passed the door, did he? he don't often do that, doos he, Mary?"

"I told him Henry wasn't in."

"Hum-hum! and that was the cause why he passed it, hey? I'd a thought now as he'd likely a comed in and sot a spell, to git a light for his pipe like, or a drink "

"We don't keep no drink here, Mr. Pierson; and you know that as well I do."

"I don't know nothen on the airth about it, nor don't warn't to, Mary. You can't say as I iver was inside your doors."

"Nor I don't wont to see you there!" she replied almost fiercely, with a gleam of flashing anger in her bold eyes; but then turning to Harry, "but you, sir, I shall be glad to see at any time; and so will Henry, for he speaks of you very often."

"I thank you; I will call if I do not meet him to-day. Good-morning to you!" and once more touching his cap, he gave his good steeds their head, and away they bowled up the road toward the base of the wooded hills that towered above them in huge billow-swells of many-coloured foliage.

They had driven perhaps a couple of miles at a slashing trot, not holding much conversation among themselves, for the past interview had set them all to thinking pretty deeply, and a sort of inexplicable gloom hung over the whole party, when they overtook a tall slouching shambling-gaited fellow, carrying a long rifle in his hand, and proceeding in the same direction with themselves.

"Who have we here, Dolph?" asked Archer, who having his eye well forward on the road, was the first to catch sight of him.

"Black Ned! don't you see how he snoops along, like no honest man would?"

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Harry smiled at the rough hunter's attributing the trick of the man's gait, the result probably of the wound to which he had himself alluded, to certain mental qualities; but knowing the uselessness of arguing such points with one at the same time so single-minded and so prejudiced as Pierson, he made no reply.

A moment afterward, however, as he ran alongside of the stranger, he checked his horses for the instant, partly to observe his features, and partly to gain some information.

The first were villanous enough; a low, receding brow, partially overshadowed by tangled elf-locks of uncombed black hair, a broken-backed hawk nose, a pair of keen, cunning, cruel, down-looking black eyes, a thin-lipped, compressed mouth, with a constant stream of tobacco-juice oozing from its corners. He had not turned his head to see who were the new-comers, though the clattering trot of such a team, and the even roll of such a vehicle, were sounds most unfamiliar to any ear in that tract of country, nor did he now raise his eyes as the horses shot past him, and immediately moderated their speed under the guidance of a master hand.

"Mister Wheeler, I believe?"

"Ned Wheeler *is* my name; but I don't know yourn, no how," was the surly answer.

"Mine is Archer," replied the young man; "but that will not help you. I heard you were before us on the range, and as we shall pass you with our horses, I thought it fair to inquire, as you have the start, which side of the road you mean to hunt; I would not wish to interfere with any man."

"Well, that's fair, anyhow," answered the other, though he looked as if he half suspected a trap. "I did think as I'd drive over to the right hereaways, toward the black swamp in the Indian holler. Harry Barhyte, he's gone along the top to the Eagle Rock, and so he'll be sendin' the deer down to the swamp, I reckons."

"We will keep to the left, then," said Archer. "Goodmorning!"

And away he drove, at the same slapping pace as before.

"Now, if I might be so bold, Mister Aircher," said the hunter, who had maintained a dogged silence during the whole of this brief colloquy, "I'd be right well pleased, anyways, to know why you did that 'ere?"

"Did what, Dolph?"

"Spoke to that ere darned scoundrel at all, fust and next, guv him his chice of beats."

"I wanted to look at him, first, Dolph!"

"You must be tarnal fond of seein' humly sights, then," replied Pierson. "You'd be hard set, I guess, to find a humlier picter atween this and York."

"He is most villanously ugly, of a truth," said Harry, musing. "And is it possible that handsome creature prefers this vile, low-bred, hideous brute, to so gallant and tight a lad as Harry Barhyte?"

"Wimen goes pretty much by contraries," replied Pierson. "Them as is good to them, they behaves wust to; and them as conducts wust to them, they niver can love hard enough. But Harry's e'ena'most as bad as Ned be, now. But why give him his chice of ground?"

"I had my reason for that, too, Dolph."

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"So I 'xpect most men has some reason for all the darned things they do leastwise they thinks they has, and that's a'most the same thing. But I'd like to know what you'n mought 'a bin."

"I wanted to be sure whither Barhyte has gone; and whether this dog was going to join him."

"And do you reckon you're sure now?"

"Pretty sure that Barhyte has gone to the Eagle Rock. Where is the Eagle Rock, Dolph?"

"Right stret ahead on us, up the big hill yonder. You see them big black pines up three-parts to the top," he added, pointing with his hands; "well, it is right over them, jist high enough that you can see clear over the tops on 'em."

"Is it good laying ground for deer, now?"

"None in the whole range better. All along there the mountain side is full of springs, and the sile's moist, and the fern grows up four and six feet high. 'Tain't such very bad walking nuther, for it's in sort of terraces, one above another, pretty level like."

"Well, if you think it good, Dolph, we'll bear off here a mile or so to the left, that I may keep my word with that scoundrel, and then we'll strike right up the crags, and beat those terraces you speak of to the eastward. Will that suit you?"

"Bravely," answered the hunter, "though we shan't see nothin' in the bottom. But a mile off to the left there's a grand waterfall comes down the hill in a sort of gorge we can climb pretty easy, and oncet up, thar's three terraces, one right above the other; so there'll be just one for each on us, within hailin' distance."

"All right, then. How much farther have we to go, Dolph?"

"One mile to the Old Mill corner."

"Look back, Forester, and see what that scamp is doing; the road is so straight, he must be in sight still."

"He is just turning into the covert to the right-hand," said Frank. "What the devil do you care about the brute for?"

"That's more than I can tell you, Master Frank; but some how or other I've a fancy that something's going to happen out of the common way to-day. It's all infernal stuff, I know; for Heaven be thanked, I am not in the least superstitious, nor do I believe in presentiments; but I cannot get it out of my head that something horrible is in the wind, and that this fellow Wheeler is at the bottom of it. It hangs over me like a black cloud. I never felt so in my life before."

"I should think not," said Forester laughing; "nor I neither. If I were you, I'd take a good pull at the Ferintosh, and feel so no more."

"I don't know but you're right, Frank; and here we are at the Old Mill, so while Tim is getting out the traps I'll follow your advice."

"What you say right is very true; so'll I," said Forester, and incontinently they both imbibed moderately; but when Dolph was invited to follow suit, he shook his head gravely, and made answer solemnly

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"A warnin' is a warnin', and shouldn't niver be made light of, no how. I dreamed of nothin' else but blood all night, and I thought when I riz up this mornin' that blood there would be; but now that Aircher's got a warnin' tew, I'm sure on't. God send it mayn't be some of us."

Forester stared at the man in mute admiration. At first he thought he was jesting, then he began to imagine that he had gone mad, but there was as little of insanity in the and even old Pierson himself, moulded as he was of castiron, was flushed and blown with the fatigue.

All three were glad to lie down for half an hour on the mossy margin of the water to rest them before climbing the hill, and this time Pierson did not refuse his share of the moderate cup. Then Harry's match-box having been discovered in an unusual pocket, all the three smoked a quiet pipe, and that done, arose, refreshed and ready for a steep mountain scramble.

Ten minutes' walk thereafter brought them to the mouth of the gorge in the hills whence the stream issued; and just before they reached it, Dolph whispered to the two young men to have their pieces ready, for that the cataract was close at hand, just round the first angle in the path, and that there was often a chance of a shot there, when the run was well up, as it was at this time, the deer coming down to the cool water to avoid the pursuit of the tormenting flies.

The gorge itself was bold and fine, the stream rushing out in a broad sheet of snow-white foam between two great gray limestone rocks, which towered on either side to the height of at least a hundred feet, crowned with feathery crests of hemlock, forming in this place the first step of the mountain ridge which soared away, clothed to the very top with forests, well nigh three thousand feet in air.

Following the motions of the wary forester, the sportsmen entered the pass, thridding a narrow ledge of rock which ran like an abutment along the base of the mountain wall, elevated only a few inches above the whirling foam-flakes.

Within, the gorge wheeled directly to the right, and along, the right-hand side they stole carefully, with their fore-fingers on the triggers of their rifles, holding their breaths in the intensity of their eagerness, and feeling their hearts knocking hard against their bosoms.

Two more steps brought them to the angle; and facing them, as the gorge wheeled again upward to the left at some fifty yards distance, thundered the foaming waterfall. It was indeed a grand and striking scene; for, although the height was inconsiderable, not exceeding fifty feet, the volume of water was considerable, and the fall, dashing on a flat rock at the foot, flung off a glancing sheet of broken water in all directions, like the fragments of a crystal mirror. The accessories too of the wild scene, the black rocks, the richly feathered evergreens, relieved by the white spray, and illuminated by one stray sunbeam which fell almost perpendicularly on the very shoot of the fall, were all perfect in their colouring and keeping. Add to this that the roar of the fall, reduplicated by the echoes of that enclosed amphitheatre, boomed with ten times the majesty of sound which the same cascade would have emitted in an open space.

Short time, however, had they to gaze at that moment on the wonders or the beauties of the spot; for there, on the very summit of the cataract itself, upon a crag which split the falling waters into two parts, although at a few feet below they joined again and descended in one common volume, there stood as fine a hart as ever gladdened the eye of deerstalker.

The noble animal was gazing up the glen as Forester and Harry entered the amphitheatre below him, and consequently saw nothing of his enemies, whose footsteps were drowned by the roar of the fall, while the taint of their presence was swept away from him by the rush of cool air from the water.

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"Hist! hist!" whispered the hunter in low tones.

"Now, Frank," said Archer in his ear, and with an eye glistening with excitement, he raised the light Manton rifle to his eye, took a quick aim, and drew the trigger.

Simultaneously with the crack and flash of the piece, the noble animal made a quick involuntary plunge, and the soft thud of the ball, as it struck him, reached the ears of the sportsmen.

He turned his soft liquid eyes towards his foemen, with a hoarse, plaintive bleat, and gathered his slender sinewy limbs to spring across the channel of the fall; but ere he had time to rise, Harry's unerring weapon flashed, for he saw that, although Frank's ball had taken effect, the wound was not mortal.

The heavy ounce ball clove his heart asunder, and in the very act of leaping, he fell dead upon the very summit of the cataract, and the next instant was swept down by the tumultuous waters to the very feet of his conquerors.

The sharp crack of the rifle-shots, in that deep rock-bound chasm, bellowed almost like the roar of ordnance, and soaring upward were repeated by the mountain tops, each after each, till they died away in the far distance, but not till they had reached the ears of a man who stood on the lower ridges of the same chain of hills at about one mile's distance eastward of the Eagle Rock.

It was no other than Ned Wheeler, who, notwithstanding his assertion that he was about to beat the level ground along the base of the hills, had ascended the slope at once, and, having wandered so far as to the first terrace of the mountain, was leaning on his rifle and listening eagerly for some sound which should indicate to him the whereabouts of the party, which strange to say he held in deadly apprehension.

A fierce smile illuminated his villanous features with a sinister light, as he heard the often re-echoed shots, and he muttered between his teeth, "Ah! that will do, that will do! They have shot a deer in the Devil's Hollow! Now, they will bear off to the left. What fools them darned gentlemen, as they calls themselves, be! They're far enough now, anyways; and I must hurry, or I'll sca'ce be in time."

And with the words he threw his rifle to the trail, and, hurrying up the mountain side, made the best of his way toward the Eagle Rock.

Meanwhile our party also, having gralloched the hart which they had slain, and hoisted him up into the branches of a tail hemlock which shot out of a crevice at the foot of the fall, set themselves to climb the rocky path by the cataract's edge, and soon gaining the three terraces mentioned by Dolph, took each his own line, Harry following the topmost, which, as Pierson informed him, would lead him direct to the often-mentioned rock, Dolph taking the next below him, and Forester pursuing the lowest.

These terraces were in fact irregular slopes on the hill side, comparatively level, but still descending at a considerable angle to the southward, each bounded by a sheer step or cliff of shaly limestone rock, varying from ten to fifty feet in height, below which lay the next in succession. These slopes were in some places two hundred yards in width, in some less than fifty, but all three were covered with a dense growth of gigantic fern, interspersed here with swales of soft rich green grass, and there with patches of wintergreen and cranberries, or with thickets of calmia, rhododendron, and azalia. Overhead they were canopied by the many-coloured foliage of the huge forest trees, and above the topmost terrace, to Archer's left hand, as he was wending his way eastward, the mountain rose abrupt, steep, and stony, and clothed for the most part with a dense growth of evergreens.

Along these terraces they made their way slowly, communicating from time to time one with the other, so as to keep all in accurate line, watching every brake, surveying the bark of every gray trunk against which the wild deer might have frayed their antlers, gathering tokens from every turned leaf, whether the wild cattle of the hills had

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passed in their direction but in vain. No sign met their eyes; and they had traversed half the distance to the rock, when the sharp crack of a rifle was heard in the woods ahead of them.

"Hist! Dolph!" cried Harry, springing to the verge of the terrace, "where was that shot fired?"

"Within two rods of the Eagle Rock, or my ears beant what they used to be."

"It must be Harry Barhyte?"

"Likely."

"Let's on. I want to speak with him."

Onward they went then, quickening their pace a little, and neglecting many of those precautions, which they had previously taken to discover the game of which they were in pursuit; for, though he said little, it was evident that there was something on Archer's mind that day far different from the mere killing of red deer, and that he had resolved on some course with regard to Barhyte, whom he regarded as the saviour of his life.

Before they reached the Eagle Rock, however, while they were all walking each on his own line at the rate of perhaps three miles and a half an hour, a brace of fine does bounced suddenly out of the long fern, scarce thirty yards ahead of Archer, and bounded across his face down the mountain side. With the speed of light he tossed the heavy rifle to his shoulder, shouting as he did so, "Mark deer! Dolph, ma-ark!" and his shout was followed by the quick-succeeding crack of both his barrels, fired one after the other.

The first doe sprang six feet into the air, and fell dead before she had made six bounds from the brake whence she had started, but the second had crossed the little terrace and was springing down the crag, at that place not above ten feet in descent, when he fired, so that he overshot her.

"Now, Dolph!" he shouted, "it's your turn; give it her, old fellow!"

But instead of the report of the rifle, the sharp explosion of a cap alone was heard, followed by a stifled execration, and then,

"Hilloh! Look out, Forester."

A shot followed, and a loud whoop from that worthy, who had at length pinned a deer, after two day's hard walking.

"Look here, Dolph," cried Archer, as he looked down upon the hunter, who was coolly recapping his gun. "I wish you'd come up and bleed this doe for me, and then follow me as quickly as you can; I'm afraid I shall miss Barhyte."

"All right, Aircher," answered the old hunter, looking up earnestly in the young man's face; "I'd like you to see him. For it's fit he should know, and you'll tell him stret and easily at oncet."

Harry nodded gravely, and hurried on, loading his rifle as he went; and scarcely had he done so, before the gray rifted precipice with a table rock on the summit, and a small glade of smooth grassy land at its base, below which grew on the declivity of the mountain a dense grove of giant pines, rose full in view before him.

He had never been on the spot before, yet was there no possibility of mistaking it. For, if the scene had not spoken for itself, there on the summit of a tall white-oak which shot a hundred feet heavenward above the hoary rock,

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was the immemorial nest of the bald-headed eagle.

Archer looked around him eagerly, as if he had hoped to find some one at that very place, so strongly had his imagination acted on him. But, seeing nothing like a human form, he half smiled at his own credulity, and, bending his eyes downward, began to search for the track of the man he sought, on the moist soil of the little mountain meadow.

He had not taken twenty paces, however, before he started back, as pale as death, in ghastly horror.

For there, directly in front of the Eagle rock, flat on his back, with his grim unshaven face, and wide staring eyes, and a small gory spot in the centre of his forehead, all turned heavenward, rigid and cold as the earth on which he lay, was the man whom he sought Harry Barhyte.

So awful and appalling was the intonation of the shout which burst from Archer's lips at this discovery, that Forester and Dolph Pierson were convinced, as it struck their ears, that something fearful had occurred; and, leaving the deer unbroken, they came rushing up at full speed, Frank leading in the race, breathless and blown, and found their comrade pale as the corpse itself, yet nothing all the circumstances with the precision and self-composure of a calm brave man.

CHAPTER X. WOODCRAFT AND EVIDENCE.

The body lay, as I have said, flat on its back, with the head down hill, and the feet toward the gray crag above. The left hand was firmly clinched, but the right was wide open. It was evident, in an instant, that the fatal shot had slain him outright, for not a blade of grass was disturbed around him; he lay, as he had fallen, as he had died, unconvulsed, and without a struggle.

He must have been standing, therefore, with his face toward the rock, when the shot took effect which slew him.

When Forester and Pierson came up, Harry was standing close to the corpse with a small note-book and a pencil in his hand; five minutes had perhaps elapsed since he uttered that wild shout, and neither of the new-comers were aware that he had stirred from the spot.

"Good God!" exclaimed Forester, "who is this?"

"Harry Barhyte!" cried Dolph, "sure's my name's Pierson. Well well! my dream's out!"

"Have a care," cried Archer, sharply, as Frank began to move restlessly about. "Don't stir a step. This ground has got to be searched, step by step."

The hunter, who had just picked up a long rifle which lay on the grass beside the body, and was examining it with a jealous eye, looked quickly up to Archer's face, as if to catch his meaning. But all there was blank and inscrutable.

Again he looked to the rifle, the hammer of which was down on the nipple, with the cap recently exploded; drew the ramrod, tried the barrel, and finding it discharge, shook his head, saying: "No, no, Aircher, 'tain't no use sarching; he's done it his own self. God send it was by accident, but I doubt it, sorely."

"He did it not himself, Dolph Pierson," replied Archer, solemnly, "either by accident or intent."

"It's his own rifle fresh fired, Aircher there hain't ben but *one* shot fired since we came on the range, and that's

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two hours, if it's a minnit, except those we fired. The poor lad's warm yet. Sure as death the shot we heard did the deed!"

"True, every syllable," said Archer; "yet he did it not that is certain," and as he spoke, he closed the book, in which he had made several memoranda, and returned it to his pocket.

"Are you in earnest, Harry?" asked Forester, all whose mercurial spirits and quick life had passed from him at that dread sight.

"In earnest!" exclaimed Archer, half indignant at the question; "in most solemn and dread earnest!"

"He must be right, then," muttered the old hunter; "but I can't see into it, nohow."

"See now, then," said the other, solemnly "and see you, Frank, and what you see, that note, for it is evidence, and on it hangs *another life!*"

"Look here!" and he pointed to the hole by which the bullet had entered, nearly in the centre of the forehead, but a little to the right, about half an inch above the inner corner of the right eyebrow.

"Well."

"And then *here!*" and, as he spoke, he kneeled down and raised the head gently by the hair the cap had fallen off and laid his finger on the spot, just above the roots of the hair at the nape of the neck, where, after passing through the brain, it had issued.

"I don't see," said Frank, musing.

"But I do," said Pierson, after a moment, during which he had bowed his own head over the muzzle of his own rifle, which he placed in several different directions, with the butt on the ground. "He did *not* shoot hisself."

"Why not?"

"If he had done so, with that rifle, the ball must have come out of the back of his head at a point *higher* than that at which it entered. It has come out two inches lower."

"True, if it were accidental but if intentional, might not he have held the piece, from above, at arm's length?"

"Impossible! It is a four-foot barrel no earthly arm could have done it. What do you say, Dolph?"

"What you says. He didn't shoot hisself, neither accidental, nor a purpose; and I thank God for't!"

"Amen!" replied Harry. "Now, look there!" and he pointed to a freshly-cut white spot on the trunk of one of the great pine trees, at about three feet from the ground, directly in the rear of the corpse; "there is the bullet!"

Two minutes had not passed before the woodman had dug the fatal ball out of the soft bark of the pine-tree with the point of his knife.

"It's Barhyte's own bullet, too, Aircher," said the hunter, examining the deadly missile; "here's his own mark on't."

"The deeper and more damnable the craft of the murderer!" said Harry.

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"The murderer!" repeated Forester.

"Ay! the murderer!" repeated Archer. "Now, kneel down, Dolph, lay your eye to the level of that shot-hole in the tree, and take your range past the collar of my coat, as I stand at poor Barhyte's feet. I am a trifle taller than he, but that's near enough. Now, old man, where does your line strike? where was he shot from?"

The old hunter rose from his knees and gazed for a moment wonderingly in the face of the young man.

"You're a merickle, you be! You knows iverything, you do! I've said it, often; but I sees it now. Harry Barhyte was shot by some one who stood at top o' the Eagle rock, alongside the trunk of the tree with the knob on't."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Archer, gravely.

"As sure as that's the sun yonder!"

While this colloquy was going on, Frank knelt and took the same eye-line, and saw that in effect the range was true from the point where the bullet had cut the tree, through the elevation of a tall man's head to a level about five feet above the table-rock, close to the body of the white-oak tree; and marvelling greatly at the strange sagacity of his comrades, he kept his peace and listened.

"Would you swear it?"

The hunter paused. "I would!" he said, at last.

"Yet that is his own gun, and it was his own bullet that killed him."

"Some one must have changed guns with him."

"When, Pierson?"

A light seemed to flash on the old man, for his eye kindled, and he smote his hand upon his thigh.

"Twice!" he replied; "oncet afore he was shot, and again arterward. We'll be on the trail of him afore ten minutes. Ned Wheeler, you shall swing for this!"

"You have hit my very thought, Pierson," said Archer. "He must have come down from the rock after doing it yet I can find no track of him."

"Let's try again," said the old man; and to work they went, and searched the ground almost foot by foot, but no track could they find, except their own prints coming from the westward, and those of the murdered man from the east.

"This is very strange," said Harry. But at that very moment Frank pointed to a piece of flat flag-stone, which he had been contemplating closely for above a minute it lay about a yard distant from the dead man. And lo! upon its dry surface, visible enough, was the "sable score," not of fingers four, but of five naked human toes, which had left the print thereon of the dark peaty soil on which they had last trodden.

"Right, Frank!" cried Archer, exultingly. "We will have him now; and you will make a woodman!"

The clue once taken was followed easily; a large piece of loose half-decayed pine bark lay on the ground at about four feet from the flag-stone; it was lifted, and beneath it were two distinct impressions in the deep loam of a

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naked human foot, one coming, one returning. Other indications were discovered, though less distinct than these, which made it perfectly clear that since the death of poor Barhyte a man had come from the Eagle Rock, and returned to it, barefooted; concealing, moreover, the evidence of his visit by strange, Indian-like expedients.

Harry again drew out his note-book, and showed to his companions a rude map which he had already made of the localities, with the exact positions of the rock, the body, and the trees, and thereupon he now inserted the places of the marked stones and foot-prints.

Forester and the hunter examined and verified it, and then affixed, the former his signature, and the latter his mark.

"Now, Dolph," said Archer, quietly; "you and I *know* who the murderer is; but we have got one thing to do yet to prove it! and to that end you and I must *take* him, and that *to-day!*"

"We can do't, Aircher!"

"And you must help us, Frank."

"Of course, Harry, to the utmost but I do not know how I can, for it seems to me, as Dolph says, that you do know, or at least *see* everything. How can I help you?"

"Do you think you can find your way to Timothy, and the wagon?"

"I am not sure. I'll try though."

"Look ye here, Mister Forester," said Dolph, leading him forward to the brow of the hill, and pointing out to him a towering bare crag across the valley, "keep your line stret to that 'ere, and it'll bring you out at the fork of the road, where Tim's waitin'."

"Have you got your pocket compass, Harry?"

"Here it is."

"I'll set the line, and then all's certain. Now, then, what am I to do?"

"Go, and find Timothy first; then follow the road half a mile, and you'll come to a country store. Get help there buy a ladle, and a few pounds of lead come hither melt the lead, take a cast of those two footprints, which I have covered over again. Then take them, and the body, and the rifle, down to the store, and wait until we come to you. Use my name and Dolph's, and do not let them hold an inquest until we come up."

"Let me look at the rifle first."

"Certainly; what of it?"

"I think I have seen it before."

"Indeed! when?"

"This morning."

"Ay!" replied Harry, catching his meaning on the instant "that was but a passing glance. You cannot be certain."

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"I may be made so."

"Well! time will show, and we have no time to lose, not a moment. This deed had not been done twenty minutes when I got here, for I heard the shot which did it, and the assassin may well have been within earshot when we reached the ground; he could not have been many hundred yards distant, for all these stratagems must have taken time. Now, if he have heard us, he will be desperate, and may lie in wait for you, or try to intercept you. If he do, shoot him like a dog, and I'll bear you out."

"I have got two barrels here, and a good stout knife too," answered Forester, "and if I had none of them, barehanded I would not fear a cold-blooded murderer he must be a coward."

"But a cornered coward is a dangerous thing."

"Be it so. I am on my guard. Fare you well." And he set off at a round trot down the hill, in the direction indicated, and was soon lost to view among the thick trees on the hill-side.

There was a momentary silence, which was broken, at length, by the hunter inquiring in a low voice,

"What next, Aircher?"

"To hunt him by the foot-track till we find him."

"And then? "

"If we can follow him by the foot, I'll arrest him on my own authority."

"And I'll back you. Come."

And leaving the fatal spot, they ascended the Eagle Rock, where, on searching the circumference of the flat table of stone where it was surrounded by soft grassy soil, they easily found the track of a man's foot coming up to it from the eastward.

"Run down, Dolph, and measure the dead man's shoe, length and breadth, mark it with nicks on your ramrod be quick."

This was done in the space of two or three minutes, and, as was expected, the tracks were found to be different shorter and broader they too were measured and marked.

Some minutes were spent, thereafter, but the pursuers of blood could not discover any track leaving the rock, till, at length, remembering the trick practised below, Archer turned over a flat stone which lay on the soft mire of the swaly ground, and there was the stamp of a booted foot the same boot.

"He's ben larned this by the Injuns in Floridy," said Dolph.

"Doubtless!" replied Archer. "But this must have taken him many minutes. He cannot be far before us. Ha! here's a foot-print not covered; he has thought himself safe here. But I cannot see another."

"He's tuk up the bed of the little stream!" cried the old hunter, delighted at finding himself able to add his quota to the discovery of the criminal; "and what's more, he's travellin' up it still see how muddy the water comes down, and there hain't ben a drop o' rain to rile it these three days."

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"Forward, then!" exclaimed Harry. "We have nothing to do, but to follow it along till it gets clear again. We have him now."

And away they dashed as hard as they could run, following the banks of the brook, which came down muddier and more muddy, the higher they traced it toward the source they were gaining upon their man.

But ere they came to clear water, they met him unexpectedly coming to meet them, face to face. He had heard them, doubtless, as they crashed through the brake and underwood; and, seeing the danger of being detected flying, had resolved to brazen it out.

As they surmised, it was Ned Wheeler. Guiltier than usual he could not look, for the assassin and the dastard were ineradically branded on his vile features by the hand of nature.

"You run hard to-day, my men," he said, sneeringly. "What are you chasing, anyhow?"

"Ned Wheeler, *you!*" said Archer, steadily, halting within six feet of him.

"Chasing *me!*" said the ruffian. "You'll find that tough work, I guess." And he cocked his rifle.

"Edward Wheeler," repeated Archer, "you are my prisoner. I arrest you, for the murder of Henry Barhyte."

The wretch turned pale as death, but still he raised his rifle to the shoulder, and levelling it full at Archer's head, cried, in a hoarse voice

"Stand off, or by J s you're a dead man!"

At the same instant Pierson levelled his piece too, exclaiming, "Down with your gun, Ned, down with it, or I fire!"

The coward's eye wandered from Archer to the new speaker, and as Harry's quick glance perceived that he wavered, he leaped in at one bound, and mastering his rifle, which went off harmlessly in the scuffle, with his left hand, caught him by the throat with his right, and tripping him at the same time with his foot, cast him heavily to the ground. The next moment he was disarmed, and his hands were securely fastened behind him.

"It only remains, now, Dolph," said Harry Archer, "to take his back track to—the place where he left the brook, and then we have the whole clue made good."

"We'll do't," said Dolph. "Come, Wheeler, you *must* go along with us; so you'd as well go easy."

"You'll live to be sorry for this," said the wretch, doggedly; but he shuddered as he spoke the words, for he perceived the ability and perseverance with which he had been pursued, though he could not conceive how he had been taken.

The rest was easy work. The track was clear in the deep mud of the swamp, and within twenty paces it led them to the banks of the little stream, which had already subsided into almost its natural clearness.

"Now, Wheeler," said Archer, gravely, "it seems a cruel thing to do but we have no choice or help for it we must take you down to the place where the body lies, and detain you there until assistance arrives to remove you and it."

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"Don't be alarmed for nuthen'," answered the callous wretch; "I'd jest as lieves set by Harry Barhyte's body as anywheres else! Ef he be dead I didn't shoot him; my gun hain't ben shot off-to-day; you can try it, ef you like. I'll make you pay for this, I tell you!"

"Wheeler," said Archer, yet more solemnly than before, "beware! I tell you, you are committing yourself. Who said anything about shooting? or how know you that Barhyte was shot? I warn you. I was Barhyte's friend, and I will be his avenger. I know you to be guilty, and I will pursue you to the utmost; but no advantage shall be taken of you. If you would take your only chance of saving your neck, do not say one word, or answer any question, until you have got a lawyer. Now, come on."

And without farther words they led him back by the very way along which they had followed him. They pointed out his foot-prints to him, one by one, uncovering those which he had concealed, and replacing the stones and bark as before, and then they set him face to face with the dead body.

That was a fearful trial, but the wretch bore it with a degged hardihood, that in a good cause would have been noble resolution. His features worked a little, but he gazed fixedly on the face of the dead, and then said, in a quiet, sullen voice,

"Ay! he is dead, but I did not kill him!"

"We shall see," replied Archer, and leading away their prisoner to the foot of the rock, and making him sit down, they sat down themselves beside him, and patiently awaited the return of Forester with aid.

Within an hour so eagerly had Forester bestirred himself, and such was the excitement created by the dreadful tidings, in that peaceful neighbourhood voices were heard coming up the hill, and a few minutes afterward, Forester appeared on the ground, followed by Timothy, carrying the ladle and the lead, and half a dozen decent-looking farmers and countrymen.

"Where is the body, sir?" said one of these, stepping a little forward, with a small air of authority it was the coroner of the county, who was accidentally present in the store when Forester entered, and had accompanied.

"There, sir," said Archer, rising from the place where he was sitting "There, sir, is the body of the murdered man, and here is the murderer!"

No one had noticed the little group at the foot of the rock till he spoke, all eyes being turned in the opposite direction, and his words made quite a commotion.

"And pray, who are you, sir?" asked the coroner.

"I am Henry Archer, at present of New York the person who discovered the body, and who have taken the murderer, whom I now deliver into your custody."

"On what authority, or evidence did you arrest him?"

"On the authority which rests in every citizen to arrest a felon taken in the fact, and on the evidence which I shall show you."

And in a few words he recounted the facts as they occurred, pointed out the mute evidence given by the direction of the shot, and the naked foot-prints coming and returning from the rock, and then led the officer over the whole ground, to the place where the prisoner was taken.

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"It is all clear enough, sir. It is all as clear as day," said the coroner, "I can see that myself now that you point it out. But it is all owing to you. Had any one of us found that body, had any one man, I am bold to say, out of five thousand, found it, he would have taken it for granted Barhyte had killed himself, and the only question would have been accidental death, or *felo de se*, and I fancy it would have been the latter. And then the murderer would have gone clear, and the murdered man been murdered doubly, in his reputation as well as in his body. Pray, sir, are you a lawyer?"

"No, I am not, sir," replied Archer, with a smile.

"No, he ain't," said old Dolph, "but he's a darned sight better thing, he's the very best and 'cutest woodman I iver did see."

"To what, pray, do you attribute your own very singular acuteness in this matter, sir?" persisted the coroner, paying no heed to Dolph, but looking very eagerly at Archer. "I never heard of anything like it in all my life?"

"I am not conscious of anything so very particular about the matter, but if there be anything, I can only attribute it to a habit of observing closely, and, as my friend here says, to the NOBLE SCIENCE OF Woodcraft!"

"It is very strange!" said the coroner; then turning to Wheeler, who was in charge of a constable, "Now, prisoner, we must look to this. Observe, you need answer no questions unless you choose it. Constable, take off the boot of his right foot."

It was done, and lo! the foot was black with the very hue of the mire around.

"Set his right foot in that foot-print!"

The prisoner turned as pale as ashes, when this mandate was given, and struggled impotently to resist, but it was all in vain. Point for point the naked foot fitted the naked foot-print.

"Now take his boot up above the rock, two or three of you, and try that. We will have all clear."

This too was done, and in a few minutes three or four witnesses returned, all ready to swear to the perfect coincidence.

"I think this is enough, sir," said the coroner, turning to Archer, "although your suggestion of the lead is an admirable one, wherever foot-tracks, either of men or beasts, are to be brought in evidence."

"Quite enough, sir," replied Archer. "I only intended using it, in case of not taking the prisoner on the spot. This actual comparison before witnesses is of course better, because positive."

"Tain't no use, none of it!" muttered the prisoner, doggedly. "It's his own rifle that he's shot with; there it lies now, alongside of him. Tain't likely, I could a' shot the man with his own gun!"

The bystanders stared a little at this speech; and one of them, taking up the rifle, said, "'Tis Harry Barhyte's rifle, sartin!"

But just then Forester advanced, and asked to see Wheeler's piece. It was given to him, and, after a single glance at it, he said,

"We passed Wheeler on the road this morning; he was carrying his rifle at a trail in his right hand, and the outer side was toward me. I will swear that it was not *this* rifle which he carried then; whether this be his own or no."

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"It *is* his own," cried two or three voices from the crowd.

"How can you swear to that, Mr. Forester? You could have had but a very cursory view of it."

"The rifle he carried had a brass-lidded patch-box in the stock this, which is said to be his, has none."

"And Henry Barhyte's?" asked the officer.

"*Has* a brass patch-box!" answered the man who held it.

"Take him away, constable, take him away; and some of you make a hand-barrow of some of these branches you have got an axe or two, I see, among you and bring the body down, will you not? To Dutch Jake's, you know, that's the nearest public house; the prisoner and the body both. You will attend there, gentlemen; we shall want your evidence."

"We are staying there for the present," answered Archer. "My wagon and horses are at the foot of the hill; I can offer you a seat, if you will accept one."

"I thank you, much, sir. Shall not I crowd you?"

"By no means. I will leave my servant."

"No, Aircher, best leave me," interposed Dolph. "I must break up them ere does, and hyst them into the trees till mornin'; the wolves'll git 'em else. And I'll bring down a saddle with me. Don't be feared, coroner, I'll be thar afore you've got your jury sot."

"There is nothing to detain us any longer, is there?"

"Nothing."

"Let us go then."

A few minutes' walk brought them to the carriage, and driving rapidly down the road, they soon reached Barhyte's cottage. Here Harry pulled up, and giving the reins to Forester, apologised to the coroner, who was a lawyer of good standing in the county town, for detaining him a few seconds, and entered the house, closing the door carefully after him.

The most fearful suspicions were at work in his mind, whether this woman, evidently in minor matters guilty, were not in this last damning crime an accomplice likewise; and, between his friendship for Barhyte, his resolve to prosecute the matter to the utmost, his reluctance to injure a woman, and some remains of lurking tenderness to the young creature whom he had so often fondled when a child, his mind was in a terrible state of anxiety and turmoil.

The beautiful young woman, who was now very becomingly and very coquettishly attired, evidently in expectation of this visit, had heard the wheels, and was coming to the door to meet him, when he entered.

There was a bright flashing glance in her blue eye, and a smile of wanton invitation on her lip, as she addressed her visiter.

"Henry has not come home, Mr. Archer," she said. "But you need not mind that, you can sit down, and talk over old times with me till he returns."

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And she put out her small white hand to lead him to a chair, as she spoke.

But he took it not, nor advanced, but stood still, and gazed at her fixedly.

"No, Mrs. Barhyte," he said in a slow solemn voice. "Henry has not come home, and what is more, he never will come home again."

She looked surprised for a moment, and then tossing her head saucily, "It is no great loss," she said. "He has run away, I suppose, Mr. Archer. He has been a lost man these nine months past."

"No, madam, he is dead."

She gazed at him for a moment, and then bursting into a sort of hysterical laugh "Dead!" she cried; "Oh! you are joking with me; dead drunk! you mean."

"Indeed, I do not. He is dead! Shot dead, through the brain. *I* found him."

"Good God!" she exclaimed, turning ashy pale, and glaring at him, as if her eyes would have started from their sockets "Good God! How terrible!" and then sinking her voice into a whisper, she added, "Who shot him?"

"It was supposed," he replied, "that he shot himself. We were but a short way off, when the gun was fired there was but one and when we found him, he was lying on his back quite dead, with his *own* gun, just discharged, beside him."

"His *own* gun!" she shrieked; "his *own* gun! Oh! villain, villain, villain! Can it be, that after all, you have done this thing?"

"It can, indeed! nay, it *is*, Mary. He is a prisoner. I took him, redhanded, in the fact; there is evidence enough to hang twenty men; and he *shall* hang, or my name is not Henry Archer. But I thank God, Mary, that you are innocent, at least, of this."

"Of this of this you did not believe, Archer, that I I was a murderess?"

"I feared it, Mary."

"My God! my God! to what have I fallen! What have I done? how am I humbled?" She buried her face in her hands, and for several minutes wept bitterly. At length, and as it would seem by a great effort, mustering courage, she raised her eyes to his, now melancholy and subdued, and cried in a plaintive tone

"Oh! you are good you are good, Henry Archer. Tell me, tell me, what must I do?" she paused; and then, an old recollection of innocent and happy days breaking upon her, she added, "What shall I do to be saved?"

"Repent!" the young man answered solemnly. "Repent, and be forgiven."

"I will, I will," cried the beautiful sinner; "God help me, I will!"

"God *will* help you!" replied Archer. "Now, tell me, what know you of this awful business?"

"*He* you know whom I mean, I will never name his name again pretended to be drunk last night, and carried away Barhyte's rifle, and left his own in place of it. So, Harry went out early, before *he* came of course he was late on purpose and took *his* gun to hunt. Oh! my God, it will kill me to think of it. Harry! poor, poor, dear

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Harry! how he loved me, and I I oh! what will become of me!" and again she burst into a bitter paroxysm of tears.

"I must leave you now, Mary," said Archer, kindly. "Heaven keep you in your good resolves. I will return, when they bring him home. Shall I" he hesitated for a moment "shall I bring a clergyman with me?"

"Yes!" she cried, clasping her hands together eagerly, "Oh, yes God bless you for the thought, I will confess, and be good, if I can, hereafter. Oh! Heaven bless you, Mr. Archer!"

"Good-night, Mary;" and with the words he left the room, and, mounting his driving-seat, took the reins, and drove rapidly to the tavern, whither hot rumour had preceded them already, and where the fat man awaited them, half crazy between excitement and anxiety.

What need of many words?

If there were any, the excitement of my tale is ended. The conclusion must be anticipated.

The coroner's inquest was held, and a verdict of wilful murder was returned instantly against Edward Wheeler; but the miserable wretch spared this world any farther trouble with his concerns, or his crimes; for he contrived, that night, to anticipate his doom, hanging himself by his neckcloth from a clothes' pin, on the wall of the room in which he was confined, previous to his removal to the county gaol.

So resolute was he, even to the last, that, the peg from which he was suspended being scarce six feet from the ground, he fell on his knees, and so strangled himself, till his was extinct. He died and made no sign.

Mary Barhyte did indeed repent, and gave proof of repentance in an amended and secluded life; but she lived not long, dying of what was called consumption, which is so often but another name for a grieved and broken heart.

And, after she was gone, some palliation for her sin was discovered in the fact, that she had loved, and would have married Wheeler, when both were young and innocent, but for her parents' opposition. She believed him dead when she wedded Barhyte. The first lover returned He was wicked, she weak; he tempted, and she fell.

Judge not, that ye be not judged!

Archer and Forester returned home, for the time, much saddened and subdued; and even Fat Tom neither swore nor jested, on the homeward route.

In process of time, however, the dark shadow left on their minds by these terrible events passed away, and left them, as of old, light-hearted, joyous, and carefree; and perhaps both felt somewhat raised in their own opinion, by the feeling that, in circumstances requiring great exertion, both of physical and moral courage, they had done their duty.

Harry Archer loved not to speak of this subject afterward; but whenever he did so, he was wont to cite it as a proof, that there is not only much practical, but much moral utility, in the Gentle Science of Woodcraft.

THE END.