L. D. Teackle

Cambridge Chronicle.

VOL. VII. NO. 19.

BY G. W. CALLAHAN.

CAMBRIDGE, Md.---SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1833.

WHOLE NO. 483.

THE WOUNDED SPIRIT,

A TALE OF LIFE.

By D. M. Moir.

[CONCLUDED.]

CHAPTER XI.

"Without love, hatred, joy, or fear,
They led a kind of —— as it were;
Nor wished, nor cared, nor laughed, nor cried;
And so they lived, and so they died."

PRIOR.

Before proceeding with the more immediate narrative of my melancholy life, it may be pardoned me to digress a little into the matters relating to that of poor Matilda; and, in the first place, to the credit of Mr. Frederick Elton, it must be allowed, that it was not without a considerable struggle that his mind was brought to acquiesce in the sordid and selfish views of his parent. Unluckily, however, the family fortune was almost entirely of his father's acquisition, and not being yet entailed, could be disposed according to his wishes. Bred up and educated with a view to this inheritance, Frederick had not been allowed to fit himself for a man of business, and in the hour of the visitation of his heartfelt calamity, he found this to his cost. But there was no remedy. An open rupture with his father left him pennyless; and to have married in that state was worse than folly, was crime A knowledge of these circumstances had no doubt stimulated my noble-minded sister to her heroic self sacrifice; but it was not for a considerable time after, and until threats of disinheritance were more than threatened, that Frederick felt himself compelled to yield to his father's arbitrary dictation.

As might have been anticipated, the marriage was any thing but a happy one. The person who could love a being of Matilda's high-toned feeling, simple dignity, and proud retirement, was not likely to be devotedly attached to Miss Hargrave, as the very circumstance of that lady's accepting Mr. Frederick Elton's hand, with a full knowledge of how affairs stood, augured not very highly for the elevation of her sentiments. Educated in the flutter and fluster of fashionable life, where every thing is sacrificed to appearances, she perhaps thought of little else than being at the head of an establishment of her own, and of outdazzling her rivals by the splendor of her equipage. This she most effectually tried to do, to the cost of her husband and his creditors. Heedless and heartless, she studied nothing but her paltry self-gratification; and, at length, Frederick, after opposing the feeble barrier of his advice to her headlong indiscretion, gave up the contest in vain, and looked at ruin with his eyes open.

Sir Simon Hargrave, in attempting some wild agricultural speculations for the improvement of his estates, at length found his farms without a tenant, and his pocket without a penny. Trees were cut down and sold, and mortgage succeeded mortgage; so to the dunning and solicitations even of his favorite and spoiled daughter, necessity compelled him to give a flat negative at length, and the consequence was an estrangement on her part, which showed that past favors could be easily enough forgotten. On the part of old Mr. Elton, who saw his son on the highway to misery, a more decided tone was adopted. He first threatened his old story of disinheritance, and then put it into execution, by making a will in favor of his other children, and cutting off his legal heir with a shilling. Before having proceeded to this extremity, it is however, but fair to state that he had given the unfortunate Frederick many salutary cautions, and it was not until having been assured that his son had become an inveterate gambler, that he determined on the measures which terminated all communication betwixt them.

While all things were thus rushing from confusion into irretrievable ruin, Frederick was dunned by one of his gambling cronies, a Mr. Stanihurst, for a very considerable stake, which he was unable to pay. This gentleman, from a similar course of life, had been reduced to similar difficulties, and had paid away Mr. Frederick Elton's bill to one of his dunning tradesmen. The money became due, but the bill was not honored. The consequence was an impertinent letter on the part of Mr. Stanihurst, to his quondam friend. A duel followed, in which poor Elton was shockingly wounded; and, to add to his misery, in the course of a few days after, while languishing under the torments occasioned by an unextracted ball, his faithless wife eloped with the very scoundrel who had wounded her husband. It was soon discovered that the fugitives had taken up their residence in France; but no one thought it worth while to offer them the smallest molestation, leaving them to the upbraidings of conscience and their guilty pleasures.

The case of the wretched Frederick had been from the moment of his wound doubtful, but the disgrace and mental anguish which the discovery occasioned, speedily decided the balance, and a few days of high fever were succeeded by a premature death. It is said that in the ravings which preceded that event, he frequently ejaculated the name of my sister.

If a man is, as some suppose, the creature of circumstances, it is much to be lamented, both for the sake of Matilda and of Frederick Elton, that fate had not destined them to be united, as her firmness and feminine devotion might have lent a tone to his more vacillating mind. As it was, she passed to heaven, if not without grief, at least without guilt; and was spared the misery of beholding the being, on whom she had bestowed her affections, sinking from affluence into poverty, from respect into dishonor, and from remorse into death.

CHAPTER XII.

"He came not to her father's halls
With a hundred squires in train,
But all he brought was a true heart,
And a name without a stain."

MARY HOWITT.

After the loss of my beloved sister, I returned once more to my rural retirement, near Dorking, with a silent determination to estrange myself from the bustle of life, and live like a recluse. The deepest formed schemes of man, however, often fail, from circumstances over which he is, apparently, incapable of exerting control. At first I had my hours entirely to myself,—I read, and walked, and meditated; day was the counterpart of day; and month succeeded month in a sort of "similitude in dissimilitude." Thanks, however, to the generosity of human nature, and the kindness of my neighbors, the solitude of the recluse began to be broken in upon by friendly offices, and calls. The only family that succeeded in really forcing me by their kindness to the nourishment of a reciprocal sentiment, was that of the Austens, of Austen Park, a family of the first rank in consideration, both with regard to character and fortune.

In the delightful society of this family, I was again restored to a susceptibility to the pleasures of life. Around it there was the all-soothing calm of affectionate interest, a reciprocity of feeling among its members which knit them to each other. From this mutuality of feeling I was not excluded, and often did my heart silently overflow with gratitute to those who seemed to have taken a spontaneous regard for one, whom providence had left out of the pale of domestic endearments.

In this family resided a cousin of the Austens, Mr. Bennet, who was waiting for an Indian cadetship. Having, like myself, but little business on hand, our evenings were almost alternately shared with each other, and a particular intimacy was the consequence. He was a warm-hearted, fine fellow; and I never think of him, even yet, although many years have elapsed since I have learned any tidings of his fate, without a glow of affectionate interest. Mr. Curtis, the proprietor of the adjoining estate, was also on terms of most familiar footing at Austen Park. He was a tall, handsome and good-looking fellow, who had about a year before returned from Oxford to his family possessions. His university education had not spoiled his love of rural sports; and with the polish of the gentleman was sometimes mingled the roughness of the county squire.

Mr. Curtis's father and old Mr. Austen had been school associates, and, the former dying while his son was yet a boy, his old friend was appointed the family guardian. I had heard it said that Miss Austen was destined for his future wife, but from my own observations I was led to regard this as mere hearsay. Indeed, had my opinion of the matter been asked, I should have at once said, that, did any partiality exist, it was for her cousin Bennet, who was much more mild in his manners, and without being regarded as cynical, I may add much more circumspect in his conversation and conduct. With old Mr. Austen, however, Curtis was an especial favorite. In his youth, he had been devotedly fond of the same amusements, and he listened to the exploits of the young follower of Nimrod with peculiar satisfaction, nor from fears of losing a future son in-law did he ever enter any caveat against his attempting a five-bar gate. In his eye the bluntness of Curtis was honesty; he regarded him as one who was really better than he cared to be taken for, and like the almond, as hiding a sweet kernel within a rough shell.

One morning Bennet walked over to inform me that his cadetship had at length arrived; but from the gravity of his manner I saw that he had something more to inform me of than that. I told him to "out with it," and found, as I suspected, that he was passionately attached to his fair cousin. With the openness and honor which characterized all his proceedings, he at the same time confessed to me that he was but a soldier of fortune, and that his future success in life must depend solely on his own exertions. "I have some reason to think," he added, "that I am at least not disagreeable to my cousin, but years must elapse before I can be in a condition in which I might reasonably make proposals to her family, and as to any engagement in my present circumstances, I cannot honorably think of such a thing."

After commending the purity of his intentions, I hinted to him my suspicions of some attachment on the part of Curtis to Miss Austen, a thing which, strange to say, had never once struck him. A new light seemed instantly to dawn in upon him, and while I observed the cloud come over his countenance, I saw and felt from his manner that the happiness of the woman he loved, was the paramount object of importance in his regard. He was to leave Austen Park during the following week, and before we parted, he had taken the resolution of coming to an explanation with Curtis himself on this important and delicate subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The face that in the morning sun
We thought so wondrous fair,
Hath faded—ere his course was run
Beneath its golden hair."

PROF. WILSON.

For some days after this meeting I was confined to the house by indisposition, and my friend Bennet, for whose presence I was longing, came to pay me a farewell visit. His absence boded ill for the success of his explanation with Curtis; and the moment he entered, I saw, by the pensive cast of his features, ill-disguised by an assumed jocular expression, that the dearest hopes of his bosom were extinguished forever. Our interview was short and hurried, but as painful as might be, and we parted with mutual good wishes. I could see that he wished me to waive any allusion to Miss Austen; yet he could not bid me farewell without saying, "You were right, my friend, in your surmises about Curtis. May they be as happy as I could wish them!"

On the day following, Bennet bade adieu to Austen Park, to embark for the east. Of his after-fate, circumstances precluded me from learning any tidings.

When convalescent, I resumed my visits to the Austen family, and did my best in shortening the evenings to the old squire, by supplying my friend Bennet's place at the chess-board. Miss Austen appeared a little more thoughtful than was her wont, and to me somewhat more reserved; the former of which I could readily enough account for in the parting with her cousin, who had so long been one of the family circle; the latter appeared rather unaccountable, but I was conscious of no impropriety, so could patiently afford to wait for the clearing up of the mystery.

It was towards the middle of September that, after a long travel through the fields with my dogs and gun, I was returning home in the evening with my bag decently replenished. The latter part of the day had been sunny and sultry, but as the disk of the sun rested on the western horizon, the evening became chill and dewy.

Below me lay my home, about two miles distant, but hidden from view by the fine old woods, with which the country, for a considerable extent to right and left, was luxuriantly covered. There was a quietude in the scene almost unearthly, as I sauntered down the banks of the river. From recent rains the channel was completely covered, and shrubs, which had found footing when the stream was shrunk from summer drought, were half-immersed in the waters, on whose surface their upper branches wantoned. The shadows of the magnificent old trees were imaged in a mirror, smooth and transparent as crystal, together with the reflected darkness of the rocks, the deep blue sky, and the gathering stars.

Having been a dreamer all my days, I could not proceed forward, without often gazing around me on the woods and waters, reposing in the majesty of nature; but when I came to the cataract, beside which I had often loved to sit with my beloved sister, I rested my gun against a tree, and lingered for a while, musing on the days of the years which were past, and on the friends who were gone forever. My heart was subdued to the hue of the hour, and the scenery around me blended with remembrances sacred to my heart. I thought of my sister, as I gazed on the favorite beech tree, under which we had so often sat and read; and in the melancholy murmur of the falling waters, I heard the angelic voice of Anna Singleton. There was not a breath of wind stirring, and in the palpable twilight every leaf was visible between the eye and the clear heavens. The scene looked like enchantment, and save a crow, that passing with a heavy rustling wing over my head, evanished amid the dusky wood, with a plaintive cry, no other token of nature's animation broke the silence of my meditations.

My path not lying by the river's edge, struck at an angle through the forest, with whose recesses I was minutely conversant. How long I remained by the waterfall, "an idle dreamer," I know not, but the space must have been considerable; as when I arose, the twilight had deepened considerably.

The forest is intersected about its centre by a cross-road, upon coming to which my dogs ran before me and barked. The place being almost unfrequented, the idea of robbers or gipsies, for an instant, passed through my mind, and I thrust a ball into the muzzle of my piece, ramming it down over a previous charge; but my fears were instantly dissipated, when, on looking along the way, I saw Curtis, who had just crossed a style, approaching the spot where I stood, on his way homeward.

Upon recognising each other, "Well, Curtis," said I, "what sport have you had? Your bag seems heavy."

"Not amiss," answered he, "considering that the game is so plundered here. Scarcely half an hour ago I fell in with a gipsey encampment—a regular Bohemian town on the eastern border of the wood; and faggots were crackling under more pots than one. The contents it would require no magician to guess at."

"Phoo, Curtis," said I jocularly, "you are a complete game-law man, and would screw the business up to the letter. But see, you are bending under your bag. Wink a little hard in charity on the poor creatures, and let them 'eat their supper,' with what appetite they may."

"Well, well, that may be your mind," he continued, in a sneering way, "but it is fortunate that all the world are not of one way of thinking Had I discovered one of the gang wiring a hare, or bringing down a pheasant, as sure as my name is Jack, he should have had as much lead as my barrels contained."

"Gramercy on the poor poachers, if you are so bloodily minded, Curtis; but it is as well for both parties that none of them fell in your way. Why, man, you seem to have got quite hipped—quite angry with yourself, and all the world, of late. Surely there is something not going according to your stomach, Curtis?"

That there was something rude and vulgar in this familiarity of address, I mean not to deny; I hope it was somewhat out of my usual mode, and that some apology may be found for it in the general character of the gentleman I was addressing. Piqued to the extreme, he answered—

"Mind your own affairs, sir; I am at least capable of taking care of myself. A man who fancies himself in love, as some one does," added he, in a bitter tone, "will have enough to do in managing his own business to his mind, else I am greatly mistaken."

I could observe that he labored under extreme mental irritation—his eyes sparkling with a ferocity that pierced through the incumbent twilight; while he stopped short suddenly, and, turning round to me, exclaimed, in a voice half-suffocated with anger, "You mean to insult me, do you? It shall not be so with impunity!"

"Insult you!" said I, interrupting him somewhat sharply, "what crotchet is this you have got in your head, Curtis? Come, come—"

"None of your smoothing me down, sir," he interrupted, fiercely; "no, no—that sha'n't serve your turn. You have tried to undermine me. You have tampered with my feelings—you are a base——"

"Hold sir!" I cried, "on the peril of being called to instant account. You are labouring under some gross misapprehension. I call upon you to explain yourself."

"Explain myself!" he ejaculated, and rushing forward, seized me by the collar. A violent struggle ensued, in which I endeavored to shake him off, but the opportunity for explanation had escaped, and it was now too late—for I found him grappling me with a tigerlike ferocity, which left me no chance for life but in my utmost exertions. "No, villain!" he exclaimed, as he best could, while twisting and struggling to throw me over, "this is a tug for life and death—both shall not survive it."

During the scuffle he still continued to hold his fowling piece, and I have little doubt would have shot me, had opportunity allowed—so intensely kindled was the fire of his anger, and so distorted were his features, by the extremity of passion; so I made every effort to trip him over, but this his athletic vigour prevented my accomplishing.

Vainly I endeavored to call him to reason—to unbosom his suspicions, and to hear my explanation! he struggled with the fury of a maniac; and at length I felt my strength not only failing, but a sense of suffocation came over me, from his having got his fingers knotted into my neckcloth. Desperation lent me a moment's vigor, and while indignation and abhorrence burned within me, I drove him backwards with such a vehemence that he was tripped over by some brushwood, and the trunk of a tree alone prevented his falling. In turn, he recoiled upon me, and, observing his fingers grappling for the trigger, I drove the muzzle from me with an energy that brought the piece from his hand, and, as we both came to the ground, it exploded. I remember the flash, and a sound thundering in my ears; but being stunned by the force with which I struck among the branches, I lay for some time insensible.

We were by ourselves—no human being was probably within hearing of the report. How long I may have lain is uncertain, and, on recovering from my stun, I started up on my elbow, quite unconscious not only of what had happened, but of where I was; and, having removed something that lay upon my face, and raised my fingers to my brow, I saw that they were clotted over with blood.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Since that hour—
But words are breath;—look on me in my sleep,
Or watch my watchings: come and sit by me!
My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the furies."

MANFRED.

The stars were now all bright and sparkling, as the twilight deepened into darkness. The wind came abroad in gusts, and the air was chill, even to frost. I attempted to rise, but staggering, fell over a body, which lay beside me. It was Curtis!

I took hold of his hand, but it was cold. The whole truth flashed upon my mind, and I called aloud, but no answer was returned. His clothes were literally soaked in blood, and around him for yards the ground was saturated with the crimson flood. I drew my hand over my face, and found his mouth and eyes open, stiffening in the immutability of death. Beside him was coiled a small black pointer bitch, which had accompanied him to the fields. She lay with her nose turned towards him, shivering from the cold.

I had awakened as from a dream: from a state of unconsciousness—to find myself—what? I shuddered at the supposition! A cold sweat broke upon my forehead, and my knees knocked against each other, and bent beneath the weight of my body, as, clenching my hands together, in agony of spirit, I stood by the corpse of my unfortunate victim, with my back resting against a tree.

What a scene is here, I thought—Would to heaven, I had fallen, rather than this man! Gracious heaven, but a few days ago, and seemingly the most cordial of friends—and now to have embrued my hands in his blood! And for what?—No—conscience, reprove me as thou wilt, thou canst not tell me that I was the aggressor. But what matters it? I am to be a mark for the finger of caution—a byeword and reproach among men!

What can I do?—the laws of my country must be satisfied. I must submit to the ignominy of a gaol—to the chains of a felon; yea plead for my life at the bar of justice, under the imputation of murder! Sooner would I die a thousand deaths.

Here the poor dogs whined, and I started from my reverie—I started as if an arm had been laid on mine.

"How is it now, when every sound appals me?"

I was seized with a sudden terror. Night became every minute darker and duskier. All was silent; I was alone with the dead, with the body of him I had murdered, "under the shade of melancholy boughs." Methought I heard the voice of Anna Singleton quieting the tumult of my soul. I gazed round and round, but no glimmer of a window was perceptible; and borne to the ear in a heavy, monotonous, and subduing murmur, came the sound of a distant cataract.

The horrors of imagination encompassed me. My nerves, shattered, and overcome, and over-exerted with what had occurred, yielded without resistance; and I was ready to sink into the ground. The countenance of the dead was appalling—the ghastly, cold, unconscious wreck of mortality lay at my feet. Seizing on my fowling-piece, with a convulsive effort, I ran on through the "night of woods," followed by my dogs, with a velocity that I did not think any exertion of my muscles capable of. Fear lent me wings. Forward and forward I ran till almost exhausted Suddenly a sound struck my ear! I stopped and listened—again it arose. It was the whine of Curtis's dog, the very echo of desolation, a wild and lamentable cry.

The sound made my blood run chill; but again I rushed forward, metamorphosing every branch and stump into frightful forms and hideous contortions. Eyes seemed to gleam out of every thicket upon me.—Every moment I expected some hand to arrest me—some figure to cross my path, and command me to stand still. I rushed straight forward. My dogs gallopped before me.—I ran blindly on, and dared not look behind. Methought a legion of spirits were in pursuit. I was indeed the man upon

A lonesome road
That walks with fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on,
Nor turns again his head,
For well he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread!

At length I felt some relief from my panic, when I saw the shadowy form of my own house rising between me and the dewy skies, and perceived a light glimmering at one of the half shut windows.

I wiped the flowing perspiration from my brow, and felt my heart knocking with violence against my breast. "What is this I have done?" muttered I to myself, "murdered my neighbour, and my friend! I am lost, dishonored, ruined miserable forever!" I laid my hand on the wicket of the sidegate, which led through a short avenue of shrubs and flowerbeds to the door of the house, and looking up to the window of my bedchamber, I thought "sleep, sweet sleep, a visitant that disdains bribery, will henceforth be a rare inmate there!"

Having calmed myself as much as I could at length I took resolution—resolution to do what? To knock for admittance at my own house. How guilt doth unnerve the soul, and what "a strong siding champion," is conscience!

"Come away, sir," said old Mary, shutting the door behind me. "We have been long wearying for you, and it is getting very dark Goodness, sir, I hope you have not hurt yourself in any way? See, the sleeve of your jacket is bloody!"

I shuddered involuntarily as she spake, and the weight of guilt pressed heavy on my heart, for a few seconds impeding my breathing. "No—no," returned I, throwing off my gamebag, "it is only some oozing from this." I saw that the bag was unstained, and consequently her scrutiny, if she chose to exert it, would detect me. But without farther remark she hurried with it into the kitchen, and lighted me up stairs.

Poor Mary! my kind old domestic, that I should have been afraid of thee—of thee, who watched over my sister's infancy, and who, although for many long years seemingly estranged to thy master's family, wert spared to follow me when I had grown up to man's estate, to the home, of which time and fortune had made me the head, that thou mightest get grey, and waste out the light of life in my service. Betray me! although the world had been arrayed against me—so wouldst not thou! Although I had confessed my guilt to thee, thou wouldst have said that I was speaking in a dream. Thou wouldst have comforted me in the darkness of the dungeon, and shed tears over my head on the scaffold, or wherever they might have led me. Thou art a picture of memory—a thing of old. Connected with thee are all the happy days that my boyish years have seen, that my maturer heart has felt. I cannot think ill of human nature, while I remember thee—"*Sit illi terra levis!*"

Shortly after I went to bed, having left orders with my man Thomas to call me early in the morning. Glancing at my hands, I saw that they were imperfectly washed—some blood-gouts being visible around the wrist; and on looking into the mirror, I discovered the mark of fingers on my forehead. These marks of Cain I cleansed off as carefully as I could, but saw that the water in the basin was tinged by my so doing. Terror made my wits sharp, the fear of discovery lay strong upon my soul. I hesitated a moment what to do I then thought of emptying it over the window, so cautiously drew up the sash, which emitted a low, creaking noise. On listening a little, I heard tongues speaking without, and drawing back, I obscured the light. They are in search of me—yes, they have come in pursuit of me; but though they have tracked the fox to his den, they shall not take him alive. Sooner will I dash myself over on the granite flags. In a little while I listened again, and, oh! how relieved was my tortured heart, how glad was I in hearing the voice of Thomas, hearty, and fearless, and the half-smothered titters and affectionate rebukes of Sally, a neighboring farmer's servant, who was his sweetheart.

I lay down in bed, tossing to and fro, in dark rumination, conjuring up all the hideous phantoms and wretched ideas, that distempered imagination could body forth. Many they were, and terrible. Compared with what I then suffered, pain, actual corporeal anguish, had been a trifle, and death itself a wished-for tranquillity. I thought of my feelings of the yesterday, and then looked forward on my blasted name. I felt the gnawings of a wounded spirit, and anticipated the hatred and aversion of the world. Could money have purchased grace, or effaced the stains of blood, I would have sold all and given to the poor—yea, wandered about in search of bread, nor envied the peer in his princely demesnes. I tried to sleep, but could not. I turned and turned, restless as a billow on the stormy seas. I had a dread foreboding that mine eyes would shut no more—that I was doomed to an eternity of miserable consciousness—that I had murdered sleep.

I heard the clock chime the hour of midnight; the wind had arisen, and was sighing at the casement. Methought that it syllabled its wild dreary tones into my name, and imitated the voice of the murdered Curtis. I lay watchful, my heart throbbing at every whisper, and, drawing the curtains aside, methought I beheld a figure standing in the middle of the floor. I started up, and cried, in the name of God speak to me! My fevered imagination had shaped out a spirit in the grey dawn flickering between the window shutters.

With a sigh, I lay down, and turned and turned, but slumber came not to my eyelids; to and fro, to and fro I tossed, till the orient sunshine threw its cheering lustre through the casement. The swallow, at its upper corner, not having yet taken its autumnal departure, twittered in its nest, as completely exhausted, weak as a lamb the moment it is yeaned. I fell at length into a sleep, which, in its profoundnees, resembled insensibility itself.

CHAPTER XV.

"He is dead and gone, lady—
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass green turf,
At his heels a stone."

HAMLET.

Ere the morning had far advanced, a loud knocking awoke me, and, starting up in agitation, I heard some one at my parlor door. I called out, "Who is there?" Thomas entering with sorrow and anxiety in his looks, answered—"Ah, sir, Mr. Curtis has shot himself, his body has been found this morning."

"When, where!" I exclaimed with trepidation, "how did it happen? that is a dismal business."

"I don't know, sir," answered Thomas, "he was found by a woodman early this morning, quite dead. His gun was lying beside him; the whole charge of both barrels had gone through his breast. His black bitch Jess, which you see here, was sitting beside him, and I got her from the man to take care of. May be we may have her for a kind of keepsake."

As the dog looked up at me, a thrill passed through every vein. Horrible! thought I to myself. Dogs have detected murders before now. "Thomas," I said aloud, "you had as well walk over with the dog. You ought not to have brought it here. Haste after the man, and give it him in charge to take home."

Scarcely had I got dressed, which was done in a tardy yet hurried manner, when a vehicle stopped at the gate, and I heard the murmur of many different voices. Thomas came running up the avenue, and seeing me at the window stood still before it. I threw up the sash, and asked him what he wanted. "Here is the body, sir, on a sledge. Such a sight I never saw. It is an awful spectacle. Hadn't we better take it in, master, till word is carried forward to his friends? but to be sure they must have heard of it by this time at any rate. Hadn't we, sir?"

This was another dagger—"No, no, Thomas," answered I, with some irritation.—"What makes you so officious? it had much better proceed."

"Shall I not make it halt then, sir, till you come down, and have a look at it?"

"No—no—no," returned I again more bitterly, throwing down the sash as I spoke, "I have nothing to do with it—I don't wish to see it."

A dread foreboding of detection hung over me. I had a dreadful struggle within myself whether I should deliver myself up to stand trial or persevere in my endeavors to avoid the scrutiny of the law. By the latter mode of procedure I might escape unhurt, so far as reputation with the world was concerned;—by the former, I foresaw that, come what might, my good name was filched away forever; and that every "puny whipster," all the vile and the vulgar, could throw after me the horrible epithets of murderer or homicide. That I had been at least the latter, was undeniable, and the multitude seldom give themselves the trouble of enquiring into the circumstances of a case, satisfying themselves with the bare result.

And Anne Austen—the happy, smiling, beautiful Anne Austen! now the question was settled and sealed: and I determined to keep the whole matter on my heart. How often, how many thousand times have I wished from my soul that my resolutions had been otherwise! What a load of misery, how many sleepless nights and desponding days should I have spared myself!

Surprise, and panic, and sudden remorse, had made my situation much more dark and desperate than it really was; but time elapsed, and weeks passed over that could not be recalled. I felt that suspicion must have ever attached to one, who had concealed and kept to himself a circumstance, whose elucidation, by his own statement, was such as to preclude hazard by legal investigation. The opportunity had escaped, before my conduct appeared to me in its genuine light. The whole country had been agitated about this mysterious circumstance. Most people insisted, that Curtis must have destroyed himself, as his own piece was found by his side, dirty and discharged, with the doghead in the pan: while some few argued against the possibility of the arms being extended so far as to pull the trigger of a long barrelled musket, with the muzzle pointed against the breast. Again, he was not robbed; his watch, rings, and money were all untouched, and the idea of his having fallen a victim to robbers seemed utterly improbable. Doubt and mystery consequently hung over the matter; but the coroner, after the examination of some domestics, thought the case so plain, as without much hesitation, to bring in a verdict of—"Died by his own hand in a fit of insanity."

On the day of the burial I feigned sickness, and did not attend. I am certain that had I done so, my agitation must have detected me; but on the day following, I ventured on a ride to Austen Park. The whole of my people imputed my abstraction and melancholy to grief for the fate of Curtis—alas! too justly.

The Austens were invisible, and I left my card. Is it possible, thought I, that they have a suspicion of the truth, yet remain quiet out of respect for our former intimacy! I trembled as the thought passed through my heart, yet determined to put it to the ordeal.

About a month after this period, I chanced one day, in visiting at Austen Park, to find Miss Austen alone. I was struck with sudden alteration in her appearance. The flow of her spirits was gone, and the eye which so lately floated in the light of joy, was now quenched in its lustre. Some days before I had signified my intention of leaving England for the continent, as my native country had now become to me only a scene of melancholy recollections. I thought of my mother torn from her orphans in their childhood—of Anna Singleton, the morning star of this world's loveliness—of my simple-minded, heroic, noble, beautiful sister—of the butchered Curtis—of all the miseries which had befallen all who moved within the sphere of my existence. Even the lovely being before me seemed to owe her blight to my presence. Bennet's advances I knew she had declined, and if Curtis was her lover, the wretch stood before her, who had embrued his hands in his blood.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh! there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of him to be our friend!"

WORDSWORTH.

Home being no longer a home for me, I had resolved on travelling. She, whom I loved with an all-engrossing tenderness, was dead in her early youth. I had no kindred to care for me: like the Indian chief, Logan, I could say there runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of a living creature; and I had unintentionally killed my friend. When I looked back to boyhood, it seemed a kind of eternity, and yet I was but twenty-five!

Suspicion as to my being accessory to the death of Curtis, might, or might not, float on the breath of fame. No one, so far as I had heard it insinuated, imputed it either directly or indirectly to me, but how often is the voice of malice heard by all save its victim. It mattered not; I suffered sufficiently without that; I had ceased "to justify my deeds unto myself," and was a conscience-stricken wretch. My buoyant hopes were quenched; and, instead of looking forward, through a bright sunshine of futurity, I must hang over my prospects. I saw nothing in life to covet; nothing to aspire to; and nought that could efface from my memory the defiling stains of the past. I had bought experience early, and at a dear price. I had suddenly become an altered man, and a "sadder one."

What boots it to relate my wanderings? it is only the history of my mind that I mean to record. After sojourning for four years on the continent, during which time I visited France, Germany, and Italy, in the hopes that change of scene and place would dissipate my ills, I began to feel that Time, the grand physician of human miseries, had anointed my heart with a balsam that, if it did not heal thoroughly, was at least powerful to salve and soothe; still *hœsit lateri lethalis arundo;* still did the arrow rankle; but its presence was more endurable, and a consciousness that my innocence had been at least equalled by my imprudence in concealing it, rested on my mind, with a becalming and pleasant influence.

From the occurrence of the fatal deed until this time, I have borne in silence; my guilt and my grief have found no tongue But, alas! the world is changed altogether since that period. I am now a sojourner in