EASTON GAZETTE.

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From Graham's Magazine.

THE ENCHANTED GUN.

A TENNESSEE STORY.

BY C. F. HOFFMAN.

The evening closed in dull and thick, with that stagnant heaviness of the atmosphere which often procedes a storm. There was a moon, but its face was veiled by the leaden clouds; and its light, dissipated through the murky air, created that kind of 'darkness visible" which gives a drearier aspect to the landscape than when it is wholly obscured.

The only cabin in sight lay in the midst of a desolate 'clearing,' which, though completely walled round by the forest of firs from whose depths I had just issued, bore not a trace of shrubbery to relieve the waste of blackened stumps. A well of primitive construction, with the bucket dangling at the end of a grape vine attached to a long lever pole, crowned a naked knoll where the stumps had been cleared away. The pole, from which the bark had been stripped, was nearly covered with that pale green moss which will often collect upon the dry rails of a fence which have not for years been disturbed; and this, with the night wind whistling through the parted staves of the decrepid bucket, proved sufficiently that the well if not dried up entirely, was no longer used. A low shed built of logs and roofed with bark, was the only other outward appurtenance of the cabin.

The whole picture, it will be acknowledged, was a dreary one. Comfortless, monotoncus—almost heart-depressing?—A scene of wildness without beauty; of solitude without dignity: a woodland home without one attribute of rural cheerfulness. An abode in the wilderness, utterly destitute of forest shelter and security.

The spirits of evil, which in some lands are believed to take up their abode in every deserted palace or ruinous castle, methought would straightway migrate hitherward did they dream of a spot so utterly lonely and, as it seemed so man-forsaken!—I say 'seemed,' for though the traces of what are called improvements were about me I could scarcely realize that the hands which had once wrought there might still be busy near. The man who had made such an opening in the forest must, I thought have been frightened at his own work the moment he ceased from his toil, and become aware how uncouthly he had given shape and form to the spirit of solitude which still sighed among the tall trees around him.

I dismounted near the cabin, and scarcely touched the door with the but of my riding whip when it was flung open from within by some one who instantly retired from the threshold. The abruptness of the act did, I confess, startle me. Though not easily alarmed, my mood of mind at the moment was such as to prompt some mystic association with the scenes and circumstances already detailed I am a perfect barometer of the weather, and the approach of a thunder gust always weighs down my spirits with undefinable oppression, in the same degree that a driving snow exhilarates them. The low mutterings of the oncoming tempest, which were now beginning to be audible, would, then, be sufficient to account for my present sensibility to gloomy influences; but I might also mention other things which, perhaps, added to the present anxiety of feeling, if the phrase be not too strong a one. It will suffice, however, to state merely that I had not heard the sound of human speech in the last two days, and that which now met my ears was harsh and discordant. It was the croaking tone which you may sometimes catch from a sour tempered virago as she strolls from the conventucle.

'I thought you'd a been here afore,' said this ungracious voice; which, upon entering the apartment, I recognised as beloning to its only occupant

She was a heavy-built woman, of coarse square features and saturnine complexion. She wore her straight black hair plainly parted over her eyebrows, which were bushy and meeting in the middle. One elvish lock had escaped from behind her ears as she stooped over the hearth, holding a tallow candle to the ashes which she was trying to blow into a flame, when my summons interrupted the process.

'You thought I would have been here before? I exclaimed at last, in reply to her singular salutation; 'why, my good woman, I have lost my way, and only stumbled upon your house by accident—you must take me for somebody else.'

'I'm no good woman Don t you good woman me,' she replied with a contemptuous glance which had something, I thought, of almost fierceness in it, as she ding the now lighted candle with one hand, she turned scornfully round and fixed her regards upon me.'

'Yes! yes, stranger you are the man, the very man that was to come at this hour. I dreamed ye—I dreamed yer hoss—yer brown leggins and all, I dreamed 'em—and now go look after your critter while I get some supper for ye.'

Those who are so good as to follow me in my story will perhaps be vexed and impatient when I tell them here that the whole of this singular scene has no immediate bearing upon the denouement.

'Why, then,' it may be asked, 'do you delay and embarrass the relation with the detail of matters that have no connection with the incident for which you would claim our interest?'

I did not say they had no connection with it! They have an intimate—a close connection. It was these very circumstances which still further fashioned the mood of mind under which I became an observer and partially an actor in the startling though grotesque events which followed, and I wish to place the reader in exactly the same position that I was in. I wish to win him, if possible, to perfect sympathy of feeling with me for the hour, and let him exercise his judgment if he care to, from precisely the same point of mental observation.

We have returned, then, to the cabin, he (the reade) or I are again alone in the midst of the wilderness; in that dreary room; alone with that weird looking woman. The storm is now howling without, but it does not chafe savagely enough to excite the dispirited temper of our feelings, or offer a contrast of any dignity to the gloomy influences within.

Supper was already prepared for me when I returned from looking after my horse. The coarse bacon and hoe cakes were placed before me without another word being spoken between my hostess and myself. I drew a rude stool to the table, and was in the act of helping myself from the wooden platter—

Stop! I hear them coming!' cried the woman.

'Hear them! who?' said I, turning round sharply as some new, though undefinable suspicion flashed upon me

'Them as will have to share that supper with ye, stranger—if how s'be't they let ye eat any of it.'

I had no time to weigh further the meaning of her words for at this instant there was a sharp flash of lightning, the door was dashed suddenly open and three armed men strode into the apartment, the storm pelting in behind them as they entered, and a terrific thunderburst following instantly the lightning amid whose glare they crossed the fire hold. The parlor of their countenances, set off by their long black dripping locks, seemed measurably to pass away when that livid light was withdrawn; but from the moment that the door was flung open there was *an earthy smell* in the room, which whether coming from the reeking soil without or from the garments of these wild foresters, was most perceptible.—Those less familiar than myself with the raw-savored odors which sometimes travel out with the rich perfume of the woods, would I am pursuaded, have identified it with the grave damps which our senses will sometimes take cognizance of in church-yards.

The aspect of two of these men was sufficiently formidable, though in point of stature & appearance of burly strength they were inferior to their companion. They were square shouldered, black bearded fellows, armed both with hatchet and bowie knife, in addition to the short rifles which they still retained laid across their knees as they settled themselves side by side upon a bench & looked coldly around them. The third was a full cheeked, heavy featured man, of about eight and twenty, bearing a strong resemblance to my hostess, both in complexion and countenance, save that his eyebrows, instead of being square and coal black like hers, were irregularly arched and of a faded brown. His mouth also lacked the firmness of expression which dwelt around her thin and shewish lips.

This man bore with him no weapon save a huge old German piece, a Tyrolean rifle as it seemed to me, from the enormous length of the barrel and the great size of the bore, as well as the outlandish and cumbersome ornaments about the stock and breeching. It was, evidently, a weapon intended for the great distances at which the chamois hunter claims his quarry, and though serviceable for a long shot on our western prairies, was ill suited to the thick woods of the Apalachion mountains. Inconvenient, however, as the length and size of the piece might make it in some hands, it seemed to be nothing in the grip of the sturdy mountaineer, (who had probably bought it from some passing emigrant from the old world) for I observed even as he entered that he held the gun vertically at arm's length before him. Still he seemed glad of relieving himself of the weight as soon as possible, for he instantly advanced to the farthest corner of the room where he placed the piece with some care in an upright position against the wall.

"Well! what for now?" said the virago. "why do you stand looking at the gun after you've set it down!—you think she'll walk off of herself, do ye?"

The youth looked gloomily at her—took a stool on the opposite side of the hearth to his companions—leaned his head doggedly upon his hand, but said nothing.

I thought I had never fallen in with a more strange set of people.

"What! Hank Stumpers, haint ye a word to fling to a dog?" cried the woman, advancing toward him; "Is that the way you treat yer dead father's wife?"

The young man looked up stupidly at her, gave a glance with something more of intelligence at the gun, but still said nothing.

"Yes—yer nateral born mother—ye chuckle head, ye—and she a widder.—Can't ye speak up to her—where's the deer?—the turkeys?—the squirrels?—haint ye got even a squirrel to show for your day's work!—speak you, John Dawson, what's the matter with the boy? He be n't drunk, be he?"

"It's a matter of five hours, Mother Stumpers, since either of us touched a drop," replied one of the men briefly, & he too, gave a furtive glance at the old firelock.

"Well—well, why don't ye go on? is any one dead?—are ye all distraugh?—Jackson Philips, you—you 've felt the back of my hand across yer chaps, afore now, for yer impertnance—I know ye, man and that sober possum look means something! Do ye think to gum it over me afore this stranger—speak up, and that at onst, or it 'll be the worst for some of ye, or my name's not Melinda Washington Stumpers!

(I did not smile, reader, as you do, at Mrs. S's sponsorial dignity—I did not *dare* to smile)

You know we would n't offend you, no how, Mother Stumpers," deprecatingly replied the man whom she addressed as Philips. Hank's misfortune, you see, has made us dull like, as it were, and—'

"And what in the name of Satan is his misfortune?" interrupted the mother, now for the first time moved with concern as well as anger.

'That's t'—that 's it, mammy," cried Hank, with some ling of alertness—she's drav the very nail on the head—Satan is at the bottom of all of it"

'At the bottom of all of what!' screamed the virago, and, even as she spoke, the ancient piece in the corner, untouched by any one—without the slightest movement of the lock—discharged itself towards the ceiling!

'At the bottom of the bar'l of my gun—he speaks for himself,' replied Hank, moodily, while his mother started back and I sprung to my feet at the sudden report so near me.

'Your gun must be foul,' I said, resuming my seat. 'very foul, to hang fire so long' I suppose she made a flash in the pan when attempting to discharge her just before entering?"

Stumpers looked vacantly at me, shook his head, muttered something about he and his mother being 'ramated,' and then more audibly said, 'Stranger you may have more book larnin than me, but I tell ye, onst for all, that Satan's got in to that gun!"

And BANG! at that moment again went the gun, as if to prove that his words were sooth.

'This is, certainly, most extraordinary,' I exclaimed, as I rose to examine the gun for myself.

'You'd better not touch her, stranager,' cried Philips.

'I tell you she's got Satan in her,' repeated Hank.

I looked at Dawson, inquiringly.

'Fact!' stranger, every word of it.—Hank's not been able to get that gun off since noon; but about a hundred rod afore we struck the clearing she begun firing of her own accord, just as you see—"

BANG!—BANG! went the gun.

'I told you that Satan was in her' ejaculated Hank.

'That's the way with her,' said Philips, in a tone of solemn sadness—sometimes she 'll not speak for a matter of ten minutes or so; sometimes she gives two little short barks like those; and sometimes she gives a regular rip snorter—

(BANG! thundered the gun.)

like that!'

'I told you she'd got Satan in her!' still repeated Hank.

I confess that it was now only the calmness of those around me which prevented some feeling of superstitious terror being disagreeably awakened in me. The men, however, seemed sad and awe struck, rather than alarmed; while the woman—a thing not uncommon with resolute minds disposed to believe readily in the supernatural—seemed at once to accept the fearful solution of the mystery which had been proffered to her, and ready to meet it with an unflinching spirit. Still, puzzled and bewildered as I was, I could n t but smile at the manner in which her emotions now manifested themselves.

'Well!' she cried, impatiently, 'and what a poor skimp of a man you must be to let Satan get into the piece when you had her all day in yer own keeping'

'I a skimp of a man?' answered her son with spirit; 'there is n't another fellow in these diggins who'd 'a brought that gun home as I did, after he diskivered that sich goings on were inside of her. And if she'd tell her own story—'

Bang!—bang!—bang! pealed the gun.

'That's Satan who speaks now'

Bang, phizz, bang!

'It's Satan, I say, and no mistake. But if she'd tell her own story she'd own I never let her go out of my hands this blessed day; save when Jackson Phillips tuk Dawson's piece and mine to watch for deer on the runway while we went down the branch to see if we could n't get a big sucker or two for supper out of the deep hole where I cotched so many fish last Fall. No! if she'd speak for herself—'

BANG! thundered the gun, with a report so tremendous that I voluntarily put my hand to my ears.

'Gim me the tongs—give me them 'ere tongs,' shouted Mrs. Stumper in great wrath, while Dawson turned pale, and even Phillips seemed a little disturbed as he muttered, 'if the old thing should bust it might be a bad business for us.'

Hank, however doggedly handed his mother the tongs: and before I could interpose, or, indeed, before I was aware what the courageous woman was about to do, she had grasped the gun with the tongs, near the lock, and bearing it before her with a strong arm she moved toward the door. 'Why don't ye open—'

Bang!—phizz!—bang!—bang!—phizz! phizz bang! alternately pealed and sputtered the gun; but still the intrepid virago went on. I sprung to the door and flung it wide before her.

The light from within was reflected upon the hollow buttonwood trunk which formed the curb of the well opposite, & in another instant the gun was plunged to the bottom.

'Thar! said Mrs. Stumper, clapping the tongs in true housewife fashion as she replaced them in the chimney corner. 'Now one can hear his self talk without the bother of sich a clatter'

Bang! moaned the gun at the bottom of the well.

'Can't stop Satan that way, mammy,' said Hank, his stupid face sickly'ng over with an unhappy smile.

The mystery had now deepened to the highest point of interest—that last discharge was wholly unaccountable—and for my own part, my curiosity was wound up to a pitch that was positively painful I remembered, though, the shattered bucket, and bethought my elf of asking if there were any water in the well.

'About enough to come up to a lizzard's ear,' answered Honk; 'but there's a smart chance of mud under it I tell ye, stranger. That old gun will keep sinking for a week yet.'

'She's stopped,' said Dawson.

'Yes,' answered Phillips, 'and we'd better fish her out before she sinks beyond our reach.'

'Don't I tell ye Satan's in the gun,' cried Hank almost furiously—down—down—she'll keep going down now till he has her in his own place all to himself. I lost an axe myself in that well onst, and if half that father used to tell about it be true—'

Splush—ush—ush. Bubble—ble—bang! ble—Bang!—Splu—ble—bang—bang ——— B.ANG!!!

* * * *

We listened—we looked long at each other With the last report, which was almost overpowering, I was convinced that the explosion must have been aided by inflammable gas at the bottom of the well, for the blue flame, as it rose from it, flashed through the only window of the cabin, and showed the features of its ignorant inmates, for the first time, distorted with real terror. At last Phillips and Dawson, upon whom my eye was fixed at the time, looked perfectly aghast with fright.

Hank's supposition of the ultimate destiny of his famous gun (viz. going to the sporting dominions of the Great Hunter below) could hardly be true, however, inasmuch as a piece of the blackened muzzle was to ind next morning driven half through a fragment of the well curb which lay shattered around, broken to splinters by the explosion of the fire damp. The poor young man fairly wept outright when it was shown him by Phillips; who, with a generosity I could not sufficiently admire at the time, insisted upon replacing the hoary weapon of Hank's affections with his own light Easton rifle; saying at the same time that he had a Kentucky tool at home which he much preferred to the Pennsylvania yæger.

This same Philips, by the way, very civilly offered after breakfast to put me on my road, which, from the number of Indian trails along the borders of the Cherokee country, I had wholly lost.

I say, stranger,' said he, the moment we had got out of earshot of the house, 'you were devilish cool when that well blew up! tell me the trick of it unly, and I'll tell you the trick of the gun, which rayther skeared you a few as I think.'

I explained the fire damp to him.

'Really, now' he exclaimed, 'wells is almost unknown in this country, for we either settle down by a spring, or get our water from the branch. But the first well I fall in with I'll draw up a bottle of that gass as you call it, and have some raal fun with the fellers. But look here,' said he, stopping and tearing off some dry fungus from an old stump, 'when you want to play a chap such a trick as made music for us last night you've only to put twenty charges in a gun, with sich wad is this atween each of em—an ascotch now and then instead of dry powder will be all the better; ram each down well; let the chap carry his gun about for an hour or so, unbeknowing—jist as that simple Hank did—and choose your own time for dropping a piece of lighted touchwood into the muzzle."

Upon my word, I was not sorry that I was to part company, before night, with this practical joker; who, for aught I knew, might seize some tempting opportunity to slip a snake or so into my boots stuff my saddle with squibs, or play off some little piece of facetiousness like that with which the jocular Captain Goffe, in Scott's novel of the Pirate, used now and then to indulge his humour; the said captain having a funny way of discharging his pistol under the mess-table, merely to pepper some one's shins with a half-ounce ball.

AGRICULTURE.

CRANBERIES.—"The cultivation of the Cranberry (oxycoccus macrocarpus) has not, we believe, received much attention. Most of those usually exhibited in our markets, are gathered by the country people from bogs and swamps where they grow wild, without any assistance whatever from the hand of man. Like all our native fruits, however, the cranberry is susceptible of being improved by cultivation. In Massachusett's many farmers cultivate from one to a dozen acres, and as the fruit brings readily a dollar per bushel in the Boston market, they find them the most lucrative crop they can raise. It is stated in the New England Farmer, vol. ix. No. 18, that Mr. F. A. Hayden, of Lincoln, in that state, raised, in 1820, four hundred bushels, for which he received four hundred dollars in cash This is profitable farming.

"Kenrick a writer Sir Joseph Banks, who had taken pains to obtain the oxycoccus macrocarpus from America, harvested in 1831, from a square of eighteen feet each way, three and a half Winchester bushels, being at the rate of 460 bushels to the acre. The soil most suitable to the culture of this plant, is a low, moist and swampy muck, but large crops have been taken from lands in every respect precisely the reverse of that in which they flourish in their natural state. Even light sandy loam, and in which there is a predominance of vitreous or siliceous matter, manured with compost of clay, muck, and swamp mud, and kept uniformly and moderately humid, will produce excellent cranberries It is even asserted by those who have had ample experience in the business of the cranberry culture, that the vines under this treatment will not only be much more thrifty and prolific, but that the fruit will also be much larger, fairer, and of better flavor, than that gathered from vines in their natural state. On most farms, however, there are numerous low places which might be advantageously devoted to this plant, and wherever such places are to be found on a farm, they should unquestionably be selected in preference to artificial or compounded soils. The method of planting, in such locations, is to dig holes in the turf, one or two, or two and a half feet deep and 2ft. over. Into these holes are placed the sods or compact turfs, containing the roots which are then carefully covered with the soil, and a sprinkling of beach sand thrown over the hill. The hills should be four feet apart each way which gives ample scope for the vines to trail or branch out. Plants, cultivated in this manner, come rapidly into bearing, after which nothing more is requisite for several years, than merely to give them a slight dressing occasionally, and to supply new plants where the old ones have decayed, or dryed out A plantation, managed in this way, is a most valuable appendage to any farm: and in this section of the country, where the fruit brings one dollar and fifty cents, and often two dollars per bushel, it would be peculiarly so. The labor of harvesting the cranberry is very simple, and very expeditiously performed by means of a rake, constructed exclusively for the purpose, and with which, in favourable seasons, a skilful hand will gather, with ease from fifty to a hundred bushels a day."

CAUTION TO MILLERS AND CONSUMERS OF BREAD.

Mobile, July 17th, 1842.

To Dr. M. W. Philips,—

About a month ago, a number of negroes on the plantation of James G. Lyon, near Mobile, were seized with violent pains and cramp in the stomach, fainting fits, irritability of stomach, obstinate constipation, some with convulsions & palsy of the limbs, little or no fever, &c.; in short, all the symptoms which belong to what has been called Lead, or Painter's colic

In a short time nearly every negro on the place was seized with similar symptoms, and it became evident that there must be some extraordinary cause at work On investigation, the corn meal which they had been eating, was found to contain lead which had been ground up with it,—half a pint of lead was picked out of a bushel and a half of meal.

On going to the mill and examining the stones, it was found that the miller had, for the purpose of balancing the runner stone, after dressing it, poured several pounds of melted lead into the eye of the runner stone, and his had worked loose, got between the stones, and was ground up with the meal. The whole mystery was solved at once.

Now sir, I am informed that it is a very common thing for millers to use lead in this way, and I have no doubt that very many persons have been poisoned without ever being able to account for it, and the symptoms have been looked upon and treated as bilious colic, or some other disease,

I have just met with a similar fact, recorded in one of my foreign journals—a whole family had symptoms like those I have enumerated above, and on analysis, the flour they had been eating was found to contain lead.

Mr. Lyon has already lost four valuable hands, and a considerable number of others are almost entirely helpless from palsy in their limbs, some of whom will either die or remain useless for life.

When I say to you that every man, woman and child, is in daily danger of being poisoned by such ignorance or negligence, I have, I hope, said enough to impress upon your readers the importance of inquiring closely into this matter.

Yours, &c.

J. C. NOTT, M. D.

THE HUANO.—The following description of this new article of traffic from S. America is taken from a letter from Mr. Wheelwright to the Secretary of the National Institute at Washington.

The Huano of which you have specimen No. 2, has recently attracted great attention, no less than 40,000 having been shipped to England during the last fifteen months as manure. Much discussion has arisen as to its nature, but the received opinion at present is that it is bird's dung. It is found on the Islands adjacent to the coast of Peru in such enormous quantities as to induce much scepticism as to its origin. In some places it lies from 80 to 100 feet in depth, feathers and egg shells are frequently found deeply buried in it; it was used as a manure by the Indians long before the conquest, and without it the valleys of Peru would be almost desolate; it is pungent in the extreme, & if used in large quantities, burns and destroys vegetation, while in smaller quantities it vivifies and gives extraordinary rapidity to growth I have not its analysis before me, I am sorry to say, to forward you.

CULTIVATION OF SILK.

About the year of Christ, 551, two Persian Monks, employed as Missionaries in some of the Christian churches established in India, penetrated into the country of Sies or China. There they observed the labor of the silk worm, and became acquainted with the art of working up its productions into a variety of elegant fabrics. They explained to the Greek Emperor at Constantinople these mysteries, hitherto unknown or imperfectly understood in Europe, and undertook to bring to the capital, a sufficient number of those wonderful insects. This they accomplished, by conveying the eggs of the silk worm in a hollow cane. They hatched and afterwards fed on the leaves of the wild mulberry tree, and multiplied and worked in the same manner as in those climates where they first became the objects of human attention and care. Vast numbers of these insects were soon reared in Greece, particularly in the Peleponessus. Sicily afterwards undertook to breed silk worms with equal success, and was imitated from time to time, in several towns of Italy. In all these places, extensive manufactures were established with silk of domestic production.

From the reign of Justinian, it was mostly in Greece, and some of the adjacent islands, that silk worms were reared. Soon after the conquest of Constantinople by the Venitians, in the year 1204, they attempted the establishment of silk manufacture in their dominions; and in a short time the silk fabrics of Venice vied with those of Greece and Sicily.

About the beginning of the 14th century, the Florentine manufactures of silk became very considerable. It was introduced much later into France, the manufacture of silk, though considerably encouraged by Henry IV. not having been fully established there, till under Louis XIV. by Colbert.

It is an established and well known fact, that both the white and black mulberry tree grows as well in almost every part of the United States as in any country on earth, and also that silk had been raised and manufactured into a most excellent fabric, under that great and venerable patriot and friend of mankind Dr. B. Franklin. That so useful a pursuit should be suffered to die away, in a country as well adapted for it as any in the universe, is as extraordinary as it is unfortunate and injurious to the real interest of the nation.

AN IOWA FARM.—This farm and its lenishing remind one of the old Hebrew patriarchs; Job, of Uz, or Laban, of Padan Aram. The Hawkeye says, that the farm of Mr. Thompson, in Louisa co, Iowa has upwards of 20,000 bushels of corn 300 at hogs 150 head of neat cattle 600 head of sheep, 400 for sale) 250 acres of wheat, 200 acres of corn, besides large quantities of potatoes, &c.

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