The Mysterious State−room: A Tale of the Mississippi

J. H. Ingraham

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CHAPTER I.

`Some men, 'tis said, do love rehearsals O' each day's acts in foregone night dreams: So nothing happens they ha' not seen the shadow o't.'

Among the numerous wild and thrilling romances of which the valley of the South−west has been so often the scene, and which have, hitherto, escaped the avidious pen of the tourist and story−writer, is the one which I have chosen for the subject of the following sketch. Though not strictly Radcliffean in its tone and aspect—for there are no castles and dungeons thereaway, in which to lay terrific chapters— yet it may involve sufficient of the romantic to entitle it to preservation.

It was one of those autumnal evenings of the South when Heaven itself seemed to have descended and enthroned herself with banners of fire and crimson, and curtains of golden light upon the piles of gorgeous clouds that lay heaped up in the West, a mass of glory and splendor too intense for the eye to gaze upon! The majestic flood of the Mississippi rolled on reflecting from its dark and steely surface a hue like purple. The centurial trees that lined its shores, were gently waving their ocean surface—the red sunlight glancing along their green and billowy tops as if from wave to wave of a vast and heaving deep! A small but beautiful city, roof rising above roof, terrace above terrace, with trees picturesquely mingling with, exposing and half concealing the white dwellings, slept upon the hill−side facing the west. A rich roseate tint was suffused over it, and the red fire from the setting sun illumined its windows, so that it looked like a city in flames; each dwelling a smouldering furnace within, yet, all burning with smokeless, unconsuming conflagration. Such it seemed indeed, to be to our eyes, as we approached it from the south, on board that most imperial steamer the `Empress.' Every passenger stood on deck enjoying with unlimited expressions of admiration the whole magical and gorgeous scene; not even excepting the ruder portion of the motly and diverse assemblage that composed our number, many of whose faces were animated with the enjoyment which even simple and uncultivated taste is ever ready to administer to every man who will open his senses to its influence.

We had left New Orleans the morning before with a large and and agreeable party of passengers, and we were to stop at Vicksburg, the city before us, to take in another, for whom the best, because it was the largest and sternmost, state−room had been reserved to this time There existed, therefore, among a bevy of lovely women on board, married and single, who had been particularly anxious to obtain this desirable room for some of their own party, probably because it was *not* obtainable, not a little curiosity to learn who the individual was that had thought him or herself of so much importance as to send to New Orleans to pre−engage a passage, and the best accommodations. Among these ladies were two remarkably lovely girls, cousins, on their passage to Lexington, of which beautiful city one was a resident; the other being a native of Louisiana, and on her way to make her cousin a visit. They were under the protection of the charming Kentuckian's father, a fine old gentleman, and an admirable specimen of the high chivalric school, characteristic of his state. They were the life and joy of our cabin party; and seldom has Heaven given such charms to please, and fascinations to win. Never were two young ladies so different in person, who were so like in spirit. The elder cousin, Louise Claviere was a Creole of proud French descent. Her hair was dark as the plumage of the raven, and worn with a simple polished braid entwined around her fine head. Her complexion is indiscribable. Its rich tone has no name. It was like the lotus leaf, pure as snow, and almost *dazzling* but for a soft voluptuous shade, living and glowing over it like sunlight glowing warm upon marble. The color of her cheek was not set, but was ever beautifully coming and passing away with every emotion. With the uplifting of the bending lids of her dark rich eyes, it would suffuse her cheek, but as delicately as if a rose leaf had been laid near, and the light had poured through upon it. Her brow was arched and black, and of exquisite workmanship. Never did I conceive before the beauty that dwelt in a woman's eye−brow. It was a study, not for a painter, but for the spirit of beauty herself. Her eyes I have spoken of Deep as wells that at noonday reflect the heavens with its stars, they seemed themselves to be a heaven of love and delight. It was impossible to meet their dark dangerous gaze! The eye dropped suddenly before them worshipingly, while the heart bounded with emotions strange and powerful. No woman I have seen, ever possessed like her the wonderful power of beauty. It was a wand which she had but to wave to command men's homage—a talisman which she had

but to lift to enchain their hearts—a spell which she only had to exert, and which lay in every glance, look and motion, to overpower the soul, and fill the mind with awe and adoration. Beauty in itself ever irresistibly and instinctively commands adoration. The first man's sin, says the Buddha theology, was the worship of the woman whom God presented to him in all the freshness of glowing beauty instead of her Creator. This principle is still existing in the human mind. Every lover adores the object of his attachment in degree and it is, perhaps, only because no woman exists (can be supposed to exist) so beautiful as Eve, who, of necessity, united in her person all the perfections of feminine loveliness, that she is not now made an idol. If any woman could command the homage of men, and also the admiration of her own sex, it was Louise Claviere. Her beauty did not consist in the chaste, yet voluptuous outline of her face; nor the round and divinely sculptured cheek and throat; nor in the majestic grace of her neck and superb bust; nor the sweet majesty of her whole figure; but rather, these were the glorious fashioning and setting of the shapely casket which contained the bright and intelligent mind. She seemed to be created to love, and dispense joy and happiness. Every generous and lofty feeling dwelt in her bosom—tenderness and pity filled her glorious eyes, ready to yield their sympathy. She was a woman whose fate promised to be unalloyedly happy or unalloyedly miserable—who would love when her heart should be interested, either good or evil, and love with undying devotion. Her cousin Genevieve, was, on the contrary, a sweet, graceful, laughing *blonde*, with a frank, open face, a bright blue eye, long, soft brown hair, a mischievous pouting mouth, and a cheek like the bridal of the lily and the rose. Her figure was petite, and her motions free and light as the doe in its wild freedom. Her cousin was twenty, but she was two years younger, and not so tall by three inches. She was a true child of nature. She knew no evil, and therefore did not know that it existed. She was as guileless as a child. She would have been just the same as she was if man had never fallen. I could not but sigh as I gazed on her joyous and happy face, in which one could read her heart with all its emotions, like an open book, to think how soon care and sorrow would trace their lines and shadows upon it. Her heart seemed to be full of love and generous emotion for all her race. I could conceive an angel, if one came to dwell on earth awhile, to be like her. There was visible, a shade of thought in her eyes I perceived, at times, and I observed that her bright lips would sometimes gently compress when in repose, as if beneath all her sweet and gentle grace, she possessed a spirit quick and sensitive; and one which, if called into exercise by a generous appeal to her sympathies, would act with decision and prompt determination. I could see that she posessed no moral fear; that her soul was courageous. It is thus, the gentlest and most delicate women sometimes present opposites in their composition. In man, firmness and decision of character are oftener united with physical power; in women it is usually reversed. Genevieve, the lovely, laughing, enchanting girl of seventeen, had a bold and fearless spirit. Hitherto, her existence had flowed from her heart as its source. She scarcely knew that she possessed a spirit—a spirit that, when once called into action, would unfold to her a new power and character, of which she knew not she was the possessor.

CHAPTER II

As we approached the sun−illumined city, I was standing beside Genevieve and Louise on the light columned verandah, called `the Guard,' which surrounded the boat and formed a commodious and agreeable place of promenade. She had in her hand a volume of Bryant's Poems, and had just finished reading aloud his superb address to `The Water Fowl,' and for the last ten minutes had been speaking in a most animated and sprightly manner, giving a just and sensible, yet playful critique upon the styles of thought of the different poets of America. If I was delighted at the sparkling wit and humor she evinced, I was charmed to discover in her a deep vein of sentiment which, as she alluded to some `holy passages of holy thought,' as she expressed it, in Willis' earlier pieces, softened into that tenderness of feeling which has ever been to me proof that a true woman is religious by nature. What is taste in man, is in her elevated religion; ever presenting a grateful and promising soil for the immortal germ of Christianity to take root and grow heavenward.

Louise Claviere, however, was absorbed in contemplating the glories of the sunset, and gave no heed to the eloquent words of her cousin, which my ears received like a revelation. I could not help mentally comparing them as they stood together. The beauty of Louise was intellectual and physical; its effects intoxicating; its power most dangerous both to its possessor and its victim. The beauty of Genevieve was grace and spirituality, a divinity seemed to breathe through her form; its effect was touching and tender, acting on the finer sensibilities of the heart of the observer; its power was to elevate and purify.

But enough of the *poetry* attached to our heroines. I have written the above descriptions, in the vein they are given, at the suggestion of a fair creature, scarce less beautiful herself than Louise, scarce less divine than Genevieve, who insists that the description would be untrue if anything was taken from it; and as she was a fellow passenger and saw them, and well knew them both, her opinion is entitled to reverence. I shall therefore leave the pictures as they are, and go into the action of my story.

We were about a leauge from the town, when the captain, who was a fine hearted gallant gentleman, came aft to the `guard,' where we stood, and bowing courteously, said with a smile:

`We are now at Vicksburg, ladies, and the mystery of our state−room will be solved.'

`You shall be put down in my journal, Captain Wardham,' said Genevieve, laughing, `as a very obstinate and self−willed captain, and I'll make the printers be sure and put those words in *italics!* Will you tell me, now, who is coming on board here?'

`I do not know, fair lady,' answered the polite officer, bowing low, `it was engaged by a person in New Orleans, who said it was by the directions of the governor of Virginia. This is the extent of my knowledge, but you will soon know.'

`I wonder if it be true the governor of Virginia *is* to be the passenger with us from this place?' said Louise, suddenly speaking in a voice the richness of the tone of which thrilled the ear. `I should like it very much if he were—for he is young and intellectual I am told.'

`Is he married, cousin?' archly asked Genevieve.

`No.'

`What then can he want of a state−room in the ladies' cabin? I shall insist on his not occupying it, particularly if he is so elegant and youthful withal,' answered Genevieve, laughing in a manner that showed her resistance was not very much to be feared, if he should prove young and handsome, `all governors,' she added, `should be old and married too.'

`He belongs to one of the noblest cavalier families,' said Louise with animation, speaking rather to herself than to her cousin. `I would like to see one of the blood of the Stanleys, to which it is said he belongs.'

`I care more for the heart, than the blood that heaves it,' said Genevieve. But look! we are close by the town! The mystery of the state−room will soon be cleared up!'

The steamer rapidly approached the city of terraced roofs, and at length touched the pier as the shades of evening deepened the purple drapery of the skies. After half an hour's detention, during which, night, with its `lesser lights,' had taken the place of day, there was heard the wheels of a carriage rapidly driven to the pier−head.

The ladies were all standing out upon the `*guard*,' anxiously listening.

`They are come,' cried the captain in the tones of a man who had been a long time impatiently waiting to start, get ready to cast off there, men.'

`Ay, ay, sir,' was the cheerful response of the mate; and a man with a lantern in his hand sprung to each of the hawsers that confined the boat.

The carriage steps were now heard rattling, as they were thrown sharply down. By the faint and uncertain glimmer of lanterns moving to and fro, we could discern three persons alight and advance towards the boat. One of them seemed to be an invalid, as he was wrapped in an ample cloak, and was supported by two others. They advanced to the gangway plank forward, and we lost sight of them, hidden by the intervening wheel−house.

`Now we will know,' cried Genevieve, retiring from the guard to the ladies' saloon through which the strangers were to pass.

It was already, in part, occupied by the female passengers whom cu riosity had drawn thither to get a sight of the personage who had preengaged the best state−room in the ladies' cabin, as he passed through to take possession of it. Louise took an easy and graceful position quite at the extremity of the saloon, where her eye could command the approach for its whole length. Genevieve seated herself at her feet on an ottoman, with as innocent a look as if she had no curiosity in her.

At length they beheld approaching, through the magnificent cabin, two gentlemen arm in arm, preceded by the captain, whose face wore a serious expression, which Genevieve could not believe could have existed there. As they advanced, every eye was turned enquiringly. A general gloom seemed to be left behind them as they moved.

`What can be the cause of the silent and earnest gaze with which all regard him!' asked Genevieve breathlessly, of her cousin.

`Hush,' said the other with extraordinary energy, `I have no sense but sight!'

The captain entered now the ladies' cabin, bowed silently and gravely to the ladies, and the two gentlemen followed him. One leaned upon the other. He who supported, or seemed to support his companion, was a large, heavily built man, with a cool, determined look and an eye of piercing blackness. He was wrapped in a white dreadnought over−coat buttoned across his breast, and wore a fur hat with a broad and flapping brim. He looked like a man of the world, and his manner was sufficiently gentlemanly; yet, evidently, he was not a gentleman. The other was a tall, elegant young man, not more than twenty−four years of age. His face was exceedingly handsome, dark, intelligent, and with an eye blazing with intellect. He was pale, very pale; yet it was not from illness; his looks were sad to a painful and touching degree. No eye that fell upon him was turned away without the observer feeling an indefinable interest in him.

He walked slowly and with great difficulty beside his companion. As he approached the spot where Louise stood, he lifted his hat with a melancholy air without scarce raising his eyes, as if conscious of the presence of beauty. Genevieve shrunk lest her own a *second time* should meet his, and she dropped them to her feet; for she had caught one full deep glance of his eyes as he entered, and it had penetrated her soul; it was so full of sorrow, despair, and of voiceless yet eloquent grief. From that moment, how intense and exciting was the interest awakened in her virgin bosom for the unknown. She felt that he was unhappy—*how* wretched she dared not ask herself. As he was passing, Louise, whose dark eyes sought his, as she proudly and gratefully felt in her inmost heart the homage he had offered her beauty, she thought she heard beneath his cloak, as he put down his hand which was closely enveloped in it, a sound, the idea of which made her heart's blood leap. The man beside him addressed a sharp word at the same time to him. She cast a suspicious glance at him. Half the truth flashed upon her mind. The young man bowed his head and walked forward, for he had insensibly stopped before her, and for a moment it seemed (his whole form sank so depressingly) as if he would have knelt at the feet of the cousins. They thought he would do so. Why, they knew not. They pitied him. The first step he made, Louise heard again the sound! It grated, too, on Genevieve's ears, it pierced her very heart! She could have shrieked, but her voice, her life was paralyzed! It was *the clank of chains!* Louise sprung forward, and laid her hand upon his arm. He turned and looked in her face with his large pitiful eyes full of gratitude. He read sympathy in her intense gaze of eager inquiry and horror. She held him so that he could not advance. With one hand she grasped him hard by the arm, with the other she wildly threw open his collar! the cloak fell to the ground! The pale and intellectual young stranger stood before her chained and manacled like a felon!

(See Engraving.)

`What has he done?' she cried, commandingly, fixing her eyes upon the other in whose custody he was. `Speak!'

`Committed a forgery,' answered the officer.'

`Oh, God! Oh, God!' she cried with impassioned and bitter feelings; `that the divine form I have seen mingling in my dreams from childhood, the reality of which I have sought in vain among mankind, should at length appear to me as a chained criminal! Mysterious dream of life! Why hast thou cast a spell over my heart, by presenting ever this face and form for me to worship and love, yet hiding these chains?'

`Cousin,' cried Genevieve, alarmed at the wild impassioned pathos of her look and language, `what has come over you? Come with me. This is no scene for either of us.'

Louise suffered herself to be led to her room by her cousin, and the manacled young man who had produced upon her mind such an extraordinary effect, was led to the state−room prepared for him in the after cabin, as well for its privacy as for its greater security.

`Dearest cousin, what could you mean by exposing yourself in such a way?' said Genevieve, kissing her forehead as she reclined her burning and throbbing temples on her shoulder. `Poor young man,' and Genevieve sighed.

`Do you know, Genevieve,' said Louise, lifting her head and looking full upon her cousin with a bright and almost unearthly gaze—so brightly beautiful and glorious were her eyes at this moment, `do you know that I have seen that same face and figure in my dreams since I was a child! I know not what led me, as he came on board, to expect some extraordinary event, but I did so. I have felt ever since I left New Orleans an indescribable sensation that my happiness was in some mysterious way connected with the person who was to occupy that state−room. I see now that my presentiments were not unfounded. Did you see him, how suffering he looked when he first came in? I felt, as I gazed upon him, that my heart was breaking. I felt the moment had come when all my dreams were to be realized. I had seen him in the same cloak, too, and with him the same stern looking man.'

`In your dreams, cousin?'

`Yes—no longer than last night I thus beheld him; but in the dream he smiled upon me, but I heard no clanking of chains. If I had died for it, I could not have resisted casting aside his cloak.'

`Why *did* you do it, cousin? My heart bled for him as he stood exposed in chains before all eyes through your cruel act.'

`I had seen him in my dreams,' she said hoarsely, and with strong feeling, `cast aside this cloak and beneath was his bridal garb. I beheld, too, the stern man changed to a priest, and instead of the saloon of this steamer, I was in a church before an altar which was enwreathed as if for a bridal. I flung aside his cloak, for I would know the worst, and I beheld *chains* instead of bridal wreaths—a manacled felon instead of a happy and glorious bridegroom.'

`And did you *love* him in your dreams, cousin?'

`Yes—with all a woman's love. I do believe, sweet Genevieve, there were *correspondences* between our spiritual natures. Did you see, he would have knelt to me as to one his soul held kindred ties with, but for him who dragged him onwards.'

`And if you loved him—I mean, cousin, in your strange dream— you now hate him that you find the reality is unworthy of your love?'

`Cousin Genevieve, you little know me or the strength of woman's affection! I have learned to love the same pale handsome youth in my dreams till my heart, waking, has assented to that it gave and pledged while in sleep. Day by day my mind has dwelt upon his image, till I had no love but for him, whether it were to be he was ever to remain visionary or prove real!'

`And did you ever expect the form of your dreams would prove to be a real person, cousin Louise?' asked Genevieve, whose wonder was excited by this narration.

`Yes, oh yes! I have long fed my love with hopes, that it would one day be rewarded!'

`And this night you have seen him in truth?'

`But oh, in what guise manacled and fettered!' she cried, burying her face in her hands.

`'Tis strange you have had such a dream! I tremble, there seems something supernatural about it. You were

always a strange girl, cousin. And this is the secret of your repeated refusals of such numerous and desirable offers of marriage!'

`No other reason, Genevieve. I firmly believed I should one day see the real individual whom I never dreamed without communing with!' she said with animation.

`Wonderful!' said Genevieve, shuddering.

`It is to *you* wonderful, sweet cousin, but not to me,' she said sadly. `It is a peculiarity of our race to dream of events personally interesting to us. My grandfather, Colonel Claviere, foretold the time and minute circumstances of his own death, and that of Louis XIV. My grandfather saved his own life by placing men to arrest an assassin, whom he had seen in a dream, approaching his chamber to take his life! The assassin came at the hour named, and was slain at the door as he was entering. My father was not only a *seer* , but foretold by dreams the exile of his family to America, and the hour and mode of his own death, which took place four years afterwards by a cannon−ball, at the battle of New Orleans. Is it wonderful, then, that I should dream of one whom I was destined one day to see?'

`'Tis strange! I have heard something of all this! I fear for myself, for I share the same blood!' said Genevieve, with a sad expression.

`It will do thee no harm.'

`I tremble at the idea,' she replied, shuddering, and turning pale.

`Nay, be not childish; I need your aid!' said Louise with animation, speaking in a low impressive tone.

`How?'

`This young man's fate and mine are united by destiny; and he must not lie degraded in chains.'

`He is guarded—a prisoner.'

`I will free him!'

`He is guilty.'

`Never! but were he guilty, were his hands stained with blood, I love him, and will share his fate, or make him free! Do you believe him guilty?'

`I cannot; but—'

`Bless you, Genevieve, for that! He is *not* guilty; I will ask him, and he will say nay! Truth and innocence are written on his forehead. The being my soul has loved, with whose spirit my own has been in communion for years, guilty? no! I spurn the thought! Genevieve, he must be freed!'

`I would help you, cousin; but he is chained and closely guarded.'

`I care not. I will seek him. I will question him. I will fathom his soul. I will prove him innocent. I will know from his own lips wherefore he is manacled and held thus a prisoner. Genevieve, watch up with me to−night!'

Genevieve pressed her cousin's hand in silent assent, and Louise, kissing her, remained a few moments buried in deep thought. Genevieve also sat thoughtful, her mind awed by the revelation of the mysterious dream which had given cast and character to her cousin's whole life. She looked at her dark and beautiful face, and felt a superstitious fear at being alone in her presence. This feeling, however, reflection enabled her to throw off from her spirit, when she remembered that, save her singular power of dreams, she was in all else like herself. They remained in their state−room till near midnight together; during which Louise related to her more in detail the history of her *spiritual* love!

The young stranger was taken to the reserved state−room, and placed there by the stern officer who held him in custody. A heavy chain was then passed over the two transverse chains that connected his manacles and his fetters, and secured to a strong iron bolt in the deck The officer then took his station outside without securing the door, knowing that his escape, thus heavily chained, was impossible; besides the boat was under way in mid−river.

[1] The ladies' cabin on western boats, is a free drawing−room. Gentlemen enter it at any time. Ladies, when they desire to be private, retire to their state−rooms, large comfortable apartments opening into it.

CHAPTER III.

The prisoner, when the door was closed on him, sat upon the side of his berth and buried his face in his hands. Tears trickled through the fingers and fell upon his chains. He was agitated; his chest heaved, and his whole form seemed wrung with mental anguish. All at once he ceased his outward expression of emotion, and removed his hands from his face. It was deathly pale.

`Yes, yes, I am a felon! The proud and high spirited Preston Randolph is a chained felon! That I should ever have seen these hands thus bound! Yes, I am a *forger!* The act of one moment I must expiate on the gallows! Yet, if ever man had excuse for crime, I have! And am I the villian these chain would mark me? No, I am not stained with guilt! My soul is not black! One act of my life is not to make me all at once a villain! I am innocent in thought and motive! I had no intention of wrong! It was circumstances that made the guilt, and not the act! Oh, that I could prove to the world the integrity of my heart, spite the dishonesty of my hand! I could then again lift my head up among men. But now, no one pities; all men scorn. Crime, or the suspicion of it, destroys the link that binds men to their species. All sympathy dies! No, I err there! Woman's heart bleeds for the unfortunate—ay, for the guilty—for the basest, if he be penitent! Heaven forgives and receives the penitent, so does woman! I could have knelt at the feet of those divine creatures, as I passed through the saloon. I read sympathy in every lovely lineament! One of them looked to me like an angel form I once beheld in my dreams! I was overpowered by the sight of her! Did I *see* her in reality? Am I not dreaming now? Oh, that I were, that I were!' and the youth hung his head despondingly upon his breast.

Preston Randolph belonged to one of the best Virginian families. He was the nephew of a wealthy gentleman who had disinherited his son for marrying contrary to his wishes. Preston was then a student at law in Philadelphia. His uncle sent for him to hasten to visit him. On arriving he found him quite ill in bed. He however dictated a will which by his direction, his nephew drew up, writing it down word for word as it came from his lips. The will made him his sole heir. A magistrate had been sent for to attest it, but had not arrived when the dying man said he must sign it without delay or it would be too late. Preston placed it before him and gave him the pen. His uncle formed the two first letters of his name, `Francis Dayton,' when he was seized with convulsions, the pen dropped from his hand, and he fell back and expired.

For a moment Preston was overcome with grief and surprise; the next instant he recollected that the will had not been signed. The consequences flashed upon his mind. He yielded to the temptation of the moment, seized the pen and *completed with his own hand the signature!*

Just as he had done so, the magistrate entered. He approached the bed, and laid his hand upon the still warm temples. He then glanced at the will and looked enquringly at Preston who held it in his hand.

`Just able to sign it,' said Preston handing it to him without looking up. It was the first falsehood he had ever spoken.

`Um, um,' he said, `all right I wish I had been here a moment sooner. But as I knew his intention to make you his heir, I will to stop all objections, just attest it.'

This magistrate of easy conscience then affixed his name and official seal to the instrument, and Preston Randolph Dayton became possessor of the vast property of his uncle. There was, however, a *witness* to this instrument whom they little suspected. It was a shrewd attorney, whom the son of the deceased had sent to see if he could not prevail upon his father to make, at least, some bequest in his favor. He arrived a few moments before Preston commenced writing the will, and walking across the lawn, came upon the gallery unobserved. As he passed along towards the main entrance, his inquisitive curiosity led him to peep in at the long windows which were trellised with vines. To his surprise and satisfaction, through one of these he beheld the invalid with Preston by his bedside. Unobserved, he heard and saw all that transpired.

With the possession of this important secret he hastened away. He let Preston take full management of the property, and then privately − Illustration.] − Blank Page.] charged him with the forgery, promising to compound with him for a third of the estate. Preston, after the first alarm and surprise had passed, refused to do it, and insulted him. The attorney then vowed to expose him, when the guilty young man overcome with remorse,

shame, and fear of punishment, *fled* . He was, eventually, arrested at Vicksburg; and on the requisition of the governor of Virginia, who despatched officers for him, he was taken from prison, and now placed in chains on board our boat.

It was, indeed, a hard lot for a noble youth like him. How great and irresistable the temptation! Stronger principles would have saved him this crime even at the expense of a vast fortune. But Preston Dayton was ambitious, proud, and loved wealth for the power and pleasure it conferred. The temptation offered itself—he embraced it, and *fell!* His guilt was, it was true, unpremeditated. He intended no fraud the moment before. He had really, only fulfilled his uncle's intention. Yet, it would have been better if he had left it as it was, with this intention so strongly apparent in the first two or three trembling letters he had signed of his name. How eloquent it would have spoken in a court of equity. But at all events, truth and integrity are safest and best. Yet, to what man living would not the idea have occurred to *complete* the unfinished signature? Many men, good Christian men, who fear to do evil, though but the eye of God is upon them, would have resisted the thought; but many, alas! too many, would have done like Preston Randolph.

CHAPTER IV.

It was midnight, and all slept in the vast cabins, all on board the immense steamer, save the watch on deck. But Louise and Genevieve were awake, and so was the prisoner. Beside his door heavily slept the officer, trusting to the chains to bind, and the waters to keep his charge in safety. Softly Genevieve opened the door of her state−room and stole forth into the cabin. The swinging lamp burned dimly and cast a pale glare around. She crossed to the state−room of the prisoner. She looked down and stealthily watched the stern countenance of the slumbering guardian. His sleep was not feigned, it was deep and heavy. She reached her arm across him and slipped a paper up between the blinds, and hastily retreated.

Preston was sitting with his hands on his knees and his face buried in his hands in deep and painful thought. He was calmly contemplating suicide. He heard the paper fall at his feet. Hope gleamed through the darkness of his destiny. He gathered his chains carefully together that they should not clank, and picked it up. It read as follows, in a delicate female hand.

`Guilty or innocent, thou art unhappy! There are friends near thee who will aid thy escape. Prepare to receive whatever instruments may be passed through the blinds, lest they fall, and the noise wake your guardian.'

He pressed his lips to the note, and hope revived in his heart. In a few moments afterwards, Louise Claviere was seen traversing with a light step the silent cabins, wrapped in a cloak and hat she had taken from one of the tables. She descended to the engine−room and secretly obtained two files. With these she returned to her state−room, having met only the watchman, who took her for one of the gentlemen passengers who preferred walking on the guards to sleeping.

`Genevieve, I will take these to him,' she said to her cousin, who felt almost as much interest in his escape as she did. `You will see, that, if the officer wakes, he listen to you, rather than to us.'

`Yes,' said Genevieve, laughing, `I will try and amuse him if need be—but let us be cautious and he may not wake. His sleep is that of a tired man.'

Louise crossed the cabin lightly. Genevieve took a book and sat on an ottoman close to the head of the officer. Louise softly opened the door across his body, and entered the state−room of the prisoner. He started with surprise. She laid her hand impressively upon his arm, and placed a file in his hand. She closed the door and seated herself silently at his feet, and commenced filing his iron fetters. She was calm, quiet, resolute. Her look was elevated with high purpose. Was it real? Was it a spirit that had come to aid his escape? He pressed her hand gratefully to his lips, and took the other file and applied it to the steel band of his manacles.

In two hours one of his manacles and a fetter released a hand and foot. In two hours more *he was freed* from his chains! They were then filed from the bolt. He knelt at the feet of his liberator. There was an hour yet to day, and she asked him to tell her his crime. Briefly he related to her what has already been narrated.

`Enough,' said she, `I knew thou hadst been greatly tempted. The way is open before thee. Escape! If you do not swim, here is a life preserver I have prepared for you. Let me buckle it about you. Now, while it is yet dark, spring with your chains in your hands, and with a loud clanking sound of them into the water, and swim ashore. It will be thought you are drowned, as no man could swim with such a weight. There will no pursuit be made for you, and under an other name, and in another clime, you may live and be happy.'

`And to what glorious being am I indebted for life, liberty, and happiness? ' he said, kneeling at her feet.

`It matters not! Fly! If hereafter you should feel an interest awakened in your breast for her who has liberated you, come on next St. Mary's eve, and ask at the convent of the Sacred Heart for Louise Claviere!'

With these words she opened the door, and pointed to the way of escape ever the body of his sleeping keeper, and through the cabin to the outer `guard.'

He pressed her hand to his heart, and that of the noble Genevieve— who extended it to him—to his lips; and taking up his chains, as he saw them both vanish into their state−room, he fled through the cabin to the outer guard. The officer, awakened by the clanking, sprung up, looked first into the state−room after his prisoner, then beheld him flying along the cabin. He started in pursuit, giving the alarm, and only reached the guard to see his

prisoner spring with his chains into the dark flood.

`Stop the boat!' he shouted aloud; but as she was already far beyond the spot, he immediately countermanded the order; `no, no, it's of no use; with twenty pounds of iron on him, he is gone to the bottom like a stone!'

The boat kept on her way, and ere we reached Louisville, the prisoner was forgotten. That some of the females in the cabin had connived at his escape, and furnished him with the files, was very generally believed, but suspicion was not fastened on the right persons.

CHAPTER V

On the eve of the succeeding St. Mary's, a mounted cavalier rode up to the gate of the convent *De l' Sacre Coeur* in Louisiana. He was dressed like a Texan county gentleman, with a short horseman's cloak, a broad Panama hat, a sword at his side, and pistols in his holsters. He was of noble presence, with an exceedingly dark but handsome countenance. He asked of the portress of the convent for permission to see Louise Claviere, if such a person abode there. The aged portress retired, and in a few moments Louise Claviere appeared at the grate. The cavalier dismounted, and kissed the hand she extended towards him.

`Lady, I have sought thee, having by deeds of honorable conduct among men, won a proud and virtuous name, which under heaven, no temptation will hereafter take from me. I know that thou didst free me from chains because thou wert interested in me as a woman.'

Louise bent her head, and the changing light of her cheek showed the pleased yet timid emotion that filled her bosom.

`I have thought only of thee since the hour these delicate fingers labored for my freedom,' he continued. `That hour of liberty was the hour of my heart's bondage. The hands that made my body free bound my heart in stronger chains.'

`Why hast thou sought me?' she asked with mingled hope and fear.

`To ask you to unite your fate with mine.'

`Such is decreed my destiny, fair sir,' she said frankly; `I have here remained to await thy coming, for in my dreams I have foreseen and enjoyed this welcome hour. Now I know that thou lovest me, by not forgetting me, I will freely unite my fate with thine.'

The same day the convent chapel witnessed their bridal; and the happy pair, a few days after, took their way to Randolph Claviere's (for that is the name he assumed) fair Texan domain which he had won by courage, virtue and integrity—a far nobler and fairer estate than that which he had criminally sought to enjoy in his native land. No man hath so far fallen that he may not rise again.

The above story, though not written `i' the Cambyses' vein,' is written in the exaggerated vein to which some American writers are very partial; a blending of the false with the true; the supernatural with the commonplace; the simple with the complex, and the sublime with its converse. The skeleton or outline of the story is however, actually true, and the incident of the liberation of a young and gentlemanly forger by ladies took place three years since on a steamer upon the Mississippi. We have adopted in writing it, to suit all tastes and our own humor, a style which Renaud, speaking of his particolored ice−creams, would call `a *Harlequinade*.' `But,' as Mr. Samuel Slick very sensibly observes, `what is the care whether the shell be a smooth or a shag bark, so there be meat in it after it be cracked!'

West Point, − July, 1839.

Dear Sir—The accompanying letter and story, with the names of persons and places alone omitted, are at your service for publication, if you think they possess sufficient interest to entertain your fair readers. With consideration, I am, &c.

J. H. I.

C— Castle, Herefordshire, − June, 1839.

My Dear I.—In my last letter from London I informed you that I was on the eve of quitting town and spending a few weeks in the country. From the date of my letter you will see that I am at C— Castle, where it is my intention to sojourn for a month or so before going into Scotland; and a delightful place of sojourn this is too! My window commands some of the finest scenery—upland, vale, and mountain—in all England. The Malverton Hills in the distance—appear, seen through the blue haze, like purple clouds resting on the green earth. Parks lawns, castles, and gentlemen's seats, arrest and please the eye, wheresoever it falls. This English scenery! we have nothing exactly similar to it in America, there is an *old world* look to it that our young land has not. The rich

green of the verdure—the oaks, (that majestic old monarch of England's woods, which ballad, and legend, and song have made immortal,) the upland and downland swells—the princely castles—the baronial halls and picturesque villas that fill the broad land, all give to the landscape a peculiar aspect that is commonly and best defined as *English*.

I have now been at Castle C— a little more than a week; and, what with riding and driving, hunting and fishing, dining and waltzing, and reading and rambling, with some thirty very respectable ladies and gentlemen, (most of whom my republican tongue has taught itself to address as `my lord' and my lady,') to aid and abet in so doing, passing my time pleasantly enough. At this season all London is county−mad, as it is at other times town−mad. Noblemen and gentlemen now turn their `seats' into free hotels for their frends and such unfortunate wights as, by hook or crook, (owning no house out of town, nor perhaps *in*,) can get themselves invited to `pass a week or two' at some `friend's country−house.' Indeed, living at an English nobleman's castle in the rusticating season is not very unlike the life in one of our fashionable hotels at a popular watering place—the White Sulphur Springs, perhaps, rather than Saratoga. The crowd, to be sure, is not so great, and the company, of course, is select. But the mode of killing time is quite similar in both instances—giving, however, the balance of comforts and advantages to the side of the noble entertainer. This is a delightful national custom, (if usages peculiar to the higher classes alone, may strictly be termed national,) and its tendency is to keep up the open−handed English hospitality, though with something more style than was known to the olden time. The good old fashioned hospitality of *our* fathers, (I say *our*, for are they not *ours* as well as *theirs?*) is, I think, preserved in its most delightful simplicity among the gentlemen of the fox−hunting school, in which class may be found many `A good old English gentleman, All of the `olden time." I have not given you the name or title of my entertainer. His style is Francis Livingstone Catesby, Esquire, of C— Castle;—but by courtesy he is usually called Lord C— of C— Castle, having married the only daughter and sole heiress of the ancient title and vast estates of the Earl of C—. There is a romantic story connected with this young nobleman and his lovely bride, which got into the American papers at the time of its occurrence, made a little noise, then was rejected as incredible, and fell into oblivion. I will relate it to you, and, as you are given to story writing, will put it in the shape of a tale, as best likely to enlist your attention; and peradventure, one of these days, it may serve you for a brace of volumes, should you by any chance, run short for *material*. You may give it what name you list—I shall call it simply a Story. Footnotes

[2] The same fair lady alluded to in the first part of the tale asks what has become of sweet Genevieve? We beg her pardon. She was a year since married to a noble young gentleman in Lexington, who has, as the same Mr. Slick said of himself very modestly, `sense, soul and sentiment, with taste, delicacy and feeling to appreciate, a heart to love, and an arm to defend and protect her!'

A STORY.

CHAPTER I.

Lady Clara Hartly, at the age of nineteen, was the toast of the Three Kingdoms. She was incomparably beautiful—if a superb figure a queenly bust; hands and feet of faultless symmetry; an eye, dark as night, yet soft and dreamy, now melting in its own fire, now burning like stars in the midnight sky; if features perfect in all that makes loveliness in woman; if a voice of thrilling richness, a smile of light, and a lip of love—if an enduring sunshine of a happy spirit, illuminating all her rare and glorious person—if these constitute *beauty*, then was she most beautiful. Pride of birth and consciousness of her exceeding loveliness had given a slight degree of haughtiness to her manner, that perhaps, still heightened and finished her charms. She was also wilful, at times, a little capricious, fond of having her own way, and singularly impatient of restraint. The pet and idol of an invalid and aged father, she never knew a wish ungratified; while, humoured with a thousand indulgences from her doting parent, she became not only wilful and independent, but, from being left without healthful restraint, eccentric habits at length grew upon her, till it got to be as difficult to decide upon any given line of conduct that Lady Clara Hartly would pursue, as to calculate the variable course of the swallow in his swift and uncertain flight.

At the age of nineteen, then, Lady Clara, was left an orphan, an heiress and her own mistress. For a single winter, she reigned a dazzling meteor in London; and, after having a score of cornets cast at her feet, and broken the hearts of all the young, and many of the old, nobles in the kingdom, she suddenly disappeared not only from the firmament of fashion but from England.

`Ha, Lawnshade,' said a gay young Viscount, encountering a noble friend in the Park, the day after it had been ascertained that Lady Clara Hartly had certainly left the country; `ha! ha! we have been chasing a will−o'−wisp this winter—flown, eh?'

`To the — for what it concerns me,' said the young Earl of Lawnshade, who, having lost all his ready cash at Crockford's, and mortgaged half his estates, was desirous of mending his fortunes by that of the lady's; `she has proved herself cold as an icicle, and has a tongue sharpened with the devil's own wit.'

`Witty she is—beautiful you must confess her to be! Heigho, she has jilted me to my heart's content. I did not love the girl—but I liked her spirit, and would have married her if I could, she was such a fine looking woman.'

`You would have held her, you mean, Malvern, as a sort of property that administered to your self−love, as you would take pride in being the possessor of a rare thorough−bred Arabian,' said a third gentleman, who had just left his carriage and received his horse from his servant to take a gallop in the Park.

`You have hit it, Chesterton,' replied the Viscount, laughing. `But you were the hardest served of all—for you loved her. Ah, Chesterton, your dark eyes could not melt her obdurate soul. I pity you, upon my honor. Lawnshade and I have only lost a stake that we may double and win at another day—but you, my dear fellow, have quite lost your heart. But whither has this Bird of Paradise flown? What hawk hath watched her flight?' he added quickly observing that the youthful lover evinced some annoyance at his words.

`Some say to the contiment,' he replied.

`I heard this morning that she had gone to St. Petersburg—perhaps to lay siege to the heart of the Grand Duke,' said Lawnshade, carelessly.

`She has full as likely gone to America,' observed Malvern; `our Countesses of late have taken quite a liking to Brother Jonathan.'

`Ha, my lords,' cried a young baronet riding up, `still the Hartly question on the floor! So what think ye? 'tis said Lady Clara has gone to hob and nob with Lady Hester Stanhope, doubtless to honor with her hand some young Arab Sheik. She is eccentric enough, i'faith.'

`Deil may care, where she be; all I hope is, that she may yet throw herself away on some infernal French or Italian Count, who will make her goldfinches fly,' said Lawnshade, with a laugh of contempt that ill concealed his chagrin; and putting spurs to his horse, he rode off at full speed, followed, a moment after, by the remainder of the party.

CHAPTER II.

About twelve months after the foregoing conversation a handsome young officer, in the uniform of a captain of artillery, of the United States Army, was hastening in a coach from his hotel in Broadway, New York, to one of the North River steamboats, generous wines and `goodlie companie,' having kept him at the table till the last minute of delay. Before he reached the foot of Barclay street, the deep toned bell of the City Hall struck five—the hour of departure—replied to in quick succession by all the clocks of the town, in every possible key; while the lesser tongues from the throats of a dozen rival steamboat bells, began to ring out their shriller treble, each vying to o'ertop his noisy neighbor. Carriages rattled up to the pier gate; passengers leaped recklessly out, their luggage following them helter−skelter; porters were swearing, wrangling, and grumbling; noisy, officious, and impudent hackmen, crowded the way, scratching and fighting for precedence; men with valises in hand, run this way and that way like mad, sweating and blowing; and, altogether, what with the cries of the news boys, the yells of orange women, and the deafening ringing of the ceaseless bells from half a score of contiguous steamers—dire and dreadful was the confusion that reigned. Amid this uproar the young officer arrived on the scene, the coachman adding his oaths and execrations, against those who blocked up the way, to increase the general flood of noises.

`Clare the road, there, you nager,' he shouted to another hack driver, who had just driven in between his horses and the gate, and prevented his farther progress.

`Jis you leff um dare, I ax you,' replied the black, giving his horses a sharp cut and dashing closer into the curb stone; `I has ladieses to get out, an' you nuffin but von gen'leman.'

`Won or twinty jintlemen, I'll let no black nager take the inside o' a white man, an' he an Irishman;' and with these words the ireful coachman struck the African's horse a blow in the head with the butt of his whip with such sudden violence that the animals run back, reared and plunged fearfully in the harness. The young officer, who witnessed the outrage and its result from the window of his carriage, at the same instant caught sight of a lovely woman in the coach, who dropped the glass and was giving, in a cool, energetic tone, two or three rapid orders to the black, who amid his surprise, rage, and the confusion, was incompetent to govern his horses.

No sooner did the officer discover the danger of the fair inmate of the carriage, than undoing his door, he leaped out to her aid. But before he reached the ground, the plunging horses, by a short turn, brought the fore−wheels round at right angles with the coach, and attempted to dash off. At this crisis, the lady threw open the coach door, and sprang out into the arms of the young officer, and the next instant the carriage was overturned.

`Thank God you have escaped unhurt,' he said, gaizing upon her bewildered beauty, and losing his hat at the same moment.

`And thank *you*, sir,' she replied gaily, fixing upon him her dark eyes with a look that made his blood course from his heart to his brow like lightning. `But my aunt and uncle I fear—'

`Are they in the coach?' he eagerly inquired, springing to the door, the reversed position of which now answered to the scuttle of a roof.

The horses had by this time been cut from the pole by the bystanders, and the door of the carriage being open, were drawn forth, one after another a respectable middle−aged man, who complained of a bruise or two in the back and shoulders, and a nice body of a little woman in starched cap and ruff, who at first was too frightened to speak, but at length found voice to lament the derangement of the propriety of her ruff, and to mourn over a slight rent in her drab silk dress. In a few seconds the baggage was disengaged from the overturned vehicle, and tumbled on board the steamer by half a dozen officious individuals, each of whom demanded a `quarter' for his services; the uncle and aunt were also hurried on board, closely followed by by the officer and the young lady who had very frankly accepted the offer of his escort through the crowd. Scarcely had they touched the deck, when the bells rung out their final peal, and the usual rapid orders were given to start.

`Haul in the plank. Cast off that bow−line. Let her go.'

Instantly the noble boat, which for the last twenty minutes had been ceaselessly moving backward and forward to the length of her fastenings, chafing like an impatient racer who is with difficulty held in until the signal is given for starting, with a swift and stately movement left the pier, and in company with half a score of other boats from the docks on either side, shot out into the broad stream. After escorting his fair charge to a settee in the stern of the boat, the young officer lingered a few moments near her, and only turned from her to promenade the deck, on the approach of the uncle and aunt. It was with reluctance that he did so. But he thought that farther attention on his part to a perfect stranger, now that there was no farther call for his services, might be construed by her into a disposition to take advantage of an accident to thrust himself upon the acquaintance of a beautiful woman. She did not know him either; but then, thought he with a glow of military pride, `My uniform should be my passport, and endorse me as a gentleman. Ah, heigho! but is she not a lovely woman!' he added, as he turned on his heel in his walk, and let his eye rest for an instant on her beautiful profile. She was watching at the moment the fleeting city, as with its hundred towers and spires it receded from the eye. She looked at objects with an observant and speculative gaze, like one who had travelled, and was in the habit of mentally instituting comparsions between what she saw and what she had seen. Her profile was spirited and beautiful—not exactly regular in its outline, but defined by a soft, yet intellectual, line that undulated without a fault from the summit of her beauteous forehead to the exquisitely shaped chin. Her eye was dark, full, and so thickly fringed with long silken lashes, that while all was sunshine on her cheek and brow, a dreamy, shadowy twilight seemed to dwell about them, subduing the lustre of her glorious beauty. She wore a black velvet spencer that fitted admirably her superb bust, and confined her round waist within a circle of beauty. Descending from it was a travelling skirt of coarse material, from beneath which peeped a symmetrical foot, the perfect shape of which a rather stout laced boot that covered it could not quite conceal. She wore an open cottage−flat of very coarse straw, which wonderfully became her style and air, which were indolent, yet haughty; independent, yet feminine. There was a frank carelessness about her that was irresistibly captivating. In abundant curls of jet her raven hair played about her face and snowy throat. In one hand she carried, apparently for the same purpose that gentlemen wear canes—to have something in the hand—a lady's riding whip, richly mounted with gold head and bands; in the other hand, or rather upon her lap, with the arm gracefully resting upon it, she held a book, that looked like a sketch book. At a little distance from her on a camp stool, sat the aunt, putting on her spectacles preparatory to perusing a penny paper which a ragged urchin had thrust into her hand, while the uncle was bustling about collecting the `small baggage' into a pile near the cabin door.

`Who can she be?' thought the young soldier as he gazed. `There is a certain style about her that looks like a high−bred woman—but then the uncle and the aunt!—*they*, doubtless, are very respectable sort of people, but'—and he took another glance at the man, who, with a hard Scotch face, shaded by a broad brimmed hat, a Quaker−looking coat, red waistcoat with flaps, breeches and knee−buckles, was still very busy in getting together numerous little packings, baskets &c., that belonged to his party—he took a second look at the aunt, who sat poring over the penny paper, dressed in a neat brown silk bonnet, and gown, spectacles on nose, and with knit cotton gloves.—`Very nice people no doubt,' he said, shaking his head after this scrutiny—`very good sort of people. She can't be very high in society: but her air, manner, and superior beauty! these are aristocratic enough. I would give my commission to know who she is; what farm−house or remote village could have produced so fair a flower! Well−a−day! I have lost my heart to her, and Cupid favor me, I will yet know more of her. Ha, there goes the man up to the office to settle the passage. I will settle mine at the same time, and so shall at least learn the names of the party. '

Thus deciding, he took his station by the captain's window, and heard the uncle give in his name as `Mr. John Hodge, wife and a young lady.'

`John Hodge!' repeated the officer, smiling; `their name fits their appearance. But the niece—if her name be Hodge, I will eat my sword. But I should not wonder if the barbarians, her father and mother, who must be chips of the same block with Mr. John Hodge, have given her some hideous name, Dorcas or Deborah! How could nature have committed so strange mistake as to produce such a glorious dahlia in a kitchen garden? Ha, there is intellect there—taste, poetry, and love for the beautiful. See her eye light up, and the color mount to her cheek, as they catch the rocky palisades! Now in that fair creature is combined everything that constitutes beauty in woman. What a being to love—what bliss to worship her—what a *bride*—what a WIFE she would make me! Ah, this infernal pride of family—I should be cut by kith and kin if I stooped to mate with one so low. My proud old

father, my dignified mother, my lovely and aristocratic sisters—ah, lovely as yonder fair woman is—they would never acknowledge her as a member of one of the oldest and most stately famlies in Virginia.'

This young officer belonged, indeed, to one of the best Virginia families which, though decayed in fortune, had lost none of its pride of blood. Although he was an only son, yet the possessions he would inherit were insufficient to afford him an independent income, if he should continue to keep up the style by which his father and grandfather had lessened his patrimony, and therefore he early looked to the army as a profession. He graduated with distinguished honor at the United States Military Academy, and at the age of twenty−seven, two years before his present introduction to the reader, was made a captain. He had recently distinguished himself in several engagements on the frontier. He was now absent from his post on furlough, and on his way to pay a visit to West Point, before his return to his cantonment beyond the Mississippi. He was a young man of remarkable personal beauty, to which the southern sun had lent a rich brown; tall, and well made, with a clear eagle eye, lofty brow shaded with dark hair, and altogether of noble person and carriage. Few women could look on him without interest. He was, nevertheless, modest and retiring, and unconscious of commanding admiration; and in all he did and said was unaffectedly mingled the courtesy of the finished and thorough bred gentleman.

The beauty of the fair stranger had the effect for which beauty was given to woman—of captivating his senses, and kindling a flame of love in his heart, at all times susceptible to such female influences. This, however was a sincere, deep and all−absorbing passion. Like Minerva, it sprung into existence in full growth and stature. As the boat approached the palisades, she left her seat to stand leaning over the railing, wrapped in the sensations which the sight of such a gigantic parapet of nature must produce in the soul of every one capable of receiving noble impressions from sublime objects. He took a position near her, and watched the play of her countenance as the varied shades of thought floated across it, giving it their own changing hues, as a still lake will paint upon its bosom the clouds that move above it. He saw not the palisades; he saw not the gilded surface of the water; he saw not the throng of passengers around him—he saw nothing but her face—was conscious of nothing but the presence of the lovely object on which rested his impassioned, worshipping, enraptured gaze. Suddenly, with that singular consciousness of having eyes fixed upon her, that all have experienced at times, she turned her head involuntarily round, (as all persons do in such cases, as if the eyes upon you possessed a mysterious power that insensibly drew your own to meet them,) and encountered the full gaze of his impassioned eyes. The start he gave on being detected in this species of adoration, and the red blush that leaped to his manly cheek, drew from her a smile that brought the culprit at once to her side.

`Pardon my rudeness, lady—but—'

`Not a word—this is no time to talk idle nothings, surrounded as we are by the majesty and beauty of nature; with these rocks on which the skies seem to be built, towering above our heads, and sending their black shadows as far down into the water; with this glorious, broad river on which the western sky has showered its gold till the flood is not less gorgeous than the firmament—let not a light thought, an artificial word mingle with the feelings of such a time. God has made a beautiful world for us; oh, how beautiful!'

It would be difficult to describe the manner in which she spoke. Her first words were addressed to him in a tone of stern reproof, as if she despised, and knew that he did also, all that was insincere and artificial. Then laying upon his arm her gloved hand—he thought he had never seen one so shapely, and the touch made his blood thrill—she pointed to the objects around her as she named them with an eye illuminated with intelligence, taste and delight, and her countenance shining with the spirit that animated her; while she spoke with the loftiest enthusiasm, slightly touched with scorn that God's glories must needs be named to draw the admiration of man—that he should not feel the presence of the spirit of beauty, and yield voluntarily the homage of his intellect to her power.

`God has made a beautiful world for us! oh, how beautiful!' this was said in a changed tone, and with a look of mingled gratitude and wonder, while her beautiful eyes as they wandered over the rich scene, were tearful with the love and joy that welled from her heart.

`And he has made this glorious being to dwell upon it!' said the young soldier mentally. He had gazed upon her with bewildered senses, as she spoke, thinking that the world might well be created even for the pleasure of one such mind. As she ceased speaking, she leaned pensively over the balustrade, and for many minutes seemed lost in the contemplation of the scene through which she was borne along.

He became more and more puzzled. `Such a soul can inhabit no plebian clay,' were his thoughts. `Wonderful, glorious creature! If she is to be won, I will strive to win her, for I feel henceforth my happiness is in her keeping. Let her be the daughter of the veriest clown, I will lay my heart at her feet.

While he communed thus with his thoughts, his eye dwelt upon her intelligent countenanee, and each moment more firmly riveted the chains that bound his heart to hers. She soon turned and addressed to him a remark, and insensibl they were led into conversation. The originality of her mind, the beauty of her thoughts, the richness of her language, to which were added a highly cultivated sense, a finished taste, and all the enthusiasm of a poet and painter, filled him with wonder and astonishment.

It was twilight when the steamer entered the landlocked part of the Hudson, called the Highlands. Who that has sailed by night−fall into this wilderness of dark mountains, will forget his impressions of the combined majesty and loveliness of the scene. The passengers hitherto restless, talkaive and noisy, now, as if under the influence of a spell, became still. No voice was heard—no sound but the regular dash, like the noise of a waterfall, of their paddles. The boat entered deeper into the mountains, and the water became black as Tartarus with the deep shadows flung upon its bosom, and the grey shores rose skyward higher and higher till they threatened to meet, enclosing beneath a vast cavernous lake. As the shadows grew darker, and the great hills came closer together, showing longer neither inlet or outlet, the singular girl leaned forward with her hands clasped together, her lips parted, and her face silently eloquent with the feelings that, in a mind like hers, such a scene was calculated to awaken. Her countenance wore almost a holy character; she seemed to be worshipping God through his works. Wonder, love, and gratitude were mingled in her looks. Oh, how beautiful—how lovely she was! But it was ethereal beauty! the beauty of her face was all forgotton in the beauty of the soul that shone through it. What, at last, is beauty without intellect? But when intellect is united with perfect beauty in woman, she assuredly must approach the perfection of angels If lovely intelligent girls could be made sensible how the cultivation of the mind enhances true beauty of feature, and also of form—for the soul pervades and shines through all the body—extraordinary female loveliness would be more general, and of far higher degree.

Twilight deepened, and the moon soon began to light up the tops of the mountains, the light of which, to the upturned gaze of those who sailed in the black shadows of the depths below, appeared like clouds of silver dust resting there; while the evening star burned like a beacon fire upon a far off peak, and lesser lights shone down into the deep water, adding a new and pleasing feature to the ever changing scene.

Three hours after taking their departure from New York, the elevated plain of West Point appeared in sight, overtopped by the hoary battlements of `Fort Putnam,' on which poured a flood of moonlight that had made its way through a cleft in the mountains to the east, as if, while all around was dark heaven, it would direct the gaze of the children of America to one of the most sacred altars of their freedom. The lights from the Military Academy now began to enliven the shores, and the sound of a bell rung landward to give signal of the approach of the steamer, floated pleasantly over the water.

`How full of enchantment all! How like fairy land it must be! I am in a maze of delight—rioting in a world of poetry and of the imagination. '

The young officer had been standing by the fair girl's side for more than hour in silence. Not a word until now had been interchanged between them, yet both felt the sympathies of each other to be active and in unison. Their spirits conversed together as they bent over the vessel's side, and in silence drank into their souls the beauty that was around them.

The soldier started as she spoke and looked up; but the darkness was too great for him to see her face, and the tones of her rich, sweet voice, fell like music on his soul. Before he could reply to her observation, the boat rounded the rocky promontory that forms the eastern most extremity of West Point, and steered directly for a light that burned, seemingly in the craggy side of the precipice, but which, as nearer observationx showed, was held in the hand of some one on the head of a small pier.

`I go on shore here,' said the lady.

`Ah!' and the delighted surprise in which this brief exclamation was made, could not have escaped the most indifferent hearer. Hitherto, he had been able by no finesse to obtain a clue to her destination. or of her place of residence; and within the last half hour he had come to the determination to continue on in the boat as far as she should go, and leave, only when he had ascertained who she was, and made to her a declaration of his

unconquerable passion.

`Why should not a lady visit West Point?' she said archly; `there are many gallant gentleman there, if rumor lie not; and beauty too, I am told, deigns to grace its parades by its presence. How is it sir?'

`Yes sir.'

`Yes sir.'

`I beg your pardon. No sir.'

`No sir.'

`I would say yes—I mean no—'

`Really sir, you are amusingly witty,,—and the mischevious laugh of the beautiful creature as she said this, almost set the poor lover beside himself; his head being already half turned by his passion. `You had best stop at West Point also, I fear to trust you farther,' she said, with a gentle fall of the voice that conveyed a wish that he would stay, while it expressed a confidence in his doing so—so conscious is beauty in the power of its influence!

`I *do* stop here.'

`Indeed! I am glad of it.'

`Passengers for West Point will please walk forward,' cried one of officers of the boat in a loud voice.

`Will you permit me to see you safely on shore?' asked the young soldier diffidently; but I fear you will consider my attention as too great presumption, inasmuch as accident only has thrown me in your society.'

`By no means. I accept your escort with great pleasure. My good uncle,' she added in a tone of peculiar humor, that he could not well define, has, I perceive, got my troublesome baggage forward. I fear you will find me more troublesome baggage still.'

`I hope—nay—I feel—'

`I beg you will trouble yourself neither to feel nor to hope, till you get me on shore,' she said, interrupting him, as they reached the fore−castle where stood the captain, ready with a lantern.

The boat now came to the pier—ropes were thrown from the deck, and skilfully caught and tied by those on shore—the plank was thrown out, and the passengers, including the party of our story, rapidly crossed it. Scarcely had their feet touched the pier, when the cry, `Go−ahead! ' was heard, and the majestic steamer moved swiftly away on her northward course, and soon, save the lights on her stern and bow, was lost in the dark shadows flung upon the water by the shaggy bulk of `Old Cro'nest.' Long afterwards the sound of the water as she made her way through it, was heard roaring among the mountains, till it finally ceased, and all became still as night and solitude could make it.

At the guard−house on the pier−head, a sentinel met the passengers with a slate, demanding a register of their names.

`Now I shall learn it!' said the officer to himself, as he took the slate and entered his own name, which for the present we shall suppose to be Captain Harry Hunter, U. S. A. `What name?' he added looking in the face of the lady, who still leaned on his arm.

`Never mind, sir. Uncle John put your name and those of the party down.'

`I will save him the trouble,' said the officer, `as I see he is busy with the baggage;' and then with a smile and a glance of humor which she did not see fit to acknowledge, he wrote:

`Mr. John Hodge, lady, and niece.'

`How do you know this?' she said, as her eye followed the entry as it was made.

`It is on the boat's record.'

`Humph! Well then, if you will see the niece to the hotel, my relative, Mr. John Hodge and lady will follow at their leisure.'

The path which the officer took to the hotel, which was perched commandingly on the cliff, and now shone dazzling with lights seen through the foliage, wound romanticly up the side of the precipice through a dense wood, and, save to the footsteps of one familiar with its windings, was difficult to follow by night. Its very gloom and uncertainty had for her romantic mind a charm, and she observed that this wild woodland walk among crags, with the moonlight dappling the path, the river beneath, and the lights of the illuminated hotel above, had only been wanting to complete the sum of her enjoyment. At first their way had been through the deepest gloom, but as they climbed higher' the moon at intervals found its way through the trees on the left, and silvered the gravel at their feet; while with occasional glimpses of the lighted windows, which served not only as a beacon, but held

forth the promise of hospitality, could be heard the strains of music, or the clear voice of some laughing girl. On the plateau above they paused an instant to admire the night view of the highlands, with the steely river sleeping in their bosom like a majestic lake. At length they entered the mansion, where under the protecting care of Cozzens, the courteous host thereof, we will leave the fair stranger, with uncle and aunt, bag and baggage, until morning, assured that in no more agreeable quarters can travellers take up their temporary abode. Our hero himself sought the quarters of some of his brother officers, where although he retired for the night, it was only to think of the beautiful niece, and lose himself in a labyrinth of conjectures.

CHAPTER III.

The succeding day the beautiful stranger made her appearance, for the first time, at the dinner table, and at her entrance, leaning on the arm of the gallant host—who had a tolerable eye for female beauty— a universal sensation was created by her beauty.

`Who is she?' where is she from? who are her party?' were questions that no one could answer.

Captain Harry Hunter, as we shall call him until we get to the *denoument* of our story, dined at the same table, but diffidently took his seat at the extreme end, but his eyes were scarcely off from her; but being rallied by his companion he colored, and to give proof of his indifference to the lady, began very coolly to pepper a glass of champaigne, instead of his salad.

`Hunter, will you take the mustard?' asked a waggish lieutenant at his elbow.

`Thank you;' and the champaigne was enlivened by an abundant spoonful of this pleasant mixture.

`A little salt?' inquired another opposite, handing him the salt−cellar.

`Thank you—thank you!' and the absent lover added very seriously a spoonful of salt to his mustard and pepper.

`Now a little oil, Harry,' said the first wag, `and you will have the honor of inventing a new dish—a devilled champaigne.'

A shout of laughter from a dozen gentlemen and ladies, who had been amused observers, recalled the smitten captain to his senses, and he fixed his eyes with a look of mingled wonder, shame, and anger on the heterogeneous mixture before him. Laughing with the others the affair soon passed; but it gave very positive proof of the state of his heart in the judgment of more than one person at the table.

For several days afterwards the young lady became an object of curiosity, and so great were her personal attractions, that the most aristocratic of the summer sojourners at the Point, would have called upon her and sought her acquaintance, but `the homely uncle and aunt' they could not get over. They were a bar sinister to the otherwise immaculate shield of her loveliness. Therefore she was courted by no one, and remained isolated and alone amid a throng of gay and fashionable people. Yet she seemed to be the happiest there. Her mornings were past in exploring the wild scenery in the neighborhood, and in sketching the most striking objects. Curiosity increased. Who has seen her sketch book?' Nobody—yet the rumor was that, it was filled with landscapes worthy of Rembrant. She had twice seated herself at the piano when the drawing−room was nearly empty, and in three minutes had filled it from terrace, lawn, and garden, by the ravishing sweetness of her voice, and the magic music her skilful touch drew from the ivory keys. `Who could she be?'

No one could say. The women avoided her, yet were dying to find out who she was, and who Mr. and Mrs. Hodge were, and where they lived, and what they did. They could not even learn the lady's name. She was registered simply the niece, and as the niece only was she known. A few ladies had spoken to her civilly to see if they could get any thing out of her. But they grew no wiser. A gallant commodore in the navy who had become a little deaf from the roar of cannon in an engagement was her chief beau, for in his eye beauty was aristocracy, spite of uncles and aunts. A few handsome cadets, also, had fluttered about her, and she had encouraged their civility, and and was often to be seen promenading on their arms. To the officers and other gentlemen she was distant and haughty, and wore an air of independence which, thought the ladies, would have become a lady with a different class of relatives, but in the niece of such ordinary personages was very presumptive and should be put down. So a party was formed against her, while another come forward in her defence; and for a time, she set them all by the ears, and was every where the subject of conversation. A French Marquis arrived at the Point, and with native gallantry attached himself to the beauty. They spoke French together constantly. `She speaks French, too!' was whispered about.

`She is a French teacher, perhaps,' said the opposition.

`She is a cultivated woman,' said the others.

There came a German prince, too, to the Point, and the day after his arrival, he was seen escorting her to the table, and during dinner they conversed wholly in German. Curiosity increased.

With the Swedish consul she conversed in his own tongue; with the Spanish minister in Spanish, and even talked Latin with a Roman priest who was travelling through the country. To sum up her accomplishments, in music she was a mocking bird, warbling melodies in all languages; in conversation a wonder; in accomplishments unparalleled; in taste perfect; in painting a master; in walking she moved like a goddess; and in riding she seemed to be the very spirit of horsemanship—a female Putnam, while she managed her rein with equal grace and boldness. Truly never were people so mystified— never was curiosity so keen—never were ladies so long at fault in getting at the bottom of a mystery.

In the meanwhile, what became of Captain Harry Hunter? From the moment, the first night of his arrival, a spirit of diffidence and reserve seemed to have taken possession of him. He avoided her presence, turned from her path, and showed apparent aversion for her society. It appeared dislike. She observed him, and rightly translated it.

It was the timidity of Love.

The inquries she had made about him from time to time, till she had learned his whole history as we have already given it, led to conjectures that Harry knew something of her. But his reserve, and the fact of never being seen in her presence, took from the supposition all its force.

One twilight, Captain Harry had been listlessly walking in that most romantic spot of the Hudson, `Kosciusco's Garden,' when coming to the fountain, he seated himself; and while the tinkling fall of the water into the marble basin soothed his spirit, his thoughts dwelt no the fair stranger. Long he sat there unintruded upon, occasionally hearing the strains of music borne to his ears from the encampment. The shades of night crept over the spot; the glens around grew dark; the diverging walks became indistinct in the gloom, and solitude, and silence reigned around him.

`What care I for family? Will parents, sisters, rank, compensate for her loss? Never. No, I will seek her,' he said half aloud, as if he had come to a final decision in relation to his passion, `and be she the lowest of the low by parentage, I will declare my consuming passion and receive from her own lips the sentence to live or die.'

`Live then!'

He started, and looking up, saw standing near him, the object of his thoughts and words.

`Lady—angelic creature,' he instantly cried, kneeling before her and seizing her hand, `forgive the language I have dared to use, I knew not—'

`Nay, Captain Hunter, you are forgiven—I know your passion, and should be cruel not only to myself as well as to a generous heart which I know you to possess, to deceive you. If the ack nowledgement that your interest in me is reciprocated by the unworthy object of it, will render your being happier, and restore to your cheek the color, and to your lip and eye the light that have left them for this two weeks, then receive it—and there is my hand in token of the truth of my heart.'

This was spoken with the extraordinary frankness that characterised all that she did or said. Its effect upon him was electrical. Her hand was pressed to his lips and then their lips were pressed together. Ere they left the spot, they had pledged to each other their undying love. Still the fair stranger, in whose breast had been kindled a passion simultaneous with, and as vivid as his own, did not give him, at his repeated solicitations, her name.

`In giving you myself, fair sir, I think I have given you as much as your merits can well lay claim to,' she said archly. `If, as you have now promised, after our marriage, you will accompany me to England, I will then give you my name. Till then, seek not to know more of me, unless perhaps at the altar.'

`Enough,' he said, `I am the slave of your will, and I obey.'

CHAPTER IV.

The next day all of the friends of Captain Hunter were congratulating him upon his good looks and fine spirits; and when the Captain was seen to escort the mysterious beauty, (the two apparently on the best terms together,) into the dining−room, curiosity became once more alive, and numerous were the surmises this sudden acquaintance gave rise to.

If this little incident created suspicion, the astonishment of every body was not lessened, when it was rumored the third day afterwards the handsome and gallant Captain Harry Hunter was to be married at twelve o'clock, by Dr. Warren, in the military chapel. The ceremony drew crowds of the beauty and chivalry of the spot to the church at the given hour.

Dr. Warren rose up, and the ceremony commenced. Every eye was fixed upon the two who were about to be united. A nobler looking man, a fairer woman never stood up together before the marriage altar. There was a universal hum of admiration, yet the intensest curiosity was mingled with the approbation. The lady was observed to place a paper in the hands of the clergyman, who glance at it with a look of surprise and doubt—his eye then fixed upon it with eager interest, and he then, a moment afterwards, proceeded with the ceremony.

`He knows her name,' was the mental observation of every lady in the thronged chapel. `We shall all soon learn it!'

Expectation was on tiptoe. Curiosity was at its height. The mystery was about to be solved.

The rites proceeded, and the clergyman solemnly said to the handsome soldier,

`Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?'

`I will!' swelled through the church in the deep, manly voice of the gallant soldier; and many a maiden as she heard his fine voice and rested her gaze on his noble person, confessed in her heart that he was well worthy to become the protector and cherisher of a lovely woman.

`Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance, in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honor and keep him in sickness and health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?'

`I will,' answered the maiden, in a voice that went to every soul with the love and confidence and hope with which it was laden. And many a noble officer envied him by her side who was to be loved and honored and kept, *both in sickness and in health*, by so fair a being.

There was a moment's expectant silence, when the clergyman said, looking around `Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?' When every one looked for the homely uncle to approach and give her away, to the surprise of all, a gentleman from New York, and the wealthiest banker in America, who had, unexpectedly to his friends, arrived at the Point that morning, advanced with dignity, and taking her ungloved hand, which seemed like ivory into which life had been breathed, placed it in that of the clergyman. The bridegroom was evidently unprepared for the presence of this gentleman; and it was apparent also from the glances that he cast upon the paper in the clergyman's hand that he was yet unacquainted with its contents.

Their right hands being joined, he first repeated in an audible voice, after the minister—

`I, Henry, take thee Clara, (here a thousand eyes exchanged glances, for her first name was known, and from the decided tone in which he repeated it, it was plain that he himself had then heard it for the first time,) to my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health to love and cherish till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight my troth.'

She also repeated her corresponding part of the ceremony, in a firm, clear, yet sweetly feminine voice, when Harry receiving it from the minister, placed upon her finger a plain gold ring, and said, in a distinct voice that filled the chapel,

`With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

After the prayer, the clergyman joined their hands together, repeated in a tone of solemn fervor,

`Those that God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

Then turning to the assembly he said, while his eye seemed to anticipate the effect his words were about to produce,

`Forasmuch as Francis Livingstone Catesby and Clara Huntly, Countess of Chesterton, have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving a ring, and by joining hands; I pronounce that they are man and wife.'

After the announcement of the name and title of the bride, the rest of the clergyman's words were lost in the general burst of surprise from every lady present, and a thousand eyes were turned on the bride with new and stranger interest.

`I knew it,' cried the triumphant *pros*.

`Who would have believed it!' exclaimed the disconcertel *cons*.

The surprise of the bridegroom need not be painted. He loved her, believing her of low degree—he could love her with no greater ardor even as Lady Clara Huntly.

So ends my story, my dear—and I will conclude the rest in my letter.

`The gentleman who gave the bride away was Mr. A—, her banker, to whom she had written to attend the ceremony. The paper she gave the priest contained her name and title. Catesby neither knew nor suspected anything of so singular and fortunate a denouement. In a few weeks, Frank having resigned his commission in the army, left America for this country, and on their arrival, drove directly over to Castle C—' where his charming wife at once surrendered to him her family mansion and vast estates. The change has not spoiled him. He is one of the most agreeable and gentlemanly men in England, and highly popular in his country. He is called by courtesy, (his wife's title having been by her marriage merged in his republican Mister or Captain,) Lord C—, of C—Castle, C—. His charming wife is devoted to him heart and soul. Never was a marriage more for love than this! He thought her lowly and his love raised her to his bosom—she knew him only to be a young American, without rank or title, yet, for love, she gave him all she had to give—beauty, wealth, and rank among nobles. They have two lovely children, a boy and girl; and the only subject on which they differ is their education. Catesby is for making the little fellow a republican, and sending him to West Point; while Clara intends him for Parliament, and to inherit her father's title and estates, which he will do—the little fellow's title being through his mother, Lord Viscount C—. You will by this time understand that the `uncle and aunt,' were Lady Clara's steward and his wife, whom she dragged with her from home, half over the world as her protectors when she started off on her wild travels. There can be nogreater instance of the peculiarly independent character of her mind than the fact of her quitting with disgust, the scenes of London disappation and resisting the fascinations of her numerous admirers, to roam amid the scenery of America, and commune with the works of nature in a world where nature has exhibited in the most stupendous manner her power and majesty. They live very retired, and seldom stay more than a third of the season in town. The remainder of the year they are in the country combining together in dispensing for the happiness and comfort of their numerous dependants the wealth with which they are blest. It was by accident I met Frank in town at the close of the season, and as he would not let me say nay—and something of his story coming to my mind, I consented to go down with him, partly from curiosity to learn its truth, I confess, but mainly, as *you* must know, to enjoy once more the society of one who was for four years my fellow cadet. Do not say after this that my letters are too short. Adieu, until the next trip of the Liverpool. Truly yours,

T. H. H.

To J. H. I., Esq., West Point, U. S. − *THE END.*