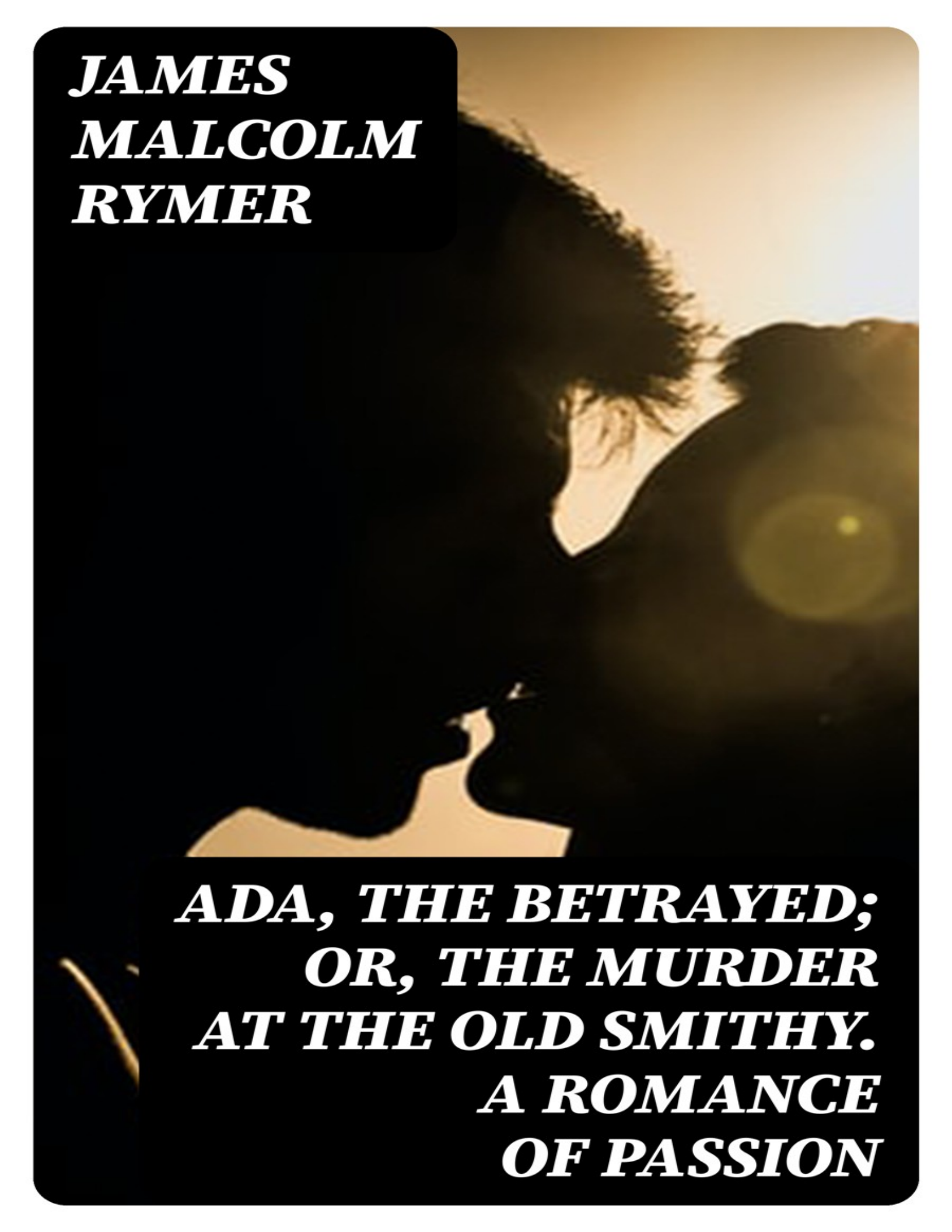




***JAMES
MALCOLM
RYMER***

***ADA, THE BETRAYED;
OR, THE MURDER
AT THE OLD SMITHY.
A ROMANCE
OF PASSION***

James Malcolm Rymer

Ada, the Betrayed; Or, The Murder at the Old Smithy. A Romance of Passion

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THE HOPE OF ALBERT SEYTON TO ADA THE BETRAYED.

PREFACE

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Prefaces, like prologues, have nearly gone out of fashion; but the Editor of Lloyd's Penny Weekly Miscellany feels, that upon the completion of the first volume of his labours, he is bound to say something to his patrons, if it is but to thank them most heartily and sincerely for a degree of patronage, such as he may venture to say, few, if any, periodical publications have been able to boast of. When we first launched our Miscellany upon the stream of time, we were gratified to find that the breath of popular applause filled its sails, and bore it gallantly forward past many a proud competitor; and we have found, by the experience of twelve months, that the fair wind that urged us onwards was not "a mere passing gale," for each week has materially increased our circulation, until the Miscellany now occupies a place in the periodical literature of Great Britain (and, in fact, wherever the English language is spoken), which may well fill the hearts of both Publisher and Editor with the most grateful feelings towards their best friends—the Public.

Having said thus much of the past, it behoves us to say something of that which is to come. First and foremost then, those pens which have already received the meed of popular applause, will still continue to

"Weave their airy fictions"

in our pages. The Author of "Ada, the Betrayed; or, the Murder at the Old Smithy," in particular, has several novelties in progress, which from time to time will appear.

Secondly,—We shall make it our study to maintain the high majesty of virtue over the turbulence of vice, and to make our pages, while they glow with the romantic and the chivalrous, so replete with true nobility of sentiment, that we shall, as hitherto, find our way, and maintain our place, among the young and pure of heart.

In conclusion, we can only add, that as we have done so will we do, and while Lloyd's Penny Weekly Miscellany shall lose none of its present attractions, we pledge ourselves that neither expense, time, or trouble, shall be spared to add to it every attractive feature which may grow out of the intelligence and spirit of the age, our wish being to render it a rational companion for all classes of persons. We must likewise, in some degree, claim for ourselves the merit, if we may be allowed the term, of laying before a large and intelligent class of readers, at a charge comparatively insignificant, those same pleasures of the imagination which have hitherto, to a great extent, only graced the polished leisure of the wealthy; and, at the same time that we have done so, we have found with unmingled satisfaction that correct tastes, glowing fancies, and an admirable perception of the poetical and the beautiful, are as well to be found by the humblest fire-sides, as in the lordly mansions of the great and the noble.

To our numerous Correspondents we have to return our sincere thanks for many literary favours, as well as for much friendly commendation they have been pleased to bestow upon our labours, and with a sanguine hope that we and our Readers shall proceed as pleasantly together to the year

1844, as we have to 1843, we gratefully thus introduce our first volume to their notice.

Ada, the Betrayed;
or,
The Murder at the Old Smithy.
A Romance of Passion.

—

Around the winter's hearth the tale is told,
To lisping infancy and hoary age;
It is a story of strange passion—of grief and tears—
Of joy and love, and all the elements of mind
Which make us what we are.
Scott.

CHAPTER I.

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The Storm.—The Old Smithy.—A Deed of Blood.—The Death Cry.—The Child of the Dead.—Remorse and Despair.

It was towards the close of the year 1795 that a storm, unequalled in duration and fury, swept over one of the most fertile districts of England, spreading consternation and dismay among the inhabitants of several villages, and destroying in a few short hours the hopes of many an industrious family, who looked to the nearly ripened grain of the fertile fields for their means of subsistence through the coming winter.

The day had been lowering and overcast. An unusual sultriness had pervaded the air, and although more than sixty miles of hill and dale laid between the spot to which we allude and the Northern Ocean, which washes the eastern shore of England, several sea birds (a most unwonted sight) had flown, screeching and wailing, over the rich corn-fields and promising orchards.

The day had worn gradually on, and it was not until the sun was lost amid a mass of fiery clouds in the glowing west that any precise indications of the approaching tempest presented themselves. Then, however, when the long shadows from the trees began to lose their identity in the general gloom of the rapidly approaching night, a singular moaning wind began to blow from the north-west.

The cattle showed alarm and uneasiness—the birds flew low and uncertainly—horses trembled in their stables, and the hoarse scream of various large birds of prey as they flew over the farm-house, or settled on the roofs, had a

peculiarly discordant effect. It would seem as if there was something in the air which enabled the inferior animals to know and dread the awful strife of the elements which was about to ensue.

The glowing clouds in the west rapidly disappeared, and the night fell over the land as if a black pall had been suddenly cast over the face of Nature. The wind momentarily increased in violence. Now it moaned like an evil spirit round the gable ends of the houses; then again, with a wild whistle and a rushing sound, it would sweep past the latticed windows like a wild animal seeking its prey.

Occasionally there would be a lull in the tempest, and in one of these the heavens were lit up with a flash of lightning of such power and brilliancy, that all who saw it closed instantly their eyes in dismay, and trembled with apprehension. Then followed thunder—thunder that shook the houses to their foundations, and boomed and rattled in the sky with so awful a sound that many of the villagers sunk upon their knees to pray, for they thought the end of the world was at hand, and they should never see the blessed sun again. Mothers clasped their screaming children to their breasts, and wept in bitterness of heart. Strong men shook with fear, and when again the wind arose, and, like a giant's arm, levelled hedges, trees, haystacks, and some houses, a cry of dismay arose from the villagers, and the bells were rung in the rural churches. Some screamed—some prayed—some wept and rung their hands. All was horror, uncertainty, and despair!

The storm had lasted several hours, and still, the forked lightning darted in livid streaks from cloud to cloud. The

awful thunder filled the air with its hundred echoes, and the wind swept over a scene of desolation, for the smiling corn-fields were no more; the laden fruit trees were levelled with the soil, and many a cottage had its humble thatch torn off, and presented but its bare walls to the moaning blast.

The principle fury of the land storm seemed to have been levelled at a little village which occupied the gentle slope of a beautiful and fertile valley, some few miles from Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and through the lowest portion of which a branch of the river Derwent wound its serpentine course. The village was called Learmont, from the name of a noble family who, since the Norman conquest, had been the owners of the land.

There was scarcely a house, from the humblest cottage to the lordly mansion of the Learmonts, which had not suffered by the hurricane; and to add to the dismay of the inhabitants, who in fear and dread had rushed from their homes, there arose about the hour of midnight the dreadful cry of fire!

That fearful cry struck terror to every heart, and those who had breath to shriek joined the shout, and "fire! fire!" passed from mouth to mouth, in all the different tones and cadences of fear and hopelessness.

All uncertainty as to the precise locality of the fire was soon removed, for the flames from a large irregular building, standing somewhat apart from the other houses, quickly marked it as the spot of the conflagration.

"It's at the *Old Smithy*," cried a dozen voices.

The words had scarcely passed their lips, when a woman darted into the centre of the throng, shrieking wildly,—

“Aye—it is at the Old Smithy! The time has come—I knew. I have told you all; you, and you, and you, I’ve told. Ha! Ha! Ha! Heaven has at last forged a bolt for the Old Smithy! Do you stand aghast! Can you put out yon light? No—no—no! I know you cannot. The Old Smithy gone at last. Ha! Ha! I am happy now—happy now! You do not stir. You are right—quite right. Let *him*, Andrew Britton—that’s his name—let him roast and writhe in the flames—let his skin blacken in curling lights—let his flesh drop from him in the hissing, roaring fire—let his bones whiten, and glow, and crackle into long white splinters, as they will—as I know they will; but I want to see it, my masters—I want to see it. Live—live and shriek, Andrew Britton, till I come. Hark! now. I hear him. Hark!—music—music—’tis music.”

She was about to bound off in the direction of the blazing house, leaving her listeners aghast at her terrible denunciations, when a man of forbidding aspect and Herculean build rushed into the midst of the throng of villagers round her, and with one blow of his clenched hand struck her insensible to the earth.

A cry of “shame! shame!” arose, and a young man stepping forward, exclaimed,—

“Unmanly ruffian! How dared you strike the woman? You know as well as all we that she is mad. Andrew Britton, you are a coward, and well you merit your name of ‘The Savage.’”

“Down with the savage!” cried several.

“He has killed poor Mad Maud,” said one.

“Is she not always crying out against me?” growled the ruffian. “Is there anything too bad for the old beldame to

say of me, Andrew Britton?"

"Not dead! not dead!" suddenly cried she whom the villagers called Mad Maud, springing to her feet. "Mind ye all, Andrew Britton is to die before I do. Ha! Ha!—Not dead! To the Smithy—to the Smithy."

She darted off in the direction of the blazing house, and, as if by one impulse, the villagers followed her, shouting,—

"To the Smithy—to the Smithy!"

The building, which was in flames, had at one time evidently been of a much higher character than its present appearance warranted. It consisted of a large uninhabited house, with two wings, one of which had been converted into a smithy, and was in the occupation of Andrew Britton, the smith, who stood high in favour of the then Squire Learmont, whose property the old house was.

The fire was in the other wing to that which had been converted into a smithy, and when the villagers arrived they found it so enveloped in flames, that any attempt to save it seemed perfectly in vain.

"Blood—blood is spilling," cried Mad Maud, rushing close to the flaming building. "I heard it. A deed of blood! Hark!—hark!"

The villagers were horror-stricken by hearing piercing shrieks coming from the interior of the burning house.

"There!" cried the maniac exultingly; "that's a death cry. Ha! Ha! Ha! Brave work—brave work. Andrew Britton, where are you?"

"Here," cried the smith. "Look at me, all of you, and swear hereafter you saw me here while—while—"

"While the murder was doing!" cried Maud.

“Murder?” said the villagers, as if with one voice.

“Drivelling idiot!” roared Britton. “By—”

Before the oath could escape his lips, there dashed from among the burning ruins a figure which might well strike terror into every heart. It was that of a man, but so blackened and scorched was he by the fire that he scarcely looked human.

“Help! Help!” he screamed. “Murder! Murder!”

Every heart was paralysed as he dashed into the centre of the throng, screaming with pain.

“The child! The child!” he screamed. “The child of the dead—save her! Save her!”

Many hands were immediately stretched forward to take from his arms an infant that the villagers now perceived he carried.

He resigned his charge, and then flinging his arms above his head, he cried,—

“Save me—save me from myself—from the glance of the dead man’s eye—from blood save me. Oh, save me from conscience. The hell has begun.”

His last words rung faintly on the ears of the horrified crowd, for having given up the child, he then bounded onwards, and was soon lost to sight and hearing in the darkness of a plantation which grew on the border of the stream that watered the valley.

Britton, the smith, glared with eyes of fury after the shrieking fugitive, then clenching his hand, he shook it wildly in the air, and breathing a bitter curse, turned from the burning portion of the house, and dashed into the wing in which was the Smithy.

CHAPTER II.

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The Lull of the Tempest.—Morning is Coming.—The Child of Mystery.—The Necklace.—A Surprise and a Disappearance.—The Inscription.—The Lord of Learmont.

The startling and singular events at the Old Smithy had the effect of distracting in some measure the attention of the affrighted inhabitants of Learmont from the fury of the tempest, which was still raging, although with diminished rage, around their humble dwellings.

The forked lightning was not so frequent in its flashes, and the thunder seemed to be passing away in the direction of the wind.

Still it was a night of terror, and it was not until the wind had sensibly abated, and a few heavy drops of rain fell splashing upon the ground, that the peasants ventured to re-enter their dwellings, with a hope that the storm had done its worst.

The child which had been brought from the burning house, in so awful and mysterious a manner appeared to be little more than one year old, and it was perfectly unknown to all in the village; neither could any one give a guess as to who the strange man could be, who with such frantic cries of pain and remorse, had appeared for a moment amongst them.

The wing of the ancient building in which the fire had originated, alone had suffered from the conflagration. It lay a heap of smouldering ruins, but the rest of the large

rambling habitation, including the Smithy, was quite uninjured.

The child was surrendered by common consent to the care of a kind-hearted woman, by the name of Dame Tatton, who was a widow. She looked with an eye of trembling pity upon the little innocent who nestled in her bosom in sobbing fear.

The little girl, for such she was, showed evidently by her attire that she had been in the care of those of a far higher rank in life than the kind-hearted, but humble cottager, who now strove to allay her childish terror.

Around the neck of the infant was a small necklace of pearls, and about its attire generally there were ample indications of wealth.

The little innocent soon sobbed itself to sleep upon the breast of Dame Tatton, and the village gossips, after resolving in the morning to go in a body to the Squire Learmont and ask his advice, or rather commands, concerning the disposal of the babe that had been so mysteriously thrown upon their hands, dispersed to seek that repose they were so much in need of.

Every one naturally thought that Andrew Britton, the smith, knew something of the mysterious man and the child; but none would venture to the dwelling of "The Savage," as he was generally called, to make an inquiry, for his ferocity was too well known not to be universally dreaded.

The storm had nearly gone. A heavy fall of rain was splashing on the meadows, and beaten down vegetation, and all was still in Learmont till the morning's sun rose on

the wreck which the tempest had made in the green valley that the day before was redolent of peace and plenty.

Young and old then sought the cottage of Dame Tatton. They knocked at first gently, then more loudly, but no one answered.

“My mind misgives me,” cried the young man who had the preceding evening spoken so boldly to the smith—“my mind misgives me; but there is something wrong. Let us force the door, my masters.”

“Nay, Frank,” said an old man. “The widow sleeps soundly after the storm. Ye are too hasty—far too hasty, Frank Hartleton.”

“Nay to thee!” cried the impetuous youth. “’Tis but a broken panel at the utmost, and we do force the dame’s door, and that we can any of us mend again. What say you masters?”

“Aye, truly,” replied a little man with a red night-cap—“spoken truly—most sagely spoken.”

“But will the squire approve of it, think ye?” suggested one.

“By my shears I thought not of that,” murmured the little man, who was the garment fashioner of Learmont.

“Knock again,” cried several.

Frank Hartleton knocked loudly, and shouted,—

“Dame Tatton—Dame Tatton, I say; hast taken a sleeping draught?”

No voice replied. All was as still as the grave within the cottage.

Frank now placed his foot against the frail door, and with one vigorous push he sent it flat upon the earthen floor of

the cottage, and immediately striding over it, he entered the humble dwelling.

The villagers hesitated for a moment, in order to be quite sure there was no immediate danger in following Frank Hartleton, and then they quickly thronged the little cottage, which could boast of but two small apartments, so that the whole interior was in a very few minutes examined.

The cottage was tenantless. Dame Tatton and her infant charge had both disappeared.

The simple rustics gaped at each other in speechless amazement. The bed had evidently been occupied, but there was no sign of confusion or violence—all was orderly and neat—nothing was removed or disarranged. A canary bird was singing gaily in a wicker cage; a cat slept on the hearth; but the Widow Tatton and the mysterious child—now more mysterious than ever—had both disappeared.

“I cannot account for this,” said Frank Hartleton. “By Heavens it’s the most singular thing I ever heard of.”

“The place has a strange look,” cried one.

“A strange look!” said the rest in chorus. “So indeed it has.”

“Strange nonsense,” cried Frank. “So you are frightened all of you at an empty-room are you?”

“Master Frank,” suddenly shouted one, “look ye here, you were always a main scholar.”

Frank turned his attention to a part of the plaster wall indicated by him who spoke, and on it was traced, as if rapidly with a thumb or finger nail these words,—

“Help—the Squire and the Savage have—”

and that was all. Whoever had written that hurried scrawl had not had time to finish the sentence which would probably have thrown some light upon the inexplicable affair.

“There has been some foul play, I am convinced,” cried Frank. “My friends, let us go at once and confront the squire.”

“You need not go far, insolent hind!” cried a hoarse voice, and Frank turned suddenly to where the sound proceeded from, saw Squire Learmont himself standing upon the threshold of the cottage.

Squire Learmont of Learmont, only as he preferred being called, was a man far above the ordinary standard of height; his figure, however, was thin and emaciated, which, coupled with his height, gave him an ungainly appearance. His complexion was a dead white—there was nothing of the sallow or brown in it—it was ghastly white, and contrasting with his lank black hair which hung far down from his head straight and snake-like without the shadow of a curl, it had a hideous corpse-like appearance.

“I am glad,” said Frank, when he had recovered his first surprise at the sudden appearance of Learmont, “I am glad we have not far to go, for the business is urgent.”

Learmont waved his hand for him to proceed.

“Last night there was a storm,” continued Frank.

“Indeed!” sneered Learmont. “That is news this morning.”

Frank Hartleton felt his cheek flush with colour, but he controlled his passion and continued,—

“A wing of the old house adjoining the smithy was on fire—the house I mean that has been shut up so long because it is thought—”

“Who dared think?” cried Learmont, in a voice of violent anger. “Who dared think of me—”

“Of you, sir?”

“Aye—who dared—?”

“It was of the house I spoke.”

“But—but is it not my house, quibbler?” cried Learmont.

“Truly, sir.”

“Then on with your speech, sir, and draw no inferences from idle gossips. The wing of my house was on fire. Enough—what followed?”

“A man rushed from it in mortal agony of mind and body, carrying a child—”

“Well—well!”

“That child was given to the care of Dame Tatton, who dwelt in this cottage. Now child and dame have both disappeared.”

“I hear!” cried Learmont.

“What is to be done sir? You are the lord here.”

“And so, I presume,” sneered Learmont, “I must charge myself to bring back every old woman, who disappears from her hovel?”

“Here is an inscription on the wall,” said Frank, “which seems to refer—”

“Ah!” cried Learmont, striding forward, and reading the few words that had been scratched on the wall. “Well, what then?”

“That I ask you Squire Learmont.”

“Then I reply, nothing. Will you finish that sentence?”

“Certainly not.”

“Then what further have you to say to me?”

Frank was rather confounded by the manner of the squire and was silent.

“Young man,” said Learmont, “your father did a service to the Learmonts.”

“I know it,” said Frank.

“In return for that service, the Learmonts gave him a patrimony, an estate, on the substance of which you live.”

“’Tis well known,” cried Frank. “The service was not overpaid. My father saved your father’s life.”

“True,” sneered Learmont, “but beware!”

“Beware of what?”

“The house that was powerful enough to make a peasant an independent man can again convert the audacious son of a peasant into a hind he should have been. Beware I say. You know my motto.”

“I do. ‘Constant till death!’”

“Constant till death. Constant in all things, including—revenge!”

“I scorn your threats,” cried Frank.

“Be it so,” said Learmont, as with an angry frown he strode to the door of the cottage. He turned upon the threshold, and said, “this hovel shall be closed for ever. Once more I say beware!”

With a haughty step he left the humble dwelling and took the road to his princely mansion.

CHAPTER III.

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Ten Years have Flown.—The Old Rose Inn.—A Snow Storm.—Tom the Factotum.—An Arrival to the Old Smithy.—The Mysterious Stranger.

Ten years had rolled away since the storm, so memorable on account of the mysterious incidents connected with it, had swept over the village of Learmont. Ten weary years to some—to others, years of sunshine and joy—but of such chequered materials are human lives. But little change had taken place in the village. Some of the aged inhabitants had dropped into the silent tomb, and some of the young had grown grey with care—nothing, however, had occurred to cast any light upon the dark and mysterious occurrences of the well-remembered evening of the storm. The smith, Andrew Britton, still plied his hammer, and the mass of ruins which had once been the wing of the old house he inhabited, still lay as they had fallen—only they were overgrown with wild weeds, and coarse vegetation. The cottage of Dame Tatton remained uninhabited, for no one would live in what they considered an ill-omened and mysterious residence. It had, therefore, remained locked up since the unaccountable disappearance of its last occupant, and in course of time the villagers began to regard it with a superstitious feeling of fear—some even asserted that lights had been seen at night gleaming through the narrow casements—others reported that strange sounds of pain and distress had been heard proceeding from the humble dwelling—but whether or not these sights and sounds had really attacked the senses of the inhabitants of Learmont,

certain it was that the cottage began by degrees to be regarded with as much dislike and dread as the large rambling habitation of Britton, the smith.

The child too—the infant who had been rescued from the flames was never heard of, and the storm—the fire—the burnt and shrieking man—the child and Dame Tatton, became all leading topics in the gossips of the villagers around their fire-sides, as well as in the old oaken parlour of the “Rose,” an ancient ale house, which stood in the very centre of Learmont, and had so stood for time out of mind.

It was in the depth of winter, ten years and some months after the storm, that a goodly collection of the village gossips—scandal-mongers and toppers were seated around the cheerful, crackling, blazing fire in the before-mentioned oaken parlour of the “Rose.” The hour was waxing late, but the room was so warm and comfortable, the ale so good, and the conversation so deeply interesting, that no one seemed inclined to move, but upon the principle of “let well alone,” preferred the present good quarters to a turn out in the snow.

“How long has it snowed now, Tom?” said a jolly farmer-looking man, without taking the pipe from his capacious mouth.

“It *beginned*,” replied Tom the waiter, ostler, and fag in general. “It *beginned* at half arter eleven, and here’s a quarter arter ten. It’s *snewed* all that time.”

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said an old man. “Forty years ago, when I was a youngster, it used to think nothing of snowing for a week or a fortnight off hand.”

"Ah!" said another old man, shaking his head. "Snow now isn't like the snow as used to be. It's not so white, I know, for one thing—"

"Mayhap, daddy, your eyes arn't so good?" said a good-looking young man who was the very picture of health and strength.

"I can tell you," said the old man, with an air of indignation, "that in my days—that's my young days, everything was different, snow and all."

"You may say that," remarked another. "When now shall we ever hear of a storm, such as that happened only ten years ago, and a matter of three months or thereby—eh?"

"You mean the time when Savage Britton had part of his old Smithy burnt?"

"The fire wasn't near his Smithy," said the old man; "I saw it, and I saw the mad fellow rush out with the child too."

"We shall never know the rights of that business," remarked another, "and since Frank Hartleton has gone to London, there's no chance neither."

"And you know who has shut himself up more than ever since."

"The savage?"

"No—not he—some one else."

"The squire?" said the young farmer.

"I mention no names," said the old man, "mind I didn't say the squire shuts himself up. Did I, Tom?"

"Not at all," replied Tom. "Any ale wanted? Keep the pot a *bilin*."

"And if you did say the squire shuts himself up," cried the young farmer, "what then? We all know he shuts himself up,

and room after room has been locked up, in Learmont house, till it's a misery to look at the dirty windows."

"That may be," said the old man, "but mind I didn't say so. Is it snowing still, Tom?"

"I believe ye," cried Tom, pulling aside a little bit of red baize that hung by the window, as fast as ever. "It *is* a coming now."

And so it was, for the large flakes of snow fell against the window with faint blows, and as far as the eye could reach was one uninterrupted field of pure white which lent an unnatural colour to the night.

"I think we may venture to remark," said a little man who had hitherto sat silent in a corner next the fire-place, "that there won't be many out to-night that have got a chimney-corner to crawl to."

"That's uncommonly true," replied several in a breath. "Hark!" cried the young farmer, "there's the clank of Britton's hammer."

"Aye, aye," said the old man, who was so careful of speech. "In the worst weather he works hardest. I hear it—I hear it—and, friends, mind, I say nothing, but where does his work come from and when is it done, where does it go to—eh?"

"That's the thing!" cried several. "You've hit the right nail on the head."

"Mind, I said nothing—nothing at all," cried the old man, resuming his pipe, with a self-satisfied air.

"I'll say something, though," cried the young farmer, "my opinion is, that he forges chains fer old Nick, and some day you'll hear—"

Several heavy blows upon the outer door of the ale house, which was closed to keep out the snow, stopped the young farmer in his speech and attracted the attention of the whole company.

“Who’s that?” said one, looking round him. “We are all here.”

“House! House!” cried a deep hoarse voice, from without, and the blows on the door continued.

“Tom! Tom!” screamed the landlady, Mrs. Fairclaw, who was a buxom widow, fat, fair, and fifty, “Tom! You idle vagabond! Don’t you hear! There’s some one knocking—if it’s a tramper, tell him this is no house for him.”

Tom, with a knowing wink, proceeded to the door, and, in a few moments ushered into the warm parlour a tall man, who was so covered with snow, that it was difficult to make out what rank in life his appearance indicated.

He cast a hurried and uneasy glance round him, as he entered the parlour, and then taking a chair in silence, he turned to Tom, and said in a tremulous voice, “Brandy, if you please.”

“Shall I take your hat and dry it by the kitchen fire?” said Tom.

“No,” replied the stranger. “I—I must not stay long.” So saying he turned his chair, so as to leave his face very much in the shade, and sat perfectly silent.

“A rough night, sir,” remarked the young farmer.

“Eh?—yes remarkably fine,” replied the stranger.

“Fine?”

“Oh—the—the—snow you mean. Yes, very rough—very rough, indeed—I beg your pardon.”

The company looked very eagerly at each other, and then at the abstracted stranger in great wonderment and intense curiosity.

Tom now entered with the brandy. The stranger eagerly clutched the little pewter measure in which it was brought and toss'd off its contents at once. Then he drew a long breath, and turning to Tom, he said:—

“Stay—I—I want to know—”

“What?” said Tom, as the man paused a moment.

“Is—Andrew Britton—still—alive?”

“Yes,” said Tom.

“And does he,” continued the man, “does he still live at the old place?”

“The old Smithy?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, yes; he lives there still.”

“And—and is the squire—alive—”

“Ah! To be sure.”

“The smith,” said the young farmer, “still lives, sir, in his old place, part of which was burnt down ten years ago, or more.”

“Ten years!” murmured the stranger.

“Yes; the night there was a storm—”

The stranger rose, saying—

“Indeed! You talk of a storm as if there never had been but one.”

So saying he threw down a shilling to Tom, and hastily left the room.

The occupants of the parlour looked at each other in silence, and those who had pipes smoked away at such

speed that in a few moments the room was full of dense blue vapour.