

FICTION

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**The
Moonshiners At
Hoho-Hebee
Falls**



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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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THE MOONSHINERS AT HOHO- HEBEE FALLS

By Charles Egbert Craddock

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I

If the mission of the little school-house in Holly Cove was to impress upon the youthful mind a comprehension and appreciation of the eternal verities of nature, its site could hardly have been better chosen. All along the eastern horizon deployed the endless files of the Great Smoky Mountains--blue and sunlit, with now and again the apparition of an unfamiliar peak, hovering like a straggler in the far-distant rear, and made visible for the nonce by some exceptional clarification of the atmosphere; or lowering, gray, stern; or with ranks of clouds hanging on their flanks, while all the artillery of heaven whirled about them, and the whole world quaked beneath the flash and roar of its volleys. The seasons successively painted the great landscape--spring, with its timorous touch, its illumined haze, its tender, tentative green and gray and yellow; summer, with its flush of completion, its deep, luscious, definite verdure, and the golden richness of fruition; autumn, with a full brush and all chromatic splendors; winter, in melancholy sepia tones, black and brown and many sad variations of the pallors of white. So high was the little structure on the side of a transverse ridge that it commanded a vast field of sky above the wooded ranges; and in the immediate foreground, down between the slopes which were cleft to the heart, was the river, resplendent with the reflected moods of the heavens. In this deep gorge the winds and the pines chanted like a Greek chorus; the waves continuously murmured an intricate rune, as if conning it by frequent repetition; a bird would call out from the upper air some joyous apothegm in a language which no creature of the earth has learned enough of happiness to translate.

But the precepts which prevailed in the little school-house were to the effect that rivers, except as they flowed as they listed to confusing points of the compass, rising among names difficult to remember, and emptying into the least anticipated body of water, were chiefly to be avoided for their proclivity to drown small boys intent on swimming or angling. Mountains, aside from the desirability of their recognition as forming one of the divisions of land somewhat easily distinguishable by the more erudite youth from plains, valleys, and capes, were full of crags and chasms, rattlesnakes and vegetable poisons, and a further familiarity with them was liable to result in the total loss of the adventurous--to see friends, family, and home no more.

These dicta, promulgated from the professorial chair, served to keep the small body of callow humanity, with whose instruction Abner Sage was intrusted by the State, well within call and out of harm's way during the short recesses, while under his guidance they toddled along the rough road that leads up the steeps to knowledge. But one there was who either bore a charmed life or possessed an unequalled craft in successfully defying danger; who fished and swam with impunity; who was ragged and torn from much climbing of crags; whose freckled face bore frequent red tokens of an indiscriminate sampling of berries. It is too much to say that Abner Sage would have been glad to have his warnings made terrible by some bodily disaster to the juvenile dare-devil of the school, but Leander Yerby's disobedient incredulity as to the terrors that menaced him, and his triumphant immunity, fostered a certain grudge against him. Covert though it was, unrecognized even by Sage himself, it was very definitely apparent to Tyler Sudley when sometimes, often, indeed, on his way home from hunting, he would pause at the school-house window, pulling open the shutter from the outside, and gravely watch his protege, who stood spelling at the head of the class.

For Leander Yerby's exploits were not altogether those of a physical prowess. He was a mighty wrestler with the multiplication table. He had met and overthrown the nine line in single-handed combat. He had attained unto some interesting knowledge of the earth on which he lived, and could fluently bound countries with neatness and precision, and was on terms of intimacy with sundry seas, volcanoes, islands, and other sizable objects. The glib certainty of his contemptuous familiarity with the alphabet and its untoward combinations, as he flung off words in four syllables in his impudent chirping treble, seemed something uncanny, almost appalling, to Tyler Sudley, who could not have done the like to save his stalwart life. He would stare dumfounded at the erudite personage at the head of the class; Leander's bare feet were always carefully adjusted to a crack between the puncheons of the floor, literally "toeing the mark"; his broad trousers, frayed out liberally at the hem, revealed his skinny and scarred little ankles, for his out-door adventures were not without a record upon the more impressionable portions of his anatomy; his waistband was drawn high up under his shoulder-blades and his ribs, and girt over the shoulders of his unbleached cotton shirt by braces, which all his learning did not prevent him from calling "galluses"; his cut, scratched, calloused hands were held stiffly down at the side seams in his nether garments in strict accordance with the regulations. But rules could not control the twinkle in his big blue eyes, the mingled effrontery and affection on his freckled face as he perceived the on-looking visitor, nor hinder the wink, the swiftly thrust-out tongue, as swiftly withdrawn, the egregious display of two rows of dishevelled jagged squirrel teeth, when once more, with an offhand toss of his tangled brown hair, he nimbly spelled a long twisted-tailed word, and leered capably at the grave intent face framed in the window. "Why, Abner!" Tyler Sudley would break out, addressing the teacher, all unmindful of scholastic etiquette, a flush of pleasure rising to his swarthy cheek as he thrust back his wide black hat on his long dark hair and turned his candid gray eyes, all aglow, upon the cadaverous, ascetic preceptor, "ain't Lee-yander a-gittin' on powerful, *powerful* fas' with his book?"

"Not in enny ways so special," Sage would reply in cavalier discouragement, his disaffected gaze resting upon the champion scholar, who stood elated, confident, needing no commendation to assure him of his pre-eminence; "but he air disobejient, an' turr'ble, turr'ble bad."

The nonchalance with which Leander Yerby hearkened to this criticism intimated a persuasion that there were many obedient people in this world, but few who could so disport themselves in the intricacies of the English language; and Sudley, as he plodded homeward with his rifle on his shoulder, his dog running on in advance, and Leander pattering along behind, was often moved to add the weight of his admonition to the teacher's reproof.

"Lee-yander," he would gently drawl, "ye mustn't be so bad, honey; ye *mustn't* be so turr'ble bad."

"Naw, ma'am, I won't," Leander would cheerily pipe out, and so the procession would wend its way along.

For he still confused the gender in titles of respect, and from force of habit he continued to do so in addressing Tyler Sudley for many a year after he had learned better.

These lapses were pathetic rather than ridiculous in the hunter's ears. It was he who had taught Leander every observance of verbal humility toward his wife, in the forlorn hope of propitiating her in the interest of the child, who, however, with his quick understanding that the words sought to do honor and express respect, had of his own accord transferred them to his one true friend in the household. The only friend he had in the world, Sudley often felt, with a sigh over the happy child's forlorn estate. And, with the morbid sensitiveness peculiar to a tender conscience, he winced under the knowledge that it was he who, through wrong-headedness or wrongheartedness, had contrived to make all the world besides the boy's enemy. Both wrongheaded and wronghearted he was, he sometimes told himself. For even now it still seemed to him that he had not judged amiss, that only the perversity of fate had thwarted him. Was

it so fantastically improbable, so hopeless a solace that he had planned, that he should have thought his wife might take comfort for the death of their own child in making for its sake a home for another, orphaned, forlorn, a burden, and a glad riddance to those into whose grudging charge it had been thrown? This bounty of hope and affection and comfort had seemed to him a free gift from the dead baby's hands, who had no need of it since coming into its infinite heritage of immortality, to the living waif, to whom it was like life itself, since it held all the essential values of existence. The idea smote him like an inspiration. He had ridden twenty miles in a snowy night to beg the unwelcome mite from the custody of its father's half-brothers, who were on the eve of moving to a neighboring county with all their kin and belongings.

Tyler Sudley was a slow man, and tenacious of impressions. He could remember every detail of the events as they had happened--the palpable surprise, the moment of hesitation, the feint of denial which successively ensued on his arrival. It mattered not what the season or the hour--he could behold at will the wintry dawn, the deserted cabin, the glow of embers dying on the hearth within; the white-covered wagon slowly a-creak along the frozen road beneath the gaunt, bare, overhanging trees, the pots and pans as they swung at the rear, the bucket for water swaying beneath, the mounted men beside it, the few head of swine and cattle driven before them. Years had passed, but he could feel anew the vague stir of the living bundle which he held on the pommel of his saddle, the sudden twist it gave to bring its inquiring, apprehensive eyes, so large in its thin, lank-jawed, piteous little countenance, to bear on his face, as if it understood its transfer of custody, and trembled lest a worse thing befall it. One of the women stopped the wagon and ran back to pin about its neck an additional wrapping, an old red-flannel petticoat, lest it should suffer in its long, cold ride. His heart glowed with vicarious gratitude for her forethought, and he shook her hand warmly and wished her well, and hoped that she might prosper in her new home, and stood still to watch the white wagon out of sight in the avenue of the snow-laden trees, above which the moon was visible, a-journeying too, swinging down the western sky.

Laurelia Sudley sat in stunned amazement when, half-frozen, but triumphant and flushed and full of his story, he burst into the warm home atmosphere, and put the animated bundle down upon the hearth-stone in front of the glowing fire. For one moment she met its forlorn gaze out of its peaked and pinched little face with a vague hesitation in her own worn, tremulous, sorrow-stricken eyes. Then she burst into a tumult of tears, upbraiding her husband that he could think that another child could take the place of her dead child--all the dearer because it was dead; that she could play the traitor to its memory and forget her sacred grief; that she could do aught as long as she should live but sit her down to bewail her loss, every tear a tribute, every pang its inalienable right, her whole smitten existence a testimony to her love. It was in vain that he expostulated. The idea of substitution had never entered his mind. But he was ignorant, and clumsy of speech, and unaccustomed to analyze his motives. He could not put into words his feeling that to do for the welfare of this orphaned and unwelcome little creature all that they would have done for their own was in some sort a memorial to him, and brought them nearer to him--that she might find in it a satisfaction, an occupation--that it might serve to fill her empty life, her empty arms.

But no! She thought, and the neighbors thought, and after a time Tyler Sudley came to think also, that he had failed in the essential duty to the dead--that of affectionate remembrance; that he was recreant, strangely callous. They all said that he had seemed to esteem one baby as good as another, and that he was surprised that his wife was not consoled for the loss of her own child because he took it into his head to go and toll off the Yerby baby from his father's half-brothers "ez war movin' away an' war glad enough ter get rid o' one head o' human stock ter kerry, though, *bein human*, they oughter been ashamed ter gin him away like a puppy-dog, or an extry cat, all hands consarned."

From the standpoint she had taken Laurelia had never wavered. It was an added and a continual reproach to her husband that all the labor and care of the ill-advised acquisition fell to her share. She it was who must feed and clothe and tend the gaunt little usurper; he needs must be accorded all the infantile prerogatives, and he exacted much time and attention. Despite the grudging spirit in which her care was given she failed in no essential, and presently the interloper was no longer gaunt or pallid or apprehensive, but grew pink and cherubic of build, and arrogant of mind. He had no sensitive sub-current of suspicion as to his welcome; he filled the house with his gay babbling, and if no maternal chirpings encouraged the development of his ideas and his powers of speech, his cheerful spirits seemed strong enough to thrive on their own stalwart endowments. His hair began to curl, and a neighbor, remarking on it to Laurelia, and forgetting for the moment his parentage, said, in admiring glee, twining the soft tendrils over her finger, that Mrs. Sudley had never before had a child so well-favored as this one. From this time forth was infused a certain rancor into his foster-mother's spirit toward him. Her sense of martyrdom was complete when another infant was born and died, leaving her bereaved once more to watch this stranger grow up in her house, strong and hearty, and handsomer than any child of hers had been.

The mountain gossips had their own estimate of her attitude.

"I ain't denyin' but what she hed nat'ral feelin' fur her own chil'ren, bein' dead," said the dame who had made the unfortunate remark about the curling hair, "but Laurelia Sudley war always a contrary-minded, lackadaisical kind o' gal afore she war married, sorter set in opposition, an' now ez she ain't purty like she useter was, through cryin' her eyes out, an' gittin' sallow-complected an' bony, I kin notice her contrariousness more. Ef Tyler hedn't brung that chile home, like ez not she'd hev sot her heart on borryin' one herself from somebody. Lee-yander ain't in nowise abused, ez I kin

see--ain't acquainted with the rod, like the Bible say he oughter be, an' ennybody kin see ez Laurelia don't like the name he gin her, yit she puts up with it. She larnt him ter call Ty 'Cap'n,' bein' she's sorter proud of it, 'kase Ty war a cap'n of a critter company in the war: 'twarn't sech a mighty matter nohow; he jes got ter be cap'n through the other officers bein' killed off. An' the leetle boy got it twisted somehow, an' calls *her* 'Cap'n 'an' Ty 'Neighbor,' from hearin' old man Jeemes, ez comes in constant, givin' him that old-fashioned name. 'Cap'n' 'bout fits Laurelia, though, an' that's a fac'."

Laurelia's melancholy ascendancy in the household was very complete. It was characterized by no turbulence, no rages, no long-drawn argument or objurgation; it expressed itself only in a settled spirit of disaffection, a pervasive suggestion of martyrdom, silence or sighs, or sometimes a depressing singing of hymn tunes. For her husband had long ago ceased to remonstrate, or to seek to justify himself. It was with a spirit of making amends that he hastened to concede every point of question, to defer to her preference in all matters, and Lauretta's sway grew more and more absolute as the years wore on. Leander Yerby could remember no other surroundings than the ascetic atmosphere of his home. It had done naught apparently to quell the innate cheerfulness of his spirit. He evidently took note, however, of the different standpoint of the "Captain" and his "Neighbor," for although he was instant in the little manifestations of respect toward her which he had been taught, his childish craft could not conceal their spuriousness.

"That thar boy treats me ez ef I war a plumb idjit," Laurelia said one day, moved to her infrequent anger. "Tells me, 'Yes, ma'am, cap'n,' an' 'Naw, ma'am, cap'n,' jes ter quiet me--like folks useter do ter old Ed'ard Green, ez war in his dotage--an' then goes along an' does the very thing I tell him not ter do."

Sudley looked up as he sat smoking his pipe by the fire, a shade of constraint in his manner, and a contraction of anxiety in his slow, dark eyes, never quite absent when she spoke to him aside of Leander.

She paused, setting her gaunt arms akimbo, and wearing the manner of one whose kindly patience is beyond limit abused. "Kems in hyar, he do, a'totin' a fiddle. An' I says, 'Lee-yander Yerby, don't ye know that thar thing's the devil's snare?' 'N'aw, ma'am, cap'n,' he says, grinnin' like a imp; 'it's *my* snare, fur I hev bought it from Peter Teazely fur two rabbits what I cotch in my trap, an' my big red rooster, an' a bag o' seed pop-corn, an' the only hat I hev got in the worl'. An' with that the consarn gin sech a yawp, it plumb went through my haid, An' then the critter jes tuk ter a-bowin' it back an' forth, a-playin' 'The Chicken in the Bread-trough' like demented, a-dancin' off on fust one foot an' then on t'other till the puncheons shuck. An' I druv him out the house. I won't stan' none o' Satan's devices hyar! I tole him he couldn't fetch that fiddle hyar whenst he kems home ter-night, an' I be a-goin' ter make him a sun-bonnet or a nightcap ter wear stiddier his hat that he traded off."

She paused.

Her husband had risen, the glow of his pipe fading in his unheeding hand, his excited eyes fixed upon her. "Laurely," he exclaimed, "ye ain't meanin' ez that thar leetle critter could play a chune fust off on a fiddle 'thout no larnin'!"

She nodded her head in reluctant admission.

He opened his mouth once or twice, emitting no sound. She saw how his elation, his spirit of commendation, his pride, set at naught her displeasure, albeit in self-defence, perchance, he dared not say a word. With an eye alight and an absorbed face, he laid his pipe on the mantel-piece, and silently took his way out of the house in search of the youthful musician.

Easily found! The racked and tortured echoes were all aquake within half a mile of the spot where, bareheaded, heedless of the threatened ignominy alike of sun-bonnet or nightcap, Leander sat in the flickering sunshine and shadow upon a rock beside the spring, and blissfully experimented with all the capacities of catgut to produce sound.

"Listen, Neighbor!" he cried out, descreying Tyler Sudley, who, indeed, could do naught else--"*listen!* Ye won't hear much better fiddlin' this side o' kingdom come!" And with glad assurance he capered up and down, the bow elongating the sound to a cadence of frenzied glee, as his arms sought to accommodate the nimbler motions of his legs.

Thus it was the mountaineers later said that Leander fell into bad company. For, the fiddle being forbidden in the sober Laurelia's house, he must needs go elsewhere to show his gift and his growing skill, and he found a welcome fast enough. Before he had advanced beyond his stripling youth, his untutored facility had gained a rude mastery over the instrument; he played with a sort of fascination and spontaneity that endeared his art to his uncritical audiences, and his endowment was held as something wonderful. And now it was that Laurelia, hearing him, far away in the open air, play once a plaintive, melodic strain, fugue-like with the elfin echoes, felt a strange soothing in the sound, found tears in her eyes, not all of pain but of sad pleasure, and assumed thenceforth something of the port of a connoisseur. She said she "couldn't abide a fiddle jes sawed helter-skelter by them ez hedn't larned, but ter play saaft an' slow an' solemn, and no dancin' chune, no frolic song--she warn't set agin that at all." And she desired of Leander a repetition of this sunset motive that evening when he had come home late, and she discovered him hiding the obnoxious instrument under the porch. But in vain. He did not remember it. It was some vague impulse, as unconsciously voiced as the dreaming bird's song in the sudden half-awake intervals of the night. Over and again, as he stood by the porch, the violin in his arms, he touched the strings tentatively, as if, perchance, being so alive, they might of their own motion recall the strain that had so lately thrilled along them:

He had grown tall and slender. He wore boots to his knees now, and proudly carried a "shoot-in'-iron" in one of the long legs--to his great discomfort. The freckles of his early days were merged into the warm uniform tint of his tanned complexion. His brown hair still curled; his shirt-collar fell away from his throat, round and full and white--the singer's throat--as he threw his head backward and cast his large roving eyes searchingly along the sky, as if the missing strain had wings.

The inspiration returned no more, and Laurelia experienced a sense of loss. "Some time, Lee-yander, ef ye war ter kem acrost that chune agin, try ter set it in yer remembrance, an' play it whenst ye kem home," she said, wistfully, at last, as if this errant melody were afloat somewhere in the vague realms of sound, where one native to those haunts might hope to encounter it anew.

"Yes, ma'am, cap'n, I will," he said, with his facile assent. But his tone expressed slight intention, and his indifference bespoke a too great wealth of "chunes"; he could feel no lack in some unremembered combination, sport of the moment, when another strain would come at will, as sweet perchance, and new.

She winced as from undeserved reproach when presently Leander's proclivities for the society of the gay young blades about the countryside, sometimes reputed "evil men," were attributed to this exile of the violin from the hearthstone. She roused herself to disputation, to indignant repudiation.

"They talk ez ef it war *me* ez led the drinkin', an' the gamin', an' the dancing and sech, ez goes on in the Cove, 'kase whenst Lee-yander war about fryin' size I wouldn't abide ter hev him a-sawin' away on the fiddle in the house enough ter make me deaf fur life. At fust the racket of it even skeered Towse so he wouldn't come out from under the house fur two days an' better; he jes sot under thar an' growled, an' shivered, an' showed his teeth ef enny-body spoke ter him. Nobody don't like Lee-yan-der's performin' better'n I do whenst he plays them saaft, slippin'-away, slow medjures, ez sound plumb religious--ef 'twarn't a sin ter say so. Naw, sir, ef ennybody hev sot Lee-yander on ter evil ways 'twarn't me. My conscience be clear."

Nevertheless she was grievously ill at ease when one day there rode up to the fence a tall, gaunt, ill-favored man, whose long, lean, sallow countenance, of a Pharisaic cast, was vaguely familiar to her, as one recognizes real lineaments in the contortions of a caricature or the bewilderments of a dream. She felt as if in some long-previous existence she had seen this man as he dismounted at the gate and came up the path with his saddle-bags over his arm. But it was not until he mustered an unready, unwilling smile, that had of good-will and geniality so slight an intimation that it was like a spasmodic grimace, did she perceive how time had deepened tendencies to traits, how the inmost thought and the secret sentiment had been chiselled into the face in the betrayals of the sculpture of fifteen years.

"Nehemiah Yerby!" she exclaimed. "I would hev knowed ye in the happy land o' Canaan."

"Let's pray we may all meet thar, Sister Sudley," he responded. "Let's pray that the good time may find none of us unprofitable servants."

Mrs. Sudley experienced a sudden recoil. Not that she did not echo his wish, but somehow his manner savored of an exclusive arrogation of piety and a suggestion of reproach.

"That's my prayer," she retorted, aggressively. "Day an' night, that's my prayer."

"Yes'm, fur us an' our households, Sister Sudley--we mus' think o' them c'mitted ter our charge."

She strove to fling off the sense of guilt that oppressed her, the mental attitude of arraignment. He was a young man when he journeyed away in that snowy dawn. She did not know what changes had come in his experience. Perchance his effervescent piety was only a habit of speech, and had no significance as far as she was concerned. The suspicion, however, tamed her in some sort. She attempted no retort. With a mechanical, reluctant smile, ill adjusted to her sorrow-lined face, she made an effort to assume that the greeting had been but the conventional phrasings of the day. "Kem in, kem in, Nehemiah; Tyler will be glad ter see ye, an' I reckon ye will be powerful interested ter view how Lee-yander hev growed an' prospered."

She felt as if she were in some terrible dream as she beheld him slowly wag his head from side to side. He had followed her into the large main room of the cabin, and had laid his saddle-bags down by the side of the chair in which he had seated himself, his elbows on his knees, his hands held out to the flickering blaze in the deep chimney-place, his eyes significantly narrowing as he gazed upon it.

"Naw, Sister Sudley," he wagged his head more mournfully still. "I kin but grieve ter hear how my nevy Lee-yander hev 'prospered,' ez ye call it, an' I be s'prised ye should gin it such a name. Oh-h-h, Sister Sudley!" in prolonged and dreary vocative, "I 'lowed ye war a godly woman. I knowed yer name 'mongst the church-goers an' the church-members." A faint flush sprang into her delicate faded cheek; a halo encircled this repute of sanctity; she felt with quivering premonition that it was about to be urged as a testimony against her. "Elsewise I wouldn't hev gin my cornsent ter hev lef the leetle lam', Lee-yander, in yer fold. Precious, precious leetle lam'!"

Poor Laurelia! Were it not that she had a sense of fault under the scathing arraignment of her motives, her work, and its result, although she scarcely saw how she was to blame, that she had equally with him esteemed Leander's standpoint iniquitous, she might have made a better fight in her own interest. Why she did not renounce the true

culprit as one on whom all godly teachings were wasted, and, adopting the indisputable vantage-ground of heredity, carry the war into the enemy's country, ascribing Leander's shortcomings to his Yerby blood, and with stern and superior joy proclaiming that he was neither kith nor kin of hers, she wondered afterward, for this valid ground of defence did not occur to her then. In these long mourning years she had grown dull; her mental processes were either a sad introspection or reminiscence. Now she could only take into account her sacrifices of feeling, of time, of care; the illnesses she had nursed, the garments that she had made and mended--ah, how many! laid votive on the altar of Leander's vigor and his agility, for as he scrambled about the crags he seemed, she was wont to say, to climb straight out of them. The recollection of all this--the lesser and unspiritual maternal values, perchance, but essential--surged over her with bitterness; she lost her poise, and fell a-bickering.

"Precious leetle lam'," she repeated, scornfully. "Precious he mus' hev been! Fur when ye lef him he hedn't a whole gyamint ter his back, an' none but them that kivered him."

Nehemiah Yerby changed color slightly as the taunt struck home, but he was skilled in the more aesthetic methods of argument.

"We war pore--mighty pore indeed, Sister Sudley."

Now, consciously in the wrong, Sister Sudley, with true feminine inconsistency, felt better. She retorted with bravado.

"Needle an' thread ain't 'spensive nowhar ez I knows on, an' the gov'mint hev sot no tax on saaft home-made soap, so far ez heam from."

She briskly placed her chair, a rude rocker, the seat formed of a taut-stretched piece of ox-hide, beside the fire, and took up her knitting. A sock for Leander it was--one of many of all sizes. She remembered the first that she had measured for the bare pink toes which he had brought there, forlorn candidates for the comfortable integuments in which they were presently encased, and how she had morbidly felt that every stitch she took was a renunciation of her own children, since a stranger was honored in their place. The tears came into her eyes. It was only this afternoon that she had experienced a pang of self-reproach to realize how near happiness she was--as near as her temperament could approach. But somehow the air was so soft; she could see from where she sat how the white velvet buds of the aspen-trees in the dooryard had lengthened into long, cream-tinted, furry tassels; the maples on the mountain-side lifted their red flowering boughs against the delicate blue sky; the grass was so green; the golden candlesticks bunched along the margin of the path to the rickety gate were all a-blossoming. The sweet appeal of spring had never been more insistent, more coercive. Somehow peace, and a placid content, seemed as essential incidents in the inner life as the growth of the grass anew, the bursting of the bud, or the soft awakening of the zephyr. Even within the house, the languors of the fire drowsing on the hearth, the broad bar of sunshine across the puncheon floor, so slowly creeping away, the sense of the vernal lengthening of the pensive afternoon, the ever-flitting shadow of the wren building under the eaves, and its iterative gladsome song breaking the fireside stillness, partook of the serene beatitude of the season and the hour. The visitor's drawling voice rose again, and she was not now constrained to reproach herself that she was too happy.

"Yes'm, pore though we war then--an' we couldn't look forward ter the Lord's prosperin' us some sence--we never would hev lef the precious leetle lam"--his voice dwelt with unvanquished emphasis upon the obnoxious words--"mongst enny but them persumed ter be godly folks. Tyler war a toler'ble good soldier in the war, an' hed a good name in the church, but ye war persumed to be a plumb special Christian with no pledjure in this worl'."

Laurelia winced anew. This repute of special sanctity was the pride of her ascetic soul. Few of the graces of life or of the spirit had she coveted, but her pre-eminence as a religionist she had fostered and cherished, and now through her own deeds of charity it seemed about to be wrested from her.

"Lee-yander Yerby hev larnt nuthin' but good in this house, an' all my neighbors will tell you the same word. The Cove 'lows I hev been *too* strict."

Nehemiah was glancing composedly about the room. "That thar 'pears ter be a fiddle on the wall, ain't it, Mis' Sudley?" he said, with an incidental air and the manner of changing the subject.

Alack, for the aesthetic perversion! Since the playing of those melancholy minor strains in that red sunset so long ago, which had touched so responsive a chord in Laurelia's grief-worn heart, the crazy old fiddle had been naturalized, as it were, and had exchanged its domicile under the porch for a position on the wall. It was boldly visible, and apparently no more ashamed of itself than was the big earthen jar half full of cream, which was placed close to the fireplace on the hearth in the hope that its contents might become sour enough by to-morrow to be churned.

Laurelia looked up with a start at the instrument, red and lustrous against the brown log wall, its bow poised jauntily above it, and some glistening yellow reflection from the sun on the floor playing among the strings, elusive, soundless fantasies.

Her lower jaw dropped. She was driven to her last defences, and sore beset. "It air a fiddle," she said, slowly, at last, and with an air of conscientious admission, as if she had had half a mind to deny it. "A fiddle the thing air." Then, as she collected her thoughts, "Brother Pete Vickers 'lows ez he sees no special sin in playin' the fiddle. He 'lows ez in some kentries--I disremember whar--they plays on 'em in church, quirin' an' hymn chunes an' sech."

Her voice faltered a little; she had never thought to quote this fantasy in her own defence, for she secretly believed that old man Vickers must have been humbugged by some worldly brother skilled in drawing the long bow himself.

Nehemiah Yerby seemed specially endowed with a conscience for the guidance of other people, so quick was he to descry and pounce upon their shortcomings. If one's sins are sure to find one out, there is little doubt but that Brother Nehemiah would be on the ground first.

"Air you-uns a-settin' under the preachin' o' Brother Peter Vickers?" he demanded in a sepulchral voice.

"Naw, naw," she was glad to reply. "'Twar onderstood ez Brother Vickers wanted a call ter the church in the Cove, bein' ez his relations live hyar-about, an' he kem up an' preached a time or two. But he didn't git no call. The brethren 'lowed Brother Vickers war too slack in his idees o' religion. Some said his hell warn't half hot enough. Thar air some powerful sinners in the Cove, an' nuthin' but good live coals an' a liquid blazin' fire air a-goin' ter deter them from the evil o' thar ways. So Brother Vickers went back the road he kem."

She knit off her needle while, with his head still bent forward, Nehemiah Yerby sourly eyed her, feeling himself a loser with Brother Vickers, in that he did not have the reverend man's incumbency as a grievance.

"He 'pears ter me ter see mo' pleasure in religion 'n penance, ennyhow," he observed, bitterly. "An' the Lord knows the bes' of us air sinners."

"An' he laughs loud an' frequent--mightily like a sinner," she agreed. "An' whenst he prays, he prays loud an' hearty, like he jes expected ter git what he axed fur sure's shootin'! Some o' the breth-erin' sorter taxed him with his sperits, an' he 'lowed he couldn't holp but be cheerful whenst he hed the Lord's word fur it ez all things work tergether fur good. An' he luffed same ez ef they hedn't spoke ter him serious."

"Look at that, now!" exclaimed Nehemiah. "An' that thar man ez good ez dead with the heart-disease."

Laurelia's eyes were suddenly arrested by his keen, pinched, lined face. What there was in it to admonish her she could hardly have said, nor how it served to tutor her innocent craft.

"I ain't so sure 'bout Brother Vickers bein' so wrong," she said, slowly. "He 'lowed ter me ez I hed spent too much o' my life a-sorrowin', 'stiddier a-praisin' the Lord for his mercies." Her face twitched suddenly; she could not yet look upon her bereavements as mercies. "He 'lowed I would hev been a happier an' a better 'oman ef I hed took the evil ez good from the Lord's hand, fur in his sendin' it's the same. An' I know that air a true word. An' that's what makes me 'low what he said war true 'bout'n that fiddle; that I ought never ter hev pervented the boy from playin' 'round home an' sech, an' 'twarn't no sin but powerful comfortable an' pleasurable ter set roun' of a cold winter night an' hear him play them slow, sweet, dyin'-away chunes--" She dropped her hands, and gazed with the rapt eyes of remembrance through the window at the sunset clouds which, gathering red and purple and gold on the mountain's brow, were reflected roseate and amethyst and amber at the mountain's base on the steely surface of the river. "Brother Vickers 'lowed he never hearn sech in all his life. It brung the tears ter his eyes--it surely did."

"He'd a heap better be weepin' fur them black sheep o' his congregation an' fur Lee-yander's short-comin's, fur ez fur ez I kin hear he air about ez black a sheep ez most pastors want ter wrestle with fur the turmin' away from thar sins. Yes'm, Sister Sudley, that's jes what p'inted out my jewty plain afore my eyes, an' I riz up an' kem ter be instant in a-do-in' of it. 'I'll not leave my own nevy in the tents o' sin,' I sez. 'I hev chil'in o' my own, hearty feeders an' hard on shoe-leather, ter support, but I'll not grudge my brother's son a home.' Yes, Laurely Sudley, I hev kem ter kerry him back with me. Yer jewty ain't been done by him, an' I'll leave him a dweller in the tents o' sin no longer."

His enthusiasm had carried him too far. Lau-relia's face, which at first seemed turning to stone as she gradually apprehended his meaning and his mission, changed from motionless white to a tremulous scarlet while he spoke, and when he ceased she retorted herself as one of the ungodly.

"Ye mus' be mighty ambitious ter kerry away a skin full o' broken bones! Jes let Tyler Sudley hear ez ye called his house the tents o' the ungodly, an' that ye kem hyar a-faultin' me, an' tellin' me ez I 'ain't done my jewty ennywhar or ennyhow!" she exclaimed, with a pride which, as a pious saint, she had never expected to feel in her husband's reputation as a high-tempered man and a "mighty handy fighter," and with implicit reliance upon both endowments in her quarrel.

"Only in a speritchual sense, Sister Sudley," Nehemiah gasped, as he made haste to qualify his asseveration. "I only charge you with havin' sp'iled the boy; ye hev sp'iled him through kindness ter him, an' not ye so much ez Ty. Ty never hed so much ez a dog that would mind him! His dog wouldn't answer call nor whistle 'thout he war so disposed. I never faulted ye, Sister Sudley; 'twar jes Ty I faulted. I know Ty."

He knew, too, that it was safer to call Ty and his doings in question, big and formidable and belligerent though he was, than his meek-mannered, melancholy, forlorn, and diminutive wife. Nehemiah rose up and walked back and forth for a moment with an excited face and a bent back, and a sort of rabbit-like action. "Now, I put it to you, Sister Sudley, air Ty a-makin' that thar boy plough terday?--jes *be-you-ti-ful* field weather!"

Sister Sudley, victorious, having regained her normal position by one single natural impulse of self-assertion, not as a religionist, but as Tyler Sud-ley's wife, and hence entitled to all the show of respect which that fact unaided could

command, sat looking at him with a changed face--a face that seemed twenty years younger; it had the expression it wore before it had grown pinched and ascetic and insistently sorrowful; one might guess how she had looked when Tyler Sudley first went up the mountain "a-courtin'." She sought to assume no other stand-point. Here she was entrenched. She shook her head in negation. The affair was none of hers. Ty Sudley could take ample care of it.

Nehemiah gave a little skip that might suggest a degree of triumph. "Aha, not ploughin'! But Ty is ploughin', I seen him in the field. An' Lee-yander ain't ploughin'! An' how did I know? Ez I war a-ridin' along through the woods this mornin' I kem acrost a striplin' lad a-walkin' through the undergrowth ez onconsarned ez a killdee an' ez nimble. An' under his chin war a fiddle, an' his head war craned down ter it." He mimicked the attitude as he stood on the hearth. "He never looked up wunst. Away he walked, light ez a plover, an' a-ping, pang, ping, pang," in a high falsetto, "went that fiddle! I war plumb 'shamed fur the critters in the woods ter view sech idle sinfulness, a ole *owel*, a-blinkin' down out'n a hollow tree, kem ter see what *ping, pang, ping, pang* meant, an' thar war a rabbit settin' up on two legs in the bresh, an' a few stray razor-back hawks; I tell ye I war mortified 'fore even sech citizens ez them, an' a lazy, impident-lookin' dog ez followed him."

"How did ye know 'twar Lee-yander?" demanded Mrs. Sudley, recognizing the description perfectly, but after judicial methods requiring strict proof.

"Oh-h! by the fambly favor," protested the gaunt and hard-featured Nehemiah, capably. "I knowed the Yerby eye."

"He hev got his mother's eyes." Mrs. Sudley had certainly changed her stand-point with a vengeance. "He hev got his mother's *be-you-ti-ful blue* eyes and her curling, silken brown hair--sorter red; little Yerby in *that*, mebbe; but sech eyes, an' sech lashes, an' sech fine curling hair ez none o' yer fambly ever hed, or ever will."

"Mebbe so. I never seen him more'n a minit. But he might ez well hev a *be-you-ti-ful* curlin' nose, like the elephint in the show, for all the use he air, or I be afeard air ever likely ter be."

Tyler Sudley's face turned gray, despite his belligerent efficiencies, when his wife, hearing the clank of the ox-yoke as it was flung down in the shed outside, divined the home-coming of the ploughman and his team, and slipped out to the barn with her news. She realized, with a strange enlightenment as to her own mental processes, what angry jealousy the look on his face would have roused in her only so short a time ago--jealousy for the sake of her own children, that any loss, any grief, should be poignant and pierce his heart save for them. Now she was sorry for him; she felt with him.

But as he continued silent, and only stared at her dumfounded and piteous, she grew frightened--she knew not of what.

"Shucks, Ty!" she exclaimed, catching him by the sleeve with the impulse to rouse him, to awaken him, as it were, to his own old familiar identity; "ye ain't 'feared o' that thar snaggle-toothed skeer-crow in yander; he would be plumb comical ef he didn't look so mean-natured an' sech a hyper-crite."

He gazed at her, his eyes eloquent with pain.

"Laurely!" he gasped, "this hyar thing plumb knocks me down; it jes takes the breath o' life out'n me!"

She hesitated for a moment. Any anxiety, any trouble, seemed so incongruous with the sweet spring-tide peace in the air, that one did not readily take it home to heart. Hope was in the atmosphere like an essential element; one might call it oxygen or caloric or vitality, according to the tendency of mind and the habit of speech. But the heart knew it, and the pulses beat strongly responsive to it. Faith ruled the world. Some tiny bulbous thing at her feet that had impeded her step caught her attention. It was coming up from the black earth, and the buried darkness, and the chill winter's torpor, with all the impulses of confidence in the light without, and the warmth of the sun, and the fresh showers that were aggregating in the clouds somewhere for its nurture--a blind inanimate thing like that! But Tyler Sudley felt none of it; the blow had fallen upon him, stunning him. He stood silent, looking gropingly into the purple dusk, veined with silver glintings of the moon, as if he sought to view in the future some event which he dreaded, and yet shrank to see.

She had rarely played the consoler, so heavily had she and all her griefs leaned on his supporting arm. It was powerless now. She perceived this, all dismayed at the responsibility that had fallen upon her. She made an effort to rally his courage. She had more faith in it than in her own.

"'Feard o' *him*!" she exclaimed, with a sharp tonic note of satire. "Kem in an' view him."

"Laurely," he quavered, "I oughter hev got it down in writin' from him; I oughter made him sign papers agreein' fur me ter keep the boy till he growed ter be his own man."

She, too, grew pale. "Ye ain't meanin' ter let him take the boy sure enough!" she gasped.

"I moughtn't be able ter help it; I dun'no' how the law stands. He air kin ter Lee-yander, an' mebbe hev got the bes' right ter him."

She shivered slightly; the dew was falling, and all the budding herbage was glossed with a silver glister. The shadows were sparse. The white branches of the aspens cast only the symmetrical outline of the tree form on the illumined grass, and seemed scarcely less bare than in winter, but on one swaying bough the mocking-bird sang all the

joyous prophecies of the spring to the great silver moon that made his gladsome day so long.

She was quick to notice the sudden cessation of his song, the alert, downward poise of his beautiful head, his tense critical attitude. A mimicking whistle rose on the air, now soft, now keen, with swift changes and intricate successions of tones, ending in a brilliant borrowed roulade, delivered with a wonderful velocity and *elan*. The long tail feathers, all standing stiffly upward, once more drooped; the mocking-bird turned his head from side to side, then lifting his full throat he poured forth again his incomparable, superb, infinitely versatile melody, fixing his glittering eye on the moon, and heeding the futilely ambitious worldling no mote.

The mimicking sound heralded the approach of Leander. Laurelia's heart, full of bitterness for his sake, throbbed tenderly for him. Ah, what was to be his fate! What unkind lot did the future hold for him in the clutches of a man like this! Suddenly she was pitying his mother--her own children, how safe!

She winced to tell him what had happened, but she it was who, bracing her nerves, made the disclosure, for Sudley remained silent, the end of the ox-yoke in his trembling hands, his head bare to the moon and the dew, his face grown lined and old.

Leander stood staring at her out of his moonlit blue eyes, his hat far back on the brown curls she had so vaunted, damp and crisp and clinging, the low limp collar of his unbleached shirt showing his round full throat, one hand resting on the high curb of the well, the other holding a great brown gourd full of the clear water which he had busied himself in securing while she sought to prepare him to hear the worst. His lips, like a bent bow as she thought, were red and still moist as he now and then took the gourd from them, and held it motionless in the interest of her narration, that indeed touched him so nearly. Then, as she made point after point clear to his comprehension, he would once more lift the gourd and drink deeply, for he had had an active day, inducing a keen thirst.



“ HE HAD HAD AN ACTIVE DAY, INDUCING A KEEN THIRST ”

She had been preparing herself for the piteous spectacle of his frantic fright, his futile reliance on them who had always befriended him, his callow forlorn helplessness, his tears, his reproaches; she dreaded them.

He was silent for a reflective moment when she had paused. "But what's he want with me, Cap'n?" he suddenly demanded. "Mought know I warn't industrious in the field, ez he seen me off a-fiddlin' in the woods whilst Neighbor war a-ploughin'."

"Mebbe he 'lows he mought *make* ye industrious an' git cornsider'ble work out'n ye," she faltered, flinching for him.

After another refreshing gulp from the gourd he canvassed this dispassionately. "Say his own chil'n air 'hearty feeders an' hard on shoe-leather?' Takes a good deal o' goadin' ter git ploughin' enough fur the wuth o' feed out'n a toler'ble beastis like old Blaze-face thar, don't it, Neighbor?--an' how is it a-goin' ter be with a human ez mebbe will hold back an' air sot agin plough-in' ennyhow, an' air sorter idle by profession? 'Twould gin him a heap o' trouble--more'n the ploughin' an' sech would be wuth--a heap o' trouble." Once more he bowed his head to the gourd.

"He 'lowed ye shouldn't dwell no mo' in the tents o' sin. He seen the fiddle, Lee; it's all complicated with the fiddle," she quavered, very near tears of vexation.

He lifted a smiling moonlit face; his half-suppressed laugh echoed gurglingly in the gourd. "Cap'n," he said, reassuringly, "jes let's hear Uncle Nehemiah talk some mo', an' ef I can't see no mo' likely work fur me 'n ploughin', I'll think myself mighty safe."

They felt like three conspirators as after supper they drew their chairs around the fire with the unsuspecting Uncle Nehemiah. However, Nehemiah Yerby could hardly be esteemed unsuspecting in any point of view, so full of vigilant craft was his intention in every anticipation, so slyly sanctimonious was his long countenance.

There could hardly have been a greater contrast than Tyler Sudley's aspect presented. His candid face seemed a mirror for his thought; he had had scant experience in deception, and he proved a most unlikely novice in the art. His features were heavy and set; his manner was brooding and depressed; he did not alertly follow the conversation; on the contrary, he seemed oblivious of it as his full dark eyes rested absently on the fire. More than once he passed his hand across them with a troubled, harassed manner, and he sighed heavily. For which his co-conspirators could have fallen upon him. How could he be so dull, so forgetful of all save the fear of separation from the boy whom he had reared, whom he loved as his own son; how could he fail to know that a jaunty, assured mien might best serve his interests until at any rate the blow had fallen; why should he wear the insignia of defeat before the strength of his claim was tested? Assuredly his manner was calculated to greatly reinforce Nehemiah Yerby's confidence, and to assist in eliminating difficulties in the urging of his superior rights and the carrying out of his scheme. Mrs. Sudley's heart sank as she caught a significant gleam from the boy's eyes; he too appreciated this disastrous policy, this virtual surrender before a blow was struck.

"An' Ty ain't afeard o' bars," she silently commented, "nor wolves, nor wind, nor lightning, nor man in enny kind o' a free fight; but bekase he dun'no' how the *law* stands, an' air afeard the law *mought* be able ter take Lee-yander, he jes sets thar ez pitiful ez a lost kid, fairly ready ter blate aloud."

She descried the covert triumph twinkling among the sparse light lashes and "crow-feet" about Nehemiah's eyes as he droned on an ever-lengthening account of his experiences since leaving the county.

"It's a mighty satisfyin' thing ter be well off in yearthly goods an' chattels," said Laurelia, with sudden inspiration. "Ty, thar, is in debt."

For Uncle Nehemiah had been dwelling unctuously upon the extent to which it had pleased the Lord to prosper him. His countenance fell suddenly. His discomfiture in her unexpected disclosure was twofold, in that it furnished a reason for Tyler's evident depression of spirits, demolishing the augury that his manner had afforded as to the success of the guest's mission, and furthermore, to Nehemiah's trafficking soul, it suggested that a money consideration might be exacted to mollify the rigors of parting.

For Nehemiah Yerby had risen to the dignities, solvencies, and responsibilities of opening a store at the cross-roads in Kildeer County. It was a new and darling enterprise with him, and his mind and speech could not long be wiled away from the subject. This abrupt interjection of a new element into his cogitations gave him pause, and he did not observe the sudden rousing of Tyler Sudley from his reverie, and the glance of indignant reproach which he cast on his wife. No man, however meek, or however bowed down with sorrow, will bear unmoved a gratuitous mention of his debts; it seems to wound him with all the rancor of insult, and to enrage him with the hopelessness of adequate retort or reprisal. It is an indignity, like taunting a ghost with cock-crow, or exhorting a clergyman to repentance. He flung himself all at once into the conversation, to bar and baffle any renewed allusion to that subject, and it was accident rather than intention which made him grasp Nehemiah in the vise of a quandary also.

"Ye say ye got a store an' a stock o' truck, Nehemiah. Air ye ekal ter keepin' store an' sech?" he demanded, speculatively, with an inquiring and doubtful corrugation of his brows, from which a restive lock of hair was flung backward like the toss of a horse's mane.

"I reckon so," Nehemiah sparsely responded, blinking at him across the fireplace.

"An' ye say ye hev applied fur the place o' postmaster?" Tyler prosed on. "All that takes a power o' knowledge--readin' an' writin' an' cipher-in' an' sech. How air ye expectin' to hold out, 'kase I know ye never hed no mo' larin' than me, an' I war acquainted with ye till ye war thirty years old an' better?"

The tenor of this discourse did not comport with his customary suavity and tactful courtesy toward a guest, but he was much harassed and had lost his balance. He had a vague idea that Mrs. Sudley hung upon the flank of the conversation with a complete summary of amounts, dates, and names of creditors, and he sought to balk this in its inception. Moreover, his forbearance with Nehemiah, with his presence, his personality, his mission, had begun to wane. Bitter reflections might suffice to fill the time were he suffered to be silent; but since a part in the conversation had been made necessary, he had for it no honeyed words.

"I'd make about ez fit a postmaster, I know, ez that thar old owl a-hootin' out yander. I could look smart an' sober like him, but that's 'bout all the fur my school-larin' kerried me, an' youm didn't reach ter the nex' mile-post--an' that I know."

Nehemiah's thin lips seemed dry. More than once his tongue appeared along their verges as he nervously moistened

them. His small eyes had brightened with an excited look, but he spoke very slowly, and to Laurelia it seemed guardedly.

"I tuk ter my book arterward, Brother Sudley. I applied myself ter lamin' vigorous. Bein' ez I seen the Lord's hand war liberal with the gifts o' this worl', I wanted ter stir myself ter desurve the good things."

Sudley brought down the fore-legs of his chair to the floor with a thump. Despite his anxiety a slow light of ridicule began to kindle on his face; his curling lip showed his strong white teeth.

"Waal, by gum! ye mus' hev been a sight ter be seen! Ye, forty or fifty years old, a-settin' on the same seat with the chil'n at the deestric' school, an' a-competin' with the leetle tadpoles fur 'Baker an' Shady' an sech!"

He was about to break forth with a guffaw of great relish when Nehemiah spoke hastily, forestalling the laughter.

"Naw; Abner Sage war thar fur a good while las' winter a-visitin' his sister, an' he kem an' gin me lessons an' set me copies thar at my house, an' I larnt a heap."

Leander lifted his head suddenly. The amount of progress possible to this desultory and limited application he understood only too well. He had not learned so much himself to be unaware how much in time and labor learning costs. The others perceived no incongruity. Sudley's face was florid with pride and pleasure, and his wife's reflected the glow.

"Ab Sage at the cross-roads! Then he mus' hev tole ye 'bout Lee-yander hyar, an' his larin'. Ab tole, I know."

Nehemiah drew his breath in quickly. His twinkling eyes sent out the keenest glance of suspicion, but the gay, affectionate, vaunting laugh, as Tyler Sudley turned around and clapped the boy a ringing blow on his slender shoulder, expressed only the plenitude of his simple vainglory.

"Lee-yander hyar *knows it all!*" he boasted. "Old Ab himself don't know no mo'! I'll be bound old Ab went a-braggin'--hey, Lee-yander?"

But the boy shrank away a trifle, and his smile was mechanical as he silently eyed his relative.

"Ab 'lowed he war tur'ble disobejient," said Nehemiah, after a pause, and cautiously allowing himself to follow in the talk, "an' gi'n over ter playin' the fiddle." He hesitated for a moment, longing to stigmatize its ungodliness; but the recollection of Tyler Sudley's uncertain temper decided him, and he left it unmolested. "But Ab 'lowed ye war middlin' quick at figgers, Lee-yander--middlin' quick at figgers!"

Leander, still silent and listening, flushed slightly. This measured praise was an offence to him; but he looked up brightly and obediently when his uncle wagged an uncouthly sportive head (Nehe-miah's anatomy lent itself to the gay and graceful with much reluctance), thrust his hands into his pockets, and, tilting himself back in his chair, continued:

"I'll try ye, sonny--I'll try ye. How much air nine times seven?--nine times seven?"

"Forty-two!" replied the boy, with a bright, docile countenance fixed upon his relative.

There was a pause. "Right!" exclaimed Nehe-miah, to the relief of Sudley and his wife, who had trembled during the pause, for it seemed so threatening. They smiled at each other, unconscious that the examination meant aught more serious than a display of their prodigy's learning.

"An', now, how much air twelve times eight?" demanded Nehemiah.

"Sixty-six!" came the answer, quick as lightning.

"Right, sir, every time!" cried Nehemiah with a glow of genuine exultation, as he brought down the fore-legs of the chair to the floor, and the two Sudleys laughed aloud with pleasure.

Leander saw them all distorted and grimacing while the room swam round. The scheme was clear enough to him now. The illiterate Nehemiah, whose worldly prosperity had outstripped his mental qualifications, had bethought himself of filling the breach with his nephew, given away as surplusage in his burdensome infancy, but transformed into a unique utility under the tutelage of Abner Sage. It was his boasting of his froward pupil, doubtless, that had suggested the idea, and Leander understood now that he was to do the work of the store and the post-office under the nominal incumbency of this unlettered lout. Had the whole transaction been open and acknowledged, Leander would have had scant appetite for the work under this master; but he revolted at the flimsy, contemptible sham; he bitterly resented the innuendoes against the piety of the Sudleys, not that he cared for piety, save in the abstract; he was daunted by the brutal ignorance, the doltish inefficiency of the imposture that had so readily accepted his patently false answers to the simple questions. He had a sort of crude reverence for education, and it had seemed to him a very serious matter to take such liberties with the multiplication table. He valued, too, with a boy's stalwart vanity, his reputation for great learning, and he would not have lightly jeopardized it did he not esteem the crisis momentous. He knew not what he feared. The fraud of the intention, the groundless claim to knowledge, made Nehemiah's scheme seem multifariously guilty in some sort; while Tyler Sudley and his wife, albeit no wiser mathematically, had all the sanctions of probity in their calm, unpretending ignorance.

"Ef Cap'n or Neighbor wanted ter run a post-office on my larin', or ter keep store, they'd be welcome; but I won't play stalkin'-horse fur that thar man's still-hunt, sure ez shootin'," he said to himself.

The attention which he bent upon the conversation thenceforth was an observation of its effect rather than its matter. He saw that he was alone in his discovery. Neither Sudley nor his wife had perceived any connection between the store, the prospective post-office, and the desire of the illiterate would-be postmaster to have his erudite nephew restored to his care.

It may be that the methods of his "Neighbor" and the "Captain" in the rearing of Leander, the one with unbridled leniency, the other with spurious severity and affected indifference, had combined to foster self-reliance and decision of character, or it may be that these qualities were inherent traits. At all events, he encountered the emergency without an instant's hesitation. He felt no need of counsel. He had no doubts. He carried to his pallet in the roof-room no vacillations and no problems. His resolve was taken. For a time, as he listened to the movements below-stairs, the sound of voices still rose, drowsy as the hour waxed late; the light that flickered through the cracks in the puncheon flooring gradually dulled, and presently a harsh grating noise acquainted him with the fact that Sudley was shovelling the ashes over the embers; then the tent-like attic was illumined only by the moonlight admitted through the little square window at the gable end--so silent, so still, it seemed that it too slept like the silent house. The winds slumbered amidst the mute woods; a bank of cloud that he could see from his lowly couch lay in the south becalmed. The bird's song had ceased. It seemed to him as he lifted himself on his elbow that he had never known the world so hushed. The rustle of the quilt of gay glazed calico was of note in the quietude; the impact of his bare foot on the floor was hardly a sound, rather an annotation of his weight and his movement; yet in default of all else the sense of hearing marked it. His scheme seemed impracticable as for an instant he wavered at the head of the ladder that served as a stairway; the next moment his foot was upon the rungs, his light, lithe figure slipping down it like a shadow. The room below, all eclipsed in a brown and dusky-red medium, the compromise between light and darkness that the presence of the embers fostered, was vaguely revealed to him. He was hardly sure whether he saw the furniture all in place, or whether he knew its arrangement so well that he seemed to see. Suddenly, as he laid his hand on the violin on the wall, it became visible, its dark red wood richly glowing against the brown logs and the tawny clay daubing. A tiny white flame had shot up in the midst of the gray ashes, as he stood with the cherished object in his cautious hand, his excited eyes, dilated and expectant, searching the room apprehensively, while a vague thrill of a murmur issued from the instrument, as if the spirit of music within it had been awakened by his touch--too vague, too faintly elusive for the dormant and somewhat dull perceptions of Nehemiah Yerby, calmly slumbering in state in the best room.

The faint jet of flame was withdrawn in the ashes as suddenly as it had shot forth, and in the ensuing darkness, deeper for the contrast with that momentary illumination, it was not even a shadow that deftly mounted the ladder again and emerged into the sheeny twilight of the moonlit roof-room. Leander was somehow withheld for a moment motionless at the window; it may have been by compunction; it may have been by regret, if it be possible to the very young to definitely feel either. There was an intimation of pensive farewell in his large illumined eyes as they rested on the circle of familiar things about him--the budding trees, the well, with its great angular sweep against the sky, the still sward, the rail-fences glistening with the dew, the river with the moonlight in a silver blazonry on its lustrous dark surface, the encompassing shadows of the gloomy mountains. There was no sound, not even among the rippling shallows; he could hear naught but the pain of parting throbbing in his heart, and from the violin a faint continuous susurrus, as if it murmured half-asleep memories of the melodies that had thrilled its waking moments. It necessitated careful handling as he deftly let himself out of the window, the bow held in his mouth, the instrument in one arm, while the other hand clutched the boughs of a great holly-tree close beside the house. It was only the moonlight on those smooth, lustrous leaves, but it seemed as if smiling white faces looked suddenly down from among the shadows: at this lonely hour, with none awake to see, what, strange things may there not be astir in the world, what unmeasured, unknown forces, sometimes felt through is the dulling sleep of mortals, and then called dreams! As he stood breathless upon the ground the wind awoke. He heard it race around the corner of the house, bending the lilac bushes, and then it softly buffeted him full in the face and twirled his hat on the ground. As he stooped to pick it up he heard whispers and laughter in the lustrous boughs of the holly, and the gleaming faces shifted with the shadows. He looked fearfully over his shoulder; the rising wind might waken some one of the household. His "Neighbor" was, he knew, solicitous about the weather, and suspicious of its intentions lest it not hold fine till all the oats be sown. A pang wrung his heart; he remembered the long line of seasons when, planting corn in the pleasant spring days, his "Neighbor" had opened the furrow with the plough, and the "Captain" had followed, dropping the grains, and he had brought up the rear with his hoe, covering them over, while the clouds floated high in the air, and the mild sun shone, and the wind kept the shadows a-flicker, and the blackbird and the crow, complacently and craftily watching them from afar, seemed the only possible threatening of evil in all the world. He hastened to stiffen his resolve. He had need of it. Tyler Sudley had said that he did not know how the law stood, and for himself, he was not willing to risk his liberty on it. He gazed apprehensively upon the little batten shutter of the window of the room where Nehemiah Yerby slept, expecting to see it slowly swing open and disclose him there. It did not stir, and gathering resolution from the terrors that had beset him when he fancied his opportunity threatened, he ran like a frightened deer fleetly down the road, and plunged into the dense forest. The wind kept him company, rollicking, quickening, coming and going in fitful gusts. He heard it die away, but now and again it was rustling among a double file of beech-trees all up the mountainside. He saw the commotion in

their midst, the effect of swift movement as the scant foliage fluttered, then the white branches of the trees all a-swaying like glistening arms flung upward, as if some bevy of dryads sped up the hill in elusive rout through the fastnesses.

The next day ushered in a tumult and excitement unparalleled in the history of the little log-cabin. When Leander's absence was discovered, and inquiry of the few neighbors and search of the vicinity proved fruitless, the fact of his flight and its motive were persistently forced upon Nehemiah Yerby's reluctant perceptions, with the destruction of his cherished scheme as a necessary sequence. With some wild craving for vengeance he sought to implicate Sudley as accessory to the mysterious disappearance. He found some small measure of solace in stumping up and down the floor before the hearth, furiously railing at the absent host, for Sudley had not yet relinquished the bootless quest, and indignantly upbraiding the forlorn, white-faced, grief-stricken Laurelia, who sat silent and stony, her faded eyes on the fire, heedless of his words. She held in her lap sundry closely-rolled knitted balls--the boy's socks that she had so carefully made and darned. A pile of his clothing lay at her feet. He had carried nothing but his fiddle and the clothes he stood in, and if she had had more tears she could have wept for his improvidence, for the prospective tatters and rents that must needs befall him in that unknown patchless life to which he had betaken himself.

Nehemiah Yerby argued that it was Sudley who had prompted the whole thing; he had put the boy up to it, for Leander was not so lacking in feeling as to flee from his own blood-relation. But he would set the law to spy them out. He would be back again, and soon.

He may have thought better of this presently, for he was in great haste to be gone when Tyler Sudley returned, and to his amazement in a counterpart frame of mind, charging Nehemiah with the responsibility of the disaster. It was strange to Laurelia that she, who habitually strove to fix her mind on religious things, should so relish the aspect of Ty Sudley in his secular rage on this occasion.

"Ye let we-uns hev him whilst so leetle an' helpless, but now that he air so fine growed an' robustious ye want ter git some work out'n him, an' he hev runned away an' tuk ter the woods tarrified by the very sight of ye," he averred. "He'll never kem back; no, he'll never kem back; fur he'll 'low ez ye would kem an? take him home with you; an' now the Lord only knows whar he is, an' what will become of him."

His anger and his tumultuous grief, his wild, irrepressible anxiety for Leander's safety, convinced the crafty Nehemiah that he was no party to the boy's scheme. Sudley's sorrow was not of the kind that renders the temper pliable, and when Nehemiah sought to point a moral in the absence of the violin, and for the first time in Sudley's presence protested that he desired to save Leander from that device of the devil, the master of the house shook his inhospitable fist very close indeed to his guest's nose, and Yerby was glad enough to follow that feature unimpaired out to his horse at the bars, saying little more.

He aired his views, however, at each house where he made it convenient to stop on his way home, and took what comfort there might be in the role of martyr. Leander was unpopular in several localities, and was esteemed a poor specimen of the skill of the Sudleys in rearing children. He had been pampered and spoiled, according to general report, and more than one of his successive interlocutors were polite enough to opine that the change to Nehemiah's charge would have been a beneficent opportunity for much-needed discipline. Nehemiah was not devoid of some skill in interrogatory. He contrived to elicit speculations without giving an intimation of unduly valuing the answer.

"He's 'mongst the moonshiners, I reckon," was the universal surmise. "He'll be hid mighty safe 'mongst them."

For where the still might be, or who was engaged in the illicit business, was even a greater mystery than Leander's refuge. Nothing more definite could be elicited than a vague rumor that some such work was in progress somewhere along the many windings of Hide-and-Seek Creek.

Nehemiah Yerby had never been attached to temperance principles, and, commercially speaking, he had thought it possible that whiskey on which no tax had been paid might be more profitably dispensed at his store than that sold under the sanctions of the government. These considerations, however, were as naught in view of the paralysis which his interests and schemes had suffered in Leander's flight. He dwelt with dismay upon the possibility that he might secure the postmastership without the capable assistant whose services were essential. In this perverse sequence of events disaster to his application was more to be desired than success. He foresaw himself browbeaten, humiliated, detected, a butt for the ridicule of the community, his pretensions in the dust, his pitiful imposture unmasked. And beyond these aesthetic misfortunes, the substantial emoluments of "keepin' store," with a gallant sufficiency of arithmetic to regulate prices and profits, were vanishing like the elusive matutinal haze before the noontide sun. Nehemiah Yerby groaned aloud, for the financial stress upon his spirit was very like physical pain. And in this inauspicious moment he bethought himself of the penalties of violating the Internal Revenue Laws of the United States.

Now it has been held by those initiated into such mysteries that there is scant affinity between whiskey and water. Nevertheless, in this connection, Nehemiah Yerby developed an absorbing interest in the watercourses of the coves and adjacent mountains, especially their more remote and sequestered tributaries. He shortly made occasion to meet

the county surveyor and ply him with questions touching the topography of the vicinity, cloaking the real motive under the pretence of an interest in water-power sufficient and permanent enough for the sawing of lumber, and professing to contemplate the erection of a saw-mill at the most eligible point. The surveyor had his especial vanity, and it was expressed in his frequent boast that he carried a complete map of the county graven upon his brain; he was wont to esteem it a gracious opportunity when a casual question in a group of loungers enabled him to display his familiarity with every portion of his rugged and mountainous region, which was indeed astonishing, even taking into consideration his incumbency for a number of terms, aided by a strong head for locality. Nehemiah Yerby's scheme was incalculably favored by this circumstance, but he found it unexpectedly difficult to support the figment which he had propounded as to his intentions. Fiction is one of the fine arts, and a mere amateur like Nehemiah is apt to fail in point of consistency. He was inattentive while the surveyor dilated on the probable value, the accessibility, and the relative height of the "fall" of the various sites, and their available water-power, and he put irrelevant queries concerning ineligible streams in other localities. No man comfortably mounted upon his hobby relishes an interruption. The surveyor would stop with a sort of bovine surprise, and break out in irritable parenthesis.

"That branch on the t'other side o' Panther Ridge? Why, man alive, that thread o' water wouldn't turn a spider web."

Nehemiah, quaking under the glance of his keen questioning eye, would once more lapse into silence, while the surveyor, loving to do what he could do well, was lured on in his favorite subject by the renewed appearance of receptivity in his listener.

"Waal, ez I war a-sayin', I know every furlong o' the creeks once down in the Cove, an' all their meanderings, an' the best part o' them in the hills amongst the laurel and the wildernesses. But now the ways of sech a stream ez Hide-an'-Seek Creek are past finding out. It's a 'sinking creek,' you know; goes along with a good volume and a swift current for a while to the west, then disappears into the earth, an' ain't seen fur five mile, then comes out agin running due north, makes a tre-menjious jump--the Hoho-hebee Falls--then pops into the ground agin, an' ain't seen no more forever," he concluded, dramatically.

"How d'ye know it's the same creek?" demanded Nehemiah, sceptically, and with a wrinkling brow.

"By settin' somethin' afloat on it before it sinks into the ground--a piece of marked bark or a shingle or the like--an' finding it agin after the stream comes out of the caves," promptly replied the man of the compass, with a triumphant snap of the eye, as if he entertained a certain pride in the vagaries of his untamed mountain friend. "Nobody knows how often it disappears, nor where it rises, nor where it goes at last. It's got dozens of fust-rate millin' sites, but then it's too fur off fur you ter think about."

"Oh no 'tain't!" exclaimed Nehemiah, suddenly.

The surveyor stared. "Why, you ain't thinkin' 'bout movin' up inter the wilderness ter live, an' ye jes applied fur the post-office down at the crossroads? Ye can't run the post-office thar an' a sawmill thirty mile away at the same time."

Nehemiah was visibly disconcerted. His wrinkled face showed the flush of discomfiture, but his craft rallied to the emergency.

"Moughtn't git the post-office, arter all's come an' gone. Nothin' is sartin in this vale o' tears."

"An' ye air goin' ter take ter the woods ef ye don't?" demanded the surveyor, incredulously. "Thought ye war goin' ter keep store?"

"Waal, I dun'no'; jes talkin' round," said Nehemiah, posed beyond recuperation. "I mus' be a-joggin', ennyhow. Time's a-wastin'."

As he made off hastily in the direction of his house, for this conversation had taken place at the blacksmith's shop at the cross-roads, the surveyor gazed after him much mystified.

"What is that old fox slyin' round after? He ain't studyin' 'bout no saw-mill, inquirin' round about all the out-o'-the-way water-power in the ken-try fifty mile from where he b'longs. He's a heap likelier to be goin' ter start a wild-cat still in them wild places--git his whiskey cheap ter sell in his store."

He shook his head sagely once for all, for the surveyor's mind was of the type prompt in reaching conclusions, and he was difficult to divert from his convictions.

A feature of the development of craft to a certain degree is the persuasion that this endowment is not shared. A fine world it would be if the Nehemiah Yerbys were as clever as they think themselves, and their neighbors as dull. He readily convinced himself that he had given no intimation that his objects and motives were other than he professed, and with unimpaired energy he went to work upon the lines which he had marked out for himself. A fine chase Hide-and-Seek Creek led him, to be sure, and it tried his enthusiasms to the uttermost. What affinity this brawling vagrant had for the briers and the rocks and the tangled fastnesses! Seldom, indeed, could he press in to its banks and look down upon its dimpled, laughing, heedless face without the sacrifice of fragments of flesh and garments left impaled upon the sharp spikes of the budding shrubs. Often it so intrenched itself amidst the dense woods, and the rocks and chasms of its craggy banks, that approach was impossible, and he followed it for miles only by the sound of its wild, sweet, woodland voice. And this, too, was of a wayward fancy; now, in turbulent glee among the rocks, riotously

chanting aloud, challenging the echoes, and waking far and near the forest quiet; and again it was merely a low, restless murmur, intimating deep, serene pools and a dallying of the currents, lapsed in the fulness of content. Then Nehemiah Yerby would be beset with fears that he would lose this whisper, and his progress was slight; he would pause to listen, hearing nothing; would turn to right, to left; would take his way back through the labyrinth of the laurel to catch a thread of sound, a mere crystalline tremor, and once more follow this transient lure. As the stream came down a gorge at a swifter pace and in a succession of leaps—a glassy cataract visible here and there, airily sporting with rainbows, affiliating with ferns and moss and marshy growths, the bounding spray glittering in the sunshine—it flung forth continuously tinkling harmonies in clear crystal tones, so penetrating, so definitely melodic, that more than once, as he paced along on his jaded horse, he heard in their midst, without disassociating the sounds, the *ping, pang, ping, pang*, of the violin he so condemned. He drew up at last, and strained his ear to listen. It did not become more distinct, always intermingled with the recurrent rhythm of the falling water, but always vibrating in subdued throbbings, now more acute, now less, as the indiscriminated melody ascended or descended the scale. It came from the earth, of this he was sure, and thus he was reminded anew of the caves which Hide-and-Seek Creek threaded in its long course. There was some opening near by, doubtless, that led to subterranean passages, dry enough here, since it was the stream's whim to flow in the open sunshine instead of underground. He would have given much to search for it had he dared. His leathery, lean, loose cheek had a glow of excitement upon it; his small eyes glistened; for the first time in his life, possibly, he looked young. But he did not doubt that this was the stronghold of the illicit distillers, of whom one heard so much in the Cove and saw so little. A lapse of caution, an inconsiderate movement, and he might be captured and dealt with as a spy and informer.

Nevertheless his discovery was of scant value unless he utilized it further. He had always believed that his nephew had fled to the secret haunts of the moonshiners. Now he only knew it the more surely; and what did this avail him, and how aid in the capture of the recusant clerk and assistant postmaster? He hesitated a moment; then fixing the spot in his mind by the falling of a broad crystal sheet of water from a ledge some forty feet high, by a rotting log at its base that seemed to rise continually, although the moving cataract appeared motionless, by certain trees and their relative position, and the blue peaks on a distant sky background of a faint cameo yellow, he slowly turned his horse's rein and took his way out of danger. It was chiefly some demonstration on the animal's part that he had feared. A snort, a hoof-beat, a whinny would betray him, and very liable was the animal to any of these expressions. One realizes how unnecessary is speech for the exposition of opinion when brought into contradictory relations with the horse which one rides or drives. All day had this animal snorted his doubts of his master's sanity; all day had he protested against these aimless, fruitless rambles; all day had he held back with a high head and a hard mouth, while whip and spur pressed him through laurel almost impenetrable, and through crevices of crags almost impassable. For were there not all the fair roads of the county to pace and gallop upon if one must needs be out and jogging! Unseen objects, vaguely discerned to be moving in the undergrowth affrighted the old plough-horse of the levels—infinity reassured and whinnying with joyful relief when the head of horned cattle showed presently as the cause of the commotion. He would have given much a hundred times that day, and he almost said so a hundred times, too, to be at home, with the old bull-tongue plough behind him, running the straight rational furrow in the good bare open field, so mellow for corn, lying in the sunshine, inviting planting.

"Ef I git ye home wunst more, I'll be bound I'll leave ye thar," Nehemiah said, ungratefully, as they wended their way along; for without the horse he could not have traversed the long distances of his search, however unwillingly the aid was given.

He annotated his displeasure by a kick in the ribs; and when the old equine farmer perceived that they were absolutely bound binward, and that their aberrations were over for the present, he struck a sharp gait that would have done honor to his youthful days, for he had worn out several pairs of legs in Nehemiah's fields, and was often spoken of as being upon the last of those useful extremities. He stolidly shook his head, which he thought so much better than his master's, and bedtime found them twenty miles away and at home.

Nehemiah felt scant fatigue. He was elated with his project. He scented success in the air. It smelled like the season. It too was suffused with the urgent pungency of the rising sap, with the fragrance of the wild-cherry, with the vinous promise of the orchard, with the richness of the mould, with the vagrant perfume of the early flowers.

He lighted a tallow dip, and he sat him down with writing materials at the bare table to indite a letter while all his household slept. The windows stood open to the dark night, and Spring hovered about outside, and lounged with her elbows on the sill, and looked in. He constantly saw something pale and elusive against the blackness, for there was no moon, but he thought it only the timid irradiation with which his tallow dip suffused the blossoming wands of an azalea, growing lithe and tall hard by. With this witness only he wrote the letter—an anonymous letter, and therefore he was indifferent to the inadequacies of his penmanship and his spelling. He labored heavily in its composition, now and then perpetrating portentous blots. He grew warm, although the fire that had served to cook supper had long languished under the bank of ashes. The tallow dip seemed full of caloric, and melted rapidly in pendulous drippings. He now and again mopped his red face, usually so bloodless, with his big bandanna handkerchief, while all the zephyrs were fanning the flying tresses of Spring at the window, and the soft, sweet, delicately attuned vernal chorus of the

marshes were tentatively running over *sotto voce* their allotted melodies for the season. Oh, it was a fine night outside, and why should a moth, soft-winged and cream-tinted and silken-textured, come whisking in from the dark, as silently as a spirit, to supervise Nehe-miah Yerby's letter, and travel up and down the page all befouled with the ink? And as he sought to save the sense of those significant sentences from its trailing silken draperies, why should it rise suddenly, circling again and again about the candle, pass through the flame, and fall in quivering agonies once more upon the page? He looked at it, dead now, with satisfaction. It had come so very near ruining his letter--an important letter, describing the lair of the illicit distillers to a deputy marshal of the revenue force, who was known to be in a neighboring town. He had good reason to withhold his signature, for the name of the informer in the ruthless vengeance of the region would be as much as his life was worth. The moth had not spoiled the letter--the laborious letter; he was so glad of that! He saw no analogies, he received not even a subtle warning, as he sealed and addressed the envelope and affixed the postage-stamp. Then he snuffed out the candle with great satisfaction.

The next morning the missive was posted, and all Nehemiah Yerby's plans took a new lease of life. The information he had given would result in an immediate raid upon the place. Leander would be captured among the moonshiners, but his youth and his uncle's representations--for he would give the officers an inkling of the true state of the case--would doubtless insure the boy's release, and his restoration to those attractive commercial prospects which had been devised for him.

II

The ordering of events is an intricate process, and to its successful exploitation a certain degree of sagacious prescience is a prerequisite, as well as a thorough mastery of the lessons of experience. For a day or so all went well in the inner consciousness of Nehemiah Yerby. The letter had satisfied his restless craving for some action toward the consummation of his ambition, and he had not the foresight to realize how soon the necessity of following it up would supervene. He first grew uneasy lest his letter had not reached its destination; then, when the illimitable field of speculation was thus opened out, he developed an ingenuity of imagination in projecting possible disaster. Day after day passed, and he heard naught of his cherished scheme. The revenueurs--craven wretches he deemed them, and he ground his teeth with rage because of their seeming cowardice in their duty, since their duty could serve his interests--might not have felt exactly disposed to risk their lives in these sweet spring days, when perhaps even a man whose life belongs to the government might be presumed to take some pleasure in it, by attempting to raid the den of a gang of moonshiners on the scanty faith of an informer's word, tenuous guaranty at best, and now couched in an anonymous letter, itself synonym for a lie. Oh, what fine eulogies rose in his mind upon the manly virtue of courage! How enthusing it is at all times to contemplate the courage of others!--and how safe!

Then a revulsion of belief ensued, and he began to fear that they might already have descended upon their quarry, and with all their captives have returned to the county town by the road by which they came--nearer than the route through the crossroads, though far more rugged. Why had not this possibility before occurred to him! He had so often prefigured their triumphant advent into the hamlet with all their guarded and shackled prisoners, the callow Leander in the midst, and his own gracefully enacted role of virtuous, grief-stricken, pleading relative, that it seemed a recollection--something that had really happened--rather than the figment of anticipation. But no word, no breath of intimation, had ruffled the serenity of the crossroads. The calm, still, yellow sunshine day by day suffused the land like the benignities of a dream--almost too good to be true. Every man with the heart of a farmer within him was at the plough-handles, and making the most of the fair weather. The cloudless sky and the auspicious forecast of fine days still to come did more to prove to the farmer the existence of an all-wise, overruling Providence than all the polemics of the world might accomplish. The furrows multiplied everywhere save in Nehemiah's own fields, where he often stood so long in the turn-row that the old horse would desist from twisting his head backward in surprise, and start at last of his own motion, dragging the plough, the share still unanchored in the ground, half across the field before he could be stopped. The vagaries of these "lands" that the absent-minded Nehemiah laid off attracted some attention.

"What ails yer furrows ter run so crooked, Nehemiah?" observed a passer-by, a neighbor who had been to the blacksmith-shop to get his plough-point sharpened; he looked over the fence critically. "Yer eyesight mus' be failin' some."

"I dun'no'," rejoined Nehemiah, hastily. Then reverting to his own absorption. "War it you-uns ez I hearn say thar war word kem ter the crossroads 'bout some revenueurs raid in' 'round some-whar in the woods?"

The look of surprise cast upon him seemed to his alert anxiety to betoken suspicion. "Laws-a-massy, naw!" exclaimed his interlocutor. "Ye air the fust one that hev named sech ez that in these diggin's, fur I'd hev hearn tell on it, sure, ef thar hed been enny sech word goin' the rounds."

Nehemiah recoiled into silence, and presently his neighbor went whistling on his way. He stood motionless for a time, until the man was well out of sight, then he began to hastily unhitch the plough-gear. His resolution was taken. He could wait no longer. For aught he knew the raiders might have come and gone, and be now a hundred miles away with their prisoners to stand their trial in the Federal court, his schemes might have all gone amiss, leaving him in naught the gainer. He could rest in uncertainty no more. He feared to venture further questions when no rumor stirred the air. They rendered him doubly liable to suspicion--to the law-abiding as a possible moonshiner, to any sympathizer with the distillers as a probable informer. He determined to visit the spot, and there judge how the enterprise had fared.

When next he heard that fine sylvan symphony of the sound of the falling water--the tinkling bell-like tremors of its lighter tones mingling with the sonorous, continuous, deeper theme rising from its weight and volume and movement; with the surging of the wind in the pines; with the occasional cry of a wild bird deep in the new verdure of the forests striking through the whole with a brilliant, incidental, detached effect--no faint vibration was in its midst of the violin's string, listen as he might. More than once he sought to assure himself that he heard it, but his fancy failed to respond to his bidding, although again and again he took up his position where it had before struck his ear. The wild minstrelsy of the woods felt no lack, and stream and wind and harping pine and vagrant bird lifted their voices in their wonted strains. He could hardly accept the fact; he would verify anew the landmarks he had made and again return to the spot, his hat in his hand, his head bent low, his face lined with anxiety and suspense. No sound, no word, no intimation of human presence. The moonshiners were doubtless all gone long ago, betrayed into captivity, and Leander with them. He had so hardened his heart toward his recalcitrant young kinsman and his Sudley friends, he felt so entirely that in being among the moonshiners Leander had met only his deserts in coming to the bar of Federal justice, that he would have experienced scant sorrow if the nephew had not carried off with his own personality his uncle's book-keeper and postmaster's clerk. And so--alas, for Leander! As he meditated on the untoward manner in which he had overshot his target, this marksman of fate forgot the caution which had distinguished his approach, for hitherto it had been as heedful as if he fully believed the lion still in his den. He slowly patrolled the bank below the broad, thin, crystal sheet, seeing naught but its rainbow hovering elusively in the sun, and its green and white skein-like draperies pendulous before the great dark arch over which the cataract fell. The log caught among the rocks in the spray at the base was still there, seeming always to rise while the restless water seemed motionless.

No trace that human beings had ever invaded these solitudes could he discover. No vague, faint suggestion of the well-hidden lair of the moonshiners did the wild covert show forth. "The revenueurs war smarter'n me; I'll say that fur 'em," he muttered at last as he came to a stand-still, his chin in his hand, his perplexed eyes on the ground. And suddenly--a footprint on a marshy spot; only the heel of a boot, for the craggy ledges hid all the ground but this, a mere sediment of sand in a tiny hollow in the rock from which the water had evaporated. It was a key' to the mystery. Instantly the rugged edges of the cliff took on the similitude of a path. Once furnished with this idea, he could perceive adequate footing all adown the precipitous way. He was not young; his habits had been inactive, and were older even than his age. He could not account for it afterward, but he followed for a few paces this suggestion of a path down the precipitous sides of the stream. He had a sort of triumph in finding it so practicable, and he essayed it still farther, although the sound of the water had grown tumultuous at closer approach, and seemed to foster a sort of responsive turmoil of the senses; he felt his head whirl as he looked at the bounding, frothing spray, then at the long swirls of the current at the base of the fall as they swept on their way down the gorge. As he sought to lift his fascinated eyes, the smooth glitter of the crystal sheet of falling water so close before him dazzled his sight. He wondered afterward how his confused senses and trembling limbs sustained him along the narrow, rugged path, here and there covered with oozing green moss, and slippery with the continual moisture. It evidently was wending to a ledge. All at once the contour of the place was plain to him; the ledge led behind the cataract that fell from the beetling heights above. And within were doubtless further recesses, where perchance the moonshiners had worked their still. As he reached the ledge he could see behind the falling water and into the great concave space which it screened beneath the beetling cliff. It was as he had expected--an arched portal of jagged brown rocks, all dripping with moisture and oozing moss, behind the semi-translucent green-and-white drapery of the cascade.

But he had not expected to see, standing quietly in the great vaulted entrance, a man with his left hand on a pistol in his belt, the mate of which his more formidable right hand held up with a steady finger on the trigger.

This much Nehemiah beheld, and naught else, for the glittering profile of the falls, visible now only aslant, the dark, cool recess beyond, that menacing motionless figure at the vanishing-point of the perspective, all blended together in an indistinguishable whirl as his senses reeled. He barely retained consciousness enough to throw up both his hands in token of complete submission. And then for a moment he knew no more. He was still leaning motionless against the wall of rock when he became aware that the man was sternly beckoning to him to continue his approach. His dumb lips moved mechanically in response, but any sound must needs have been futile indeed in the pervasive roar of the waters. He felt that he had hardly strength for another step along the precipitous way, but there is much tonic influence in a beckoning revolver, and few men are so weak as to be unable to obey its behests. Poor Nehemiah tottered along as behooved him, leaving all the world, liberty, volition, behind him as the descending sheet of water fell between him and the rest of life and shut him off.

"That's it, my leetle man! I thought you could make it!" were the first words he could distinguish as he joined the mountaineer beneath the crag.

Nehemiah Yerby had never before seen this man. That in itself was alarming, since in the scanty population of the region few of its denizens are unknown to each other, at least by sight. The tone of satire, the gleam of enjoyment in his keen blue eye, were not reassuring to the object of his ridicule. He was tall and somewhat portly, and he had a bluff and offhand manner, which, however, served not so much to intimate his good-will toward you as his abounding good-humor with himself. He was a man of most arbitrary temper, one could readily judge, not only from his own aspect and manner, but from the docile, reliant, approving cast of countenance of his reserve force--a half-dozen men, who were somewhat in the background, lounging on the rocks about a huge copper still. They wore an attentive aspect, but offered to take no active part in the scene enacted before them. One of them--even at this crucial moment Yerby noticed it with a pang of regretful despair--held noiseless on his knee a violin, and more than once addressed himself seriously to rubbing rosin over the bow. There was scant music in his face--a square physiognomy, with thick features, and a shock of hay-colored hair striped somewhat with an effect of darker shades like a weathering stack. He handled the bow with a blunt, clumsy hand that augured little of delicate skill, and he seemed from his diligence to think that rosin is what makes a fiddle play. He was evidently one of those unhappy creatures furnished with some vague inner attraction to the charms of music, with no gift, no sentiment, no discrimination. Something faintly sonorous there was in his soul, and it vibrated to the twanging of the strings. He was far less alert to the conversation than the others, whose listening attitudes attested their appreciation of the importance of the moment.

"Waal," observed the moonshiner, impatiently, eying the tremulous and tongue-tied Yerby, "hev ye fund what ye war a-huntin' fur?"

So tenacious of impressions was Nehemiah that it was the violin in those alien hands which still focussed his attention as he stared gaspingly about. Leander was not here; probably had never been here; and the twanging of those strings had lured him to his fate. Well might he contemn the festive malevolence of the violin's influence! His letter had failed; no raider had intimidated these bluff, unafraid, burly law-breakers, and he had put his life in jeopardy in his persistent prosecution of his scheme. He gasped again at the thought.

"Waal," said the moonshiner, evidently a man of short patience, and with a definite air of spurring on the visitor's account of himself, "we 'ain't been lookin' fur any spy lately, but I'm 'lowin' ez we hev fund him."

His fear thus put into words so served to realize to Yerby his immediate danger that it stood him in the stead of courage, of brains, of invention; his flaccid muscles were suddenly again under control; he wreathed his features with his smug artificial smile, that was like a grimace in its best estate, and now hardly seemed more than a contortion. But beauty in any sense was not what the observer was prepared to expect in Nehemiah, and the moonshiner seemed to accept the smile at its face value, and to respect its intention.

"Spies don't kem climbin' down that thar path o' yourn in full view through the water"--for the landscape was as visible through the thin falling sheet as if it had been the slightly corrugated glass of a window--"do they?" Yerby asked, with a jocose intonation. "That thar shootin'-iron o' yourn liked ter hev skeered me ter death whenst I fust seen it."

His interlocutor pondered on this answer for a moment. He had an adviser among his corps whose opinion he evidently valued; he exchanged a quick glance with one of the men who was but dimly visible in the shadows beyond the still, where there seemed to be a series of troughs leading a rill of running water down from some farther spring and through the tub in which the spiral worm was coiled. This man had a keen, white, lean face, with an ascetic, abstemious expression, and he looked less like a distiller than some sort of divine--some rustic pietist, with strange theories and unhappy speculations and unsettled mind. It was a face of subtle influences, and the very sight of it roused in Nehemiah a more heedful fear than the "shootin'-iron" in the bluff moonshiner's hand had induced. He was silent, while the other resumed the office of spokesman.

"Ye ain't 'quainted hyar"--he waved his hand with the pistol in it around at the circle of uncowering men, although the mere movement made Nehemiah cringe with the thought that an accidental discharge might as effectually settle his case as premeditated and deliberate murder. "Ye dun'no' none o' us. What air ye a-doin' hyar?"

"Why, that thar war the very trouble," Yerby hastily explained. "*I didn't know none o' ye!* I hed hearn ez thar war a still somewhars on Hide-an'-Seek Creek"--once more there ensued a swift exchange of glances among the party--"but nobody knew who run it nor whar 'twar. An' one day, considerable time ago, I war a-passin' nigh 'bouts an' I hearn that fiddle, an' that revealed the spot ter me. An' I kem ter-day 'lowin' ye an' me could strike a trade."

Once more the bluff man of force turned an anxious look of inquiry to the pale, thoughtful face in the brown and dark green shadows beyond the copper gleam of the still. If policy had required that Nehemiah should be despatched, his was the hand to do the deed, and his the stomach to support his conscience afterward. But his brain revolted from the discriminating analysis of Nehemiah's discourse and a decision on its merits. "Trade fur what?" he demanded at last, on his own responsibility, for no aid had radiated from the face which his looks had interrogated.

"Fur whiskey, o' course." Nehemiah made the final plunge boldly. "I be goin' ter open a store at the cross-roads, an' I

'lowed I could git cheaper whiskey untaxed than taxed. I 'lowed ye wouldn't make it ef ye didn't expec' ter sell it. I didn't know none o' you-uns, an' none o' yer customers. An' ez I expec' ter git mo' profit on sellin' whiskey 'n ennything else in the store, I jes took foot in hand an' kem ter see 'boutn it mysef. I never 'lowed, though, ez it mought look cur'ous ter you-uns, or like a spy, ter kem ez bold ez brass down the path in full sight."

The logic of the seeming security of his approach, and the apparent value of his scheme, had their full weight. He saw credulity gradually overpowering doubt and distrust, and his heart grew light with relief. Even their cautious demur, intimating a reserve of opinion to the effect that they would think about it, did not daunt him now. He believed, in the simplicity of his faith in his own craft, now once more in the ascendant, that if they should accept his proposition he would be free to go without further complication of his relations with wild-cat whiskey. He could not sufficiently applaud his wits for the happy termination of the adventure to which they had led him. He had gone no further in the matter than he had always intended. Brush whiskey was the commodity that addressed itself most to his sense of speculation. For this he had always expected to ferret out some way of safely negotiating. He had gone no further than he should have done, at all events, a little later. He even began mentally to "figger on the price" down to which he should be able to bring the distillers, as he accepted a proffered seat in the circle about the still. He could neither divide nor multiply by fractions, and it is not too much to say that he might have been throttled on the spot if the moonshiners could have had a mental vision of the liberties the stalwart integers were taking with their price-current, so to speak, and the preternatural discount that was making so free with their profits. So absorbed in this pleasing intellectual exercise was Nehemiah that he did not observe that any one had left the coterie; but when a stir without on the rocks intimated an approach he was suddenly ill at ease, and this discomfort increased when the new-comer proved to be a man who knew him.

"Waal, Nehemiah Yerby!" he exclaimed, shaking his friend's hand, "I never knowed you-uns ter be consarned in sech ez moonshinin'. I hev been a-neighborin' Isham hyar," he laid his heavy hand on the tall moonshiner's shoulder, "fur ten year an' better, but I won't hev nuthin' ter do with bresh whiskey or aidin' or abettin' in illicit 'stillin'. I like Isham, an' Isham he likes me, an' we hev jes agreed ter disagree."

Nehemiah dared not protest nor seek to explain. He could invent no story that would not give the lie direct to his representations to the moonshiners. He felt that their eyes were upon him. He could only hope that his silence did not seem to them like denial--and yet was not tantamount to confession in the esteem of his upbraider.

"Yes, sir," his interlocutor continued, "it's a mighty bad government ter run agin." Then he turned to the moonshiner, evidently taking up the business that had brought him here. "Lemme see what sorter brand ye hev registered fur yer cattle, Isham."

Yerby's heart sank when the suspicion percolated through his brain that this man had been induced to come here for the purpose of recognizing him. More fixed in this opinion was he when no description of the brand of the cattle could be found, and the visitor finally went away, his errand bootless.

From time to time during the afternoon other-men went out and returned with recruits on various pretexts, all of which Nehemiah believed masked the marshalling of witnesses to incriminate him as one of themselves, in order to better secure his constancy to the common interests, and in case he was playing false to put others into possession of the facts as to the identity of the informer. His liability to the law for aiding and abetting in moonshining was very complete before the day darkened, and his jeopardy as to the information he had given made him shake in his shoes.

For at any moment, he reflected, in despair, the laggard raiders might swoop down upon them, and the choice of roles offered to him was to seem to them a moonshiner, or to the moonshiners an informer. The first was far the safer, for the clutches of the law were indeed feeble as contrasted with the popular fury that would pursue him unwearied for years until its vengeance was accomplished. From the one, escape was to the last degree improbable; from the other, impossible.

Any pretext to seek to quit the place before the definite arrangements of his negotiation were consummated seemed even to him, despite his eagerness to be off, too tenuous, too transparent, to be essayed, although he devised several as he sat meditative and silent amongst the group about the still. The prospect grew less and less inviting as the lingering day waned, and the evening shadows, dank and chill, perceptibly approached. The brown and green recesses of the grotto were at once murkier, and yet more distinctly visible, for the glow of the fire, flickering through the crevices of the metal door of the furnace, had begun to assert its luminous quality, which was hardly perceptible in the full light of day, and brought out the depth of the shadows. The figures and faces of the moonshiners showed against the deepening gloom. The sunset clouds were still red without; a vague roseate suffusion was visible through the falling water. The sun itself had not yet sunk, for an oblique and almost level ray, piercing the cataract, painted a series of faint prismatic tints on one side of the rugged arch. But while the outer world was still in touch with the clear-eyed day, night was presently here, with mystery and doubt and dark presage. The voice of Hoho-hebee Falls seemed to him louder, full of strange, uncomprehended meanings, and insistent iteration. Vague echoes were elicited. Sometimes in a seeming pause he could catch their lisping sibilant tones repeating, repeating--what? As the darkness encroached yet more heavily upon the cataract, the sense of its unseen motion so close at hand oppressed his very soul; it gave an

idea of the swift gathering of shifting invisible multitudes, coming and going--who could say whence or whither? So did this impression master his nerves that he was glad indeed when the furnace door was opened for fuel, and he could see only the inanimate, ever-descending sheet of water--the reverse interior aspect of Hoho-hebee Falls--all suffused with the uncanny tawny light, but showing white and green tints like its diurnal outer aspect, instead of the colorless outlines, resembling a drawing of a cataract, which the cave knew by day. He did not pause to wonder whether the sudden transient illumination was visible without, or how it might mystify the untutored denizens of the woods, bear, or deer, or wolf, perceiving it aglow in the midst of the waters like a great topaz, and anon lost in the gloom. He pined to see it; the momentary cessation of darkness, of the effect of the sounds, so strange in the obscurity, and of the chill, pervasive mystery of the invisible, was so grateful that its influence was tonic to his nerves, and he came to watch for its occasion and to welcome it. He did not grudge it even when it gave the opportunity for a close, unfriendly, calculating scrutiny of his face by the latest comer to the still. This was the neighboring miller, also liable to the revenue laws, the distillers being valued patrons of the mill, and since he ground the corn for the mash he thereby aided and abetted in the illicit manufacture of the whiskey. His life was more out in the world than that of his underground *confères*, and perhaps, as he had a thriving legitimate business, and did not live by brush whiskey, he had more to lose by detection than they, and deprecated even more any unnecessary risk. He evidently took great umbrage at the introduction of Nehemiah amongst them.

"Oh yes," he observed, in response to the cordial greeting which he met; "an' I'm glad ter see ye all too. I'm powerful glad ter kem ter the still enny time. It's ekal ter goin' ter the settlemint, or plumb ter town on a County Court day. Ye see *everybody*, an' hear *all* the news, an' meet up with *interesting strangers*, I tell ye, now, the mill's plumb lonesome compared ter the still, an' the mill's always hed the name of a place whar a heap o' cronies gathered ter swap lies, an' sech."

The irony of this description of the social delights and hospitable accessibilities of a place esteemed the very stronghold of secrecy itself--the liberty of every man in it jeopardized by the slightest lapse of vigilance or judgment--was very readily to be appreciated by the group, who were invited by this fair show of words to look down the vista of the future to possible years of captivity in the jails of far-away States as Federal prisoners. The men gazed heavily and anxiously from one to another as the visitor sank down on the rocks in a relaxed attitude, his elbow on a higher ledge behind him, supporting his head on his hand; his other hand was on his hip, his arm stiffly akimbo, while he looked with an expression of lowering exasperation at Yerby. It was impossible to distinguish the color of his garb, so dusted with flour was he from head to foot; but his long boots drawn over his trousers to the knee, and his great spurs, and a brace of pistols in his belt, seemed incongruous accessories to the habiliments of a miller. His large, dark hat was thrust far back on his head; his hair, rising straight in a sort of elastic wave from his brow, was powdered white; the effect of his florid color and his dark eyes was accented by the contrast; his pointed beard revealed its natural tints because of his habit of frequently brushing his hand over it, and was distinctly red. He was lithe and lean and nervous, and had the impatient temper characteristic of mercurial natures. It mattered not to him what was the coercion of the circumstances which had led to the reception of the stranger here, nor what was the will of the majority; he disapproved of the step; he feared it; he esteemed it a grievance done him in his absence; and he could not conceal his feelings nor wait a more fitting time to express them in private. His irritation and objection evidently caused some solicitude amongst the others. He was important to them, and they deprecated his displeasure. Isham Beaton listened to the half-covert sneers of his words with perturbation plainly depicted on his face, and the man whom Nehemiah had at first noticed as one whose character seemed that of adviser, and whose opinion was valued, now spoke for the first time. He handed over a broken-nosed pitcher with the remark, "Try the flavor of this hyar whiskey, Alfred; 'pears like ter me the bes' we-uns hev ever hed."

His voice was singularly smooth; it had all the qualities of culture; every syllable, every lapse of his rude dialect, was as distinct as if he had been taught to speak in this way; his tones were low and even, and modulated to suave cadences; the ear experienced a sense of relief after the loud, strident voice of the miller, poignantly penetrating and pitched high.

"Naw, Hilary, I don't want nuthin' ter drink. 'Bleeged ter ye, but I ain't wantin' nuthin' ter drink," reiterated the miller, plaintively.

Isham Beaton cast a glance of alarm at the dimly seen, monastic face of his adviser in the gloom. It was unchanged. Its pallor and its keen outline enabled its expression to be discerned as he himself went through the motions of sampling the rejected liquor, shook his head discerningly, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and deposited the pitcher near by on a shelf of the rock.

A pause ensued. Nehemiah, with every desire to be agreeable, hardly knew how to commend himself to the irate miller, who would have none of his very existence. No one could more eagerly desire him to be away than he himself. But his absence would not satisfy the miller; nothing less than that the intruder should never have been here. Every perceptible lapse of the moonshiners into anxiety, every recurrent intimation of their most pertinent reason for this anxiety, set Nehemiah a-shaking in his shoes. Should it be esteemed the greatest good to the greatest number to make safely away with him, his fate would forever remain unknown, so cautious had he been to leave no trace by which he

might be followed. He gazed with deprecating urbanity, and with his lips distended into a propitiating smile, at the troubled face powdered so white and with its lowering eyes so dark and petulant. He noted that the small-talk amongst the others, mere un-individualized lumpish fellows with scant voice in the government of their common enterprise, had ceased, and that they no longer busied themselves with the necessary work about the still, nor with the snickering interludes and horse-play with which they were wont to beguile their labors. They had all seated themselves, and were looking from one to the other of the more important members of the guild with an air which betokened the momentary expectation of a crisis. The only exception was the man who had the violin; with the persistent, untimely industry of incapacity, he twanged the strings, and tuned and retuned the instrument, each time producing a result more astonishingly off the key than before.

He was evidently unaware of this till some one with senses ajar would suggest that all was not as it should be in the drunken reeling catch he sought to play, when he would desist in surprise, and once more diligently rub the bow with rosin, as if that mended the matter. The miller's lowering eyes rested on his shadowy outline as he sat thus engaged, for a moment, and then he broke out suddenly:

"Yes, this hyar still is the place fur news, an' the place ter look out fur what ye don't expect ter happen. It's powerful pleasant ter be a-meetin' of folks hyar--this hyar stranger this evenin' "--his gleaming teeth in the semi-obscurity notified Yerby that a smile of spurious politeness was bent upon him, and he made haste to grin very widely in response--"an' that thar fiddle 'minds me o' how unexpected 'twas whenst I met up with Lee-yander hyar--'pears ter me, Bob, ez ye air goin' ter diddle the life out'n his fiddle--an' Hilary jes begged an' beseeched me ter take the boy with me ter help 'round the mill, ez he war a-runnin' away. Ye want me ter 'commodate this stranger too, ez mebbe air runnin' from them ez wants him, hey Hilary?"

The grin was petrified on Nehemiah's face. He felt his blood rush quickly to his head in the excitement of the moment. So here was the bird very close at hand! And here was his enterprise complete and successful. He could go away after the cowardly caution of the moonshiners should have expended itself in dallying and delay, with his negotiation for the "wild-cat" ended, and his accomplished young relative in charge. He drew himself erect with a sense of power. The moonshiners, the miller, would not dare to make an objection. He knew too much! he knew far too much!

The door of the furnace was suddenly flung ajar, but he was too much absorbed to perceive the change that came upon the keen face of Hilary Tarbetts, who knelt beside it, as the guest's portentous triumphant smile was fully revealed. Yerby did not lose, however, the glance of reproach which the moonshiner cast upon the miller, nor the miller's air at once triumphant, ashamed, and regretful. He had in petulant pique disclosed the circumstance which he had pledged himself not to disclose.

"This man's name is Yerby too," Hilary said, significantly, gazing steadily at the miller.

The miller looked dumfounded for a moment. He stared from one to the other in silence. His conscious expression changed to obvious discomfiture. He had expected no such result as this. He had merely given way to a momentary spite in the disclosure, thinking it entirely insignificant, only calculated to slightly annoy Hilary, who had made the affair his own. He would not in any essential have thwarted his comrade's plans intentionally, nor in his habitual adherence to the principles of fair play would he have assisted in the boy's capture. He drew himself up from his relaxed posture; his spurred feet shuffled heavily on the stone floor of the grotto. A bright red spot appeared on each cheek; his eyes had become anxious and subdued in the quick shiftings of temper common to the red-haired gentry; his face of helpless appeal was bent on Hilary Tarbetts, as if relying on his resources to mend the matter; but ever and anon he turned his eyes, animated with a suspicious dislike, on Yerby, who, however, could have snapped his fingers in the faces of them all, so confident, so hilariously triumphant was he.

"Yerby, I b'lieve ye said yer name war, an' so did Peter Green," said Tarbetts, still kneeling by the open furnace door, his pale cheek reddening in the glow of the fire.

Thus reminded of the testimony of his acquaintance, Yerby did not venture to repudiate his cognomen.

"An' what did ye kem hyar fur?" blustered the miller. "A-sarchin' fur the boy?"

Yerby's lips had parted to acknowledge this fact, but Tarbetts suddenly anticipated his response, and answered for him:

"Oh no, Alfred. Nobody ain't sech a fool ez ter kem hyar ter this hyar still, a stranger an' mebbe suspected ez a spy, ter hunt up stray children, an' git thar heads shot off, or mebbe drowned in a mighty handy water-fall, or sech. This hyar man air one o' we-uns. He air a-tradin' fur our liquor, an' he'll kerry a barrel away whenst he goes."

Yerby winced at the suggestion conveyed so definitely in this crafty speech; he was glad when the door of the furnace closed, so that his face might not tell too much of the shifting thoughts and fears that possessed him.

The miller's fickle mind wavered once more. If Yerby had not come for the boy, he himself had done no damage in disclosing Leander's whereabouts. Once more his quickly illumined anger was kindled against Tarbetts, who had caused him a passing but poignant self-reproach. "Waal, then, Hilary," he demanded, "what air ye a-raisin' sech a row fur? Lee-yander ain't noways so special precious ez I knows on. Toler'ble lazy an' triflin', an' mightily gi'n over ter

moonin' over a readin'-book he hev got. That thar mill war a-grindin' o' nuthin' at all more'n haffen ter-day, through me bein' a-nap-pin', and Lee-yander plumb demented by his book so ez he furgot ter pour enny grist inter the hopper. Shucks! his kin is welcome ter enny sech critter ez that, though I ain't denyin' ez he'd be toler'ble spry ef he could keep his nose out'n his book," he qualified, relenting, "or his fiddle out'n his hands. I made him leave his fiddle hyar ter the still, an' I be goin' ter hide his book."

"No need," thought Nehemiah, scornfully. Book and scholar and it might be fiddle too, so indulgent had the prospect of success made him, would by tomorrow be on the return route to the cross-roads. He even ventured to differ with the overbearing miller.

"I dun'no' 'bout that; books an' edication in gin'ral air toler'ble useful wunst in a while;" he was thinking of the dark art of dividing and multiplying by fractions. "The Yerbys hev always hed the name o' bein' quick at thar book."

Now the democratic sentiment in this country is bred in the bone, and few of its denizens have so diluted it with Christian grace as to willingly acknowledge a superior. In such a coterie as this "eating humble-pie" is done only at the muzzle of a "shootin'-iron."

"Never hearn afore ez enny o' the Yerbys knowed B from bull-foot," remarked one of the unindividualized lumpish moonshiners, shadowy, indistinguishable in the circle about the rotund figure of the still. He yet retained acrid recollections of unavailing struggles with the alphabet, and was secretly of the opinion that education was a painful thing, and, like the yellow-fever or other deadly disease, not worth having. Nevertheless, since it was valued by others, the Yerbys should scathless make no unfounded claims. "Ef the truth war knowed, nare one of 'em afore could tell a book from a bear-trap."

Nehemiah's flush the darkness concealed; he moistened his thin lips, and then gave a little cackling laugh, as if he regarded this as pleasantry. But the demolition of the literary pretensions of his family once begun went bravely on.

"Abner Sage larnt this hyar boy all he knows," another voice took up the testimony. "Ab 'lows ez his mother war quick at school, but his dad--law! I knowed Ebenezer Yerby! He war a frien'ly sorter cuss, good-nachured an' kind-spoken, but ye could put all the lamin' he hed in the corner o' yer eye."

"An' Lee-yander don't favor none o' ye," observed another of the indiscriminated, unimportant members of the group, who seemed to the groping scrutiny of Nehemiah to be only endowed with sufficient identity to do the rough work of the still, and to become liable to the Federal law. "Thar's Hil'ry--he seen it right off. Hil'ry he tuk a look at Lee-yander whenst he wanted ter kem an' work along o' we-uns, 'kase his folks wanted ter take him away from the Sudleys. Hil'ry opened the furnace door--jes so; an' he cotch the boy by the arm"--the great brawny fellow, unconsciously dramatic, suited the action to the word, his face and figure illumined by the sudden red glow--"an' Hil'ry, he say, 'Naw, by God--ye hev got yer mother's eyes in yer head, an' I'll swear ye sha'n't larn ter be a sot!' An' that's how kem Hil'ry made Alf Bixby take Lee-yander ter work in the mill. Ef ennybody tuk arter him he war convenient ter disappear down hyar with we-uns. So he went ter the mill."

"An' I wisht I hed put him in the hopper an' ground him up," said the miller, in a blood-curdling tone, but with a look of plaintive anxiety in his eyes. "He hev made a heap o' trouble 'twixt Hil'ry an' me fust an' last. Whar's Hil'ry disappeared to, en-nyways?"

For the flare from the furnace showed that this leading spirit amongst the moonshiners had gone softly out. Nehemiah, whose courage was dissipated by some subtle influence of his presence, now made bold to ask, "An' what made him ter set store on Lee-yander's mother's eyes?" His tone was as bluffly sarcastic as he dared.

"Shucks--ye mus' hev hearn that old tale," said the miller, cavalierly. "This hyar Malviny Hixon--ez lived down in Tanglefoot Cove then--her an' Hil'ry war promised ter marry, but the revenueers captured him--he war a-runnin' a still in Tanglefoot then--an' they kep' him in jail somewhar in the North fur five year. Waal, she waited toler'ble constant fur two or three year, but Ebenezer Yerby he kem a-visitin' his kin down in Tanglefoot Cove, an' she an' him met at a bran dance, an' the fust thing I hearn they war married, an' 'fore Hil'ry got back she war dead an' buried, an' so war Ebenezer."

There was a pause while the flames roared in the furnace, and the falling water desperately dashed upon the rocks, and its tumultuous voice continuously pervaded the silent void wildernesses without, and the sibilant undertone, the lisping whisperings, smote the senses anew.

"He met up with consider'ble changes fur five year," remarked one of the men, regarding the matter in its chronological aspect.

Nehemiah said nothing. He had heard the story before, but it had been forgotten. A worldly mind like his is not apt to burden itself with the sentimental details of an antenuptial romance of the woman whom his half-brother had married many years ago.

A persuasion that it was somewhat unduly long-lived impressed others of the party.

"It's plumb cur'us Hil'ry ain't never furgot her," observed one of them. "He hev never married at all. My wife says it's jes contrariousness. Ef Mal-viny hed been his wife an' died, he'd hev married agin 'fore the year war out. An' I tell my wife that he'd hev been better acquainted with her then, an' would hev fund out ez no woman war wuth mournin' 'bout

fur nigh twenty year. My wife says she can't make out ez how Hil'ry 'ain't got pride enough not ter furgive her fur givin' him the mitten like she done. An' I tell my wife that holdin' a gredge agin a woman fur bein' fickle is like holdin' a gredge agin her fur bein' a woman."

He paused with an air, perceived somehow in the brown dusk, of having made a very neat point. A stir of assent was vaguely suggested when some chivalric impulse roused a champion at the farther side of the worm, whose voice rang out brusquely:

"Jes listen at Tom! A body ter hear them tales he tells 'bout argufyin' with his wife would 'low he war a mighty smart, apt man, an' the pore foolish 'oman skeercely hed a sensible word ter bless herself with. When everybody that knows Tom knows he sings mighty small round home. Ye stopped too soon, Tom. Tell what yer wife said to that."

Tom's embarrassed feet shuffled heavily on the rocks, apparently in search of subterfuge. The dazzling glintings from the crevices of the furnace door showed here and there gleaming teeth broadly agrin.

"Jes called me a fool in gineral," admitted the man skilled in argument.

"An' didn't she 'low ez men folks war fickle too, an' remind ye o' yer young days whenst ye went a-courtin' hyar an' thar, an' tell over a string o' gals' names till she sounded like an off'cer callin' the roll?"

"Ye-es," admitted Tom, thrown off his balance by this preternatural insight, "but all them gals war a-tryin' ter marry me--not me tryin' ter marry them."

There was a guffaw at this modest assertion, but the disaffected miller's tones dominated the rude merriment.

"Whenst a feller takes ter drink folks kin spell out a heap o' reasons but the true one--an' that's 'kase he likes it. Hil'ry 'ain't never named that 'oman's name ter me, an' I hev knowed him ez well ez ennybody hyar. Jes t'other day whenst that boy kem, bein' foolish an' maudlin, he seen suthin' on-common in Lee-yander's eyes--they'll be mighty uncommon ef he keeps on readin' his tomfool book, ez he knows by heart, by the firelight when it's dim. Ef folks air so sot agin strong drink, let 'em drink less tharsefs. Hear Brother Peter Vickers preach agin liquor, an' ye'd know ez all wine-bibbers air bound fur hell."

"But the Bible don't name 'whiskey' once," said the man called Tom, in an argumentative tone. "Low wines I'll gin ye up;" he made the discrimination in accents betokening much reasonable admission; "but nare time does the Bible name whiskey, nor yit peach brandy, nor apple-jack."

"Nor cider nor beer," put in an unexpected recruit from the darkness.

The miller was silent for a moment, and gave token of succumbing to this unexpected polemic strength. Then, taking thought and courage together, "Ye can't say the Bible ain't down on 'strong drink'?" There was no answer from the vanquished, and he went on in the overwhelming miller's voice: "Hil'ry hed better be purtectin' his-self from strong drink, 'stiddier the boy--by makin' him stay up thar at the mill whar he knows thar's no drinkin' goin' on--ez will git chances at it other ways, ef not through him, in the long life he hev got ter live. The las' time the revenuers got Hil'ry 'twar through bein' ez drunk ez a fraish-biled owl. It makes me powerful oneasy whenever I know ye air all drunk an' a-gallopadin' down hyar, an' no mo' able to act reasonable in case o' need an' purtect yersefs agin spies an' revenuers an' sech 'n nuthin' in this worl'. The las' raid, ye 'member, we hed the still over yander;" he jerked his thumb in the direction present to his thoughts, but unseen by his coadjutors; "a man war wounded, an' we dun'no' but what killed in the scuffle, an' it mought be a hang-in' matter ter git caught now. Ye oughter keep sober; an' ye know, Isham, ye oughter keep Hil'ry sober. I dun'no' why ye can't. I never could abide the nasty stuff--it's enough ter turn a bullfrog's stomach. Whiskey is good ter sell--not ter drink. Let them consarned idjits in the flat woods buy it, an' drink it. Whiskey is good ter sell--not ter drink."

This peculiar temperance argument was received in thoughtful silence, the reason of all the mountaineers commending it, while certain of them knew themselves and were known to be incapable of profiting by it.

Nehemiah had scant interest in this conversation. He was conscious of the strain on his attention as he followed it, that every point of the situation should be noted, and its utility canvassed at a leisure moment. He marked the allusion to the man supposed to have been killed in the skirmish with the raiders, and he appraised its value as coercion in any altercation that he might have in seeking to take Leander from his present guardians. But he felt in elation that this was likely to be of the slightest; the miller evidently found himself hampered rather than helped by the employment of the boy; and as to the moonshiner's sentimental partisanship, for the sake of an old attachment to the dead-and-gone mountain girl, there was hardly anything in the universe so tenuous as to bear comparison with its fragility. "A few drinks ahead," he said to himself, with a sneer, "an' he won't remember who Malviny Hixon was, ef thar is ennything in the old tale--which it's more'n apt thar ain't."

He began, after the fashion of successful people, to cavil because his success was not more complete. How the time was wasting here in this uncomfortable interlude! Why could he not have discovered Leander's whereabouts earlier, and by now be jogging along the road home with the boy by his side? Why had he not bethought himself of the mill in the first instance--that focus of gossip where all the news of the countryside is mysteriously garnered and thence dispensed bounteously to all comers? It was useless, as he fretted and chafed at these untoward omissions, to urge in

his own behalf that he did not know of the existence of the mill, and that the miller, being an ungenial and choleric man, might have perversely lent himself to resisting his demand for the custody of the young runaway. No, he told himself emphatically, and with good logic, too, the miller's acrimony rose from the fact of a stranger's discovery of the still and the danger of his introduction into its charmed circle. And that reflection reminded him anew of his own danger here--not from the lawless denizens of the place, but from the forces which he himself had evoked, and again he glanced out toward the water-fall as fearful of the raiders as any moonshiner of them all.

But what sudden glory was on the waters, mystic, white, an opaque brilliance upon the swirling foam and the bounding spray, a crystalline glitter upon the smooth expanse of the swift cataract! The moon was in the sky, and its light, with noiseless tread, sought out strange, lonely places, and illusions were astir in the solitudes. Pensive peace, thoughts too subtle for speech to shape, spiritual yearnings, were familiars of the hour and of this melancholy splendor; but he knew none of them, and the sight gave him no joy. He only thought that this was a night for the saddle, for the quiet invasion of the woods, when the few dwellers by the way-side were lost in slumber. He trembled anew at the thought of the raiders whom he himself had summoned; he forgot his curses on their laggard service; he upbraided himself again that he had not earlier made shift to depart by some means--by any means--before the night came with this great emblazoning bold-faced moon that but prolonged the day; and he started to his feet with a galvanic jerk and a sharp exclamation when swift steps were heard on the rocks outside, and a man with the lightness of a deer sprang down the ledges and into the great arched opening of the place.

"'Tain't nobody but Hil'ry," observed Isham Beaton, half in reproach, half in reassurance. The pervasive light without dissipated in some degree the gloom within the grotto; a sort of gray visibility was on the appurtenances and the figures about the still, not strong enough to suggest color, but giving contour. His fright had been marked, he knew; a sort of surprised reflectiveness was in the manner of several of the moonshiners, and Ne-hemiah, with his ready fears, fancied that this inopportune show of terror had revived their suspicions of him. It required some effort to steady his nerves after this, and when footfalls were again audible outside, and all the denizens of the place sat calmly smoking their pipes without so much as a movement toward investigating the sound, he, knowing whose steps he had invited thither, had great ado with the coward within to keep still, as if he had no more reason to fear an approach than they.

A great jargon in the tone of ecstasy broke suddenly on the air upon this new entrance, shattering what little composure Nehemiah had been able to muster; a wide-mouthed exaggeration of welcome in superlative phrases and ready chorus. Swiftly turning, he saw nothing for a moment, for he looked at the height which a man's head might reach, and the new-comer measured hardly two feet in stature, waddled with a very uncertain gait, and although he bore himself with manifest complacency, he had evidently heard the like before, as he was jovially hailed by every ingratiating epithet presumed to be acceptable to his infant mind. He was attended by a tall, gaunt boy of fifteen, barefooted, with snagged teeth and a shock of tow hair, wearing a shirt of unbleached cotton, and a pair of trousers supported by a single suspender drawn across a sharp, protuberant shoulder-blade behind and a very narrow chest in front.

But his face was proud and happy and gleeful, as if he occupied some post of honor and worldly emolument in attending upon the waddling wonder on the floor in front of him, instead of being assigned the ungrateful task of seeing to it that a very ugly baby closely related to him did not, with the wiliness and ingenuity of infant nature, invent some method of making away with himself. For he *was* an ugly baby as he stood revealed in the flare of the furnace door, thrown open that his admirers and friends might feast their eyes upon him. His short wisps of red hair stood straight up in front; his cheeks were puffy and round, but very rosy; his eyes were small and dark, but blandly roguish; his mouth was wide and damp, and had in it a small selection of sample teeth, as it were; he wore a blue checked homespun dress garnished down the back with big horn buttons, sparsely set on; he clasped his chubby hands upon a somewhat pompous stomach; he sidled first to the right, then to the left, in doubt as to which of the various invitations he should accept.

"Kem hyar, Snooks!" "Right hyar, Toodles!" "Me hyar, Monkey Doodle!" "Hurrah fur the lee-tle-est moonshiner on record!" resounded fulsomely about him. Many were the compliments showered upon him, and if his flatterers told lies, they had told more wicked ones. The pipes all went out, and the broken-nosed pitcher languished in disuse as he trotted from one pair of outstretched arms to another to give an exhibition of his progress in the noble art of locomotion; and if he now and again sat down, unexpectedly to himself and to the spectator, he was promptly put upon his feet again with spurious applause and encouragement. He gave an exhibition of his dancing--a funny little shuffle of exceeding temerity, considering the facilities at his command for that agile amusement, but he was made reckless by praise--and they all lied valiantly in chorus. He repeated all the words he knew, which were few, and for the most part unintelligible, crowed like a cock, barked like a dog, mewed like a cat, and finally went away, his red cheeks yet more ruddily aglow, grave and excited and with quickly beating pulses, like one who has achieved some great public success and led captive the hearts of thousands.

The turmoils of his visit and his departure were great indeed. It all irked Nehemiah Yerby, who had scant toleration of infancy and little perception of the jocosity of the aspect of callow human nature, and it seemed strange to him that these men, all with their liberty, even their existence, jeopardized upon the chances that a moment might bring forth,

could so relax their sense of danger, so disregard the mandates of stolid common-sense, and give themselves over to the puerile beguilements of the visitor. The little animal was the son of one of them, he knew, but he hardly guessed whom until he marked the paternal pride and content that had made unwontedly placid the brow of the irate miller while the ovation was in progress. Nehemiah greatly preferred the adult specimen of the race, and looked upon youth as an infirmity which would mend only with time. He was easily confused by a stir; the gurglings, the ticklings, the loud laughter both in the deep bass of the hosts and the keen treble of the guest had a befuddling effect upon him; his powers of observation were numbed. As the great, burly forms shifted to and fro, resuming their former places, the red light from the open door of the furnace illumining their laughing, bearded countenances, casting a roseate suffusion upon the white turmoils of the cataract, and showing the rugged interior of the place with its damp and dripping ledges, he saw for the first time among them Leander's slight figure and smiling face; the violin was in his hand, one end resting on a rock as he tightened a string; his eyes were bent upon the instrument, while his every motion was earnestly watched by the would-be fiddler.

Nehemiah started hastily to his feet. He had not expected that the boy would see him here. To share with one of his own household a secret like this of aiding in illicit distilling was more than his hardihood could well contemplate. As once more the contemned "ping-pang" of the process of tuning fell upon the air, Leander chanced to lift his eyes. They smilingly swept the circle until they rested upon his uncle. They suddenly dilated with astonishment, and the violin fell from his nerveless hand upon the floor. The surprise, the fear, the repulsion his face expressed suddenly emboldened Nehemiah. The boy evidently had not been prepared for the encounter with his relative here. Its only significance to his mind was the imminence of capture and of being constrained to accompany his uncle home. He cast a glance of indignant reproach upon Hilary Tarbetts, who was not even looking at him. The moonshiner stood filling his pipe with tobacco, and as he deftly extracted a coal from the furnace to set it alight, he shut the door with a clash, and for a moment the whole place sunk into invisibility, the vague radiance vouchsafed to the recesses of the grotto by the moonbeams on the water without annihilated for the time by the contrast with the red furnace glare. Nehemiah had a swift fear that in this sudden eclipse Leander might slip softly out and thus be again lost to him, but as the dull gray light gradually reasserted itself, and the figures and surroundings emerged from the gloom, resuming shape and consistency, he saw Leander still standing where he had disappeared in the darkness; he could even distinguish his pale face and lustrous eyes. Leander at least had no intention to shirk explanations.

"Why, Uncle Nehemiah!" he said, his boyish voice ringing out tense and excited above the tones of the men, once more absorbed in their wonted interests. A sudden silence ensued amongst them. "What air ye a-doin' hyar?"

"Waal, ah, Lee-yander, boy--" Nehemiah hesitated. A half-suppressed chuckle among the men, whom he had observed to be addicted to horse-play, attested their relish of the situation. Ridicule is always of unfriendly intimations, and the sound served to put Nehemiah on his guard anew. He noticed that the glow in Hilary's pipe was still and dull: the smoker did not even draw his breath as he looked and listened. Yerby did not dare avow the true purpose of his presence after his representations to the moonshiners, and yet he could not, he would not in set phrase align himself with the illicit vocation. The boy was too young, too irresponsible, too inimical to his uncle, he reflected in a sudden panic, to be intrusted with this secret. If in his hap-hazard, callow folly he should turn informer, he was almost too young to be amenable to the popular sense of justice. He might, too, by some accident rather than intention, divulge the important knowledge so unsuitable to his years and his capacity for guarding it. He began to share the miller's aversion to the introduction of outsiders to the still. He felt a glow of indignation, as if he had always been a party in interest, that the common safety should not be more jealously guarded. The danger which Leander's youth and inexperience threatened had not been so apparent to him when he first heard that the boy had been here, and the menace was merely for the others. As he felt the young fellow's eyes upon him he recalled the effusive piety of his conversation at Tyler Sudley's house, his animadversions on violin-playing and liquor-drinking, and Brother Peter Vickers's mild and merciful attitude toward sinners in those un-spiced sermons of his, that held out such affluence of hope to the repentant rather than to the self-righteous. The blood surged unseen into Nehe-miah's face. For shame, for very shame he could not confess himself one with these outcasts. He made a feint of searching in the semi-obscurity for the rickety chair on which he had been seated, and resumed his former attitude as Leander's voice once more rang out:

"What air ye a-doin' hyar, Uncle Nehemiah?"

"Jes a-visitin', sonny; jes a-visitin'."

There was a momentary pause, and the felicity of the answer was demonstrated by another chuckle from the group. His senses, alert to the emergency, discriminated a difference in the tone. This time the laugh was with him rather than at him. He noted, too, Leander's dumfounded pause, and the suggestion of discomfiture in the boy's lustrous eyes, still widely fixed upon him. As Leander stooped to pick up the violin he remarked with an incidental accent, and evidently in default of retort, "I be powerful s'prised ter view ye hyar."

Nehemiah smarted under the sense of unmerited reproach; so definitely aware was he of being out of the character which he had assumed and worn until it seemed even to him his own, that he felt as if he were constrained to some

ghastly masquerade. Even the society of the moonshiners as their guest was a reproach to one who had always piously, and in such involuted and redundant verbiage, spurned the ways and haunts of the evil-doer. According to the dictates of policy he should have rested content with his advantage over the silenced lad. But his sense of injury engendered a desire of reprisal, and he impulsively carried the war into the enemy's country.

"I ain't in no ways s'prised ter view you-uns hyar, Lee-yander," he said. "From the ways, Lee-yander, ez ye hev been brung up by them slack-twisted Sud-leys--ungodly folks 'ceptin' what little regeneration they kin git from the sermons of Brother Peter Vick-ers, who air onsartain in his mind whether folks ez ain't church-members air goin' ter be damned or no--I ain't s'prised none ter view ye hyar." He suddenly remembered poor Laurelia's arrogations of special piety, and it was with exceeding ill will that he added: "An' Mis' Sudley in partic'lar. Ty ain't no great shakes ez a shoutin' Christian. I dun'no' ez I ever hearn him shout once, but his wife air one o' the reg'lar, mournful, unrejoicing members, always questioning the decrees of Providence, an' what ain't no nigher salvation, ef the truth war knowed, 'n a sinner with the throne o' grace yit ter find."

Leander had not picked up the violin; this disquisition had arrested his hand until his intention was forgotten. He came slowly to the perpendicular, and his eyes gleamed in the dusk. A vibration of anger was in his voice as he retorted:

"Mebbe so--mebbe they air sinners; but they'd look powerful comical 'visitin' 'hyar!"

"Ty Sudley ain't one o' the drinkin' kind," interpolated the miller, who evidently had the makings of a temperance man. "He never sot foot hyar in his life."

"Them ez kem a-visitin' hyar," blustered the boy, full of the significance of his observations and experience, "air either wantin' a drink or two 'thout payin' fur it, or else air tradin' fur liquor ter sell, an' that's the same ez moonshinin' in the law."

There was a roar of delight from the circle of lumpish figures about the still which told the boy that he had hit very near to the mark. Nehemiah hardly waited for it to subside before he made an effort to divert Leander's attention.

"An' what *air you-uns* doin' hyar?" he demanded. "Tit for tat."

"Why," bluffly declared Leander, "I be a-runnin' away from you-uns. An' I 'lowed the still war one place whar I'd be sure o' not meetin' ye. Not ez I hev got ennything agin moonshinin' nuther," he added, hastily, mindful of a seeming reflection on his refuge. "Moonshinin' *is business*, though the United States don't seem ter know it. But I hev hearn ye carry on so pious 'bout not lookin' on the wine whenst it be red, that I 'lowed ye wouldn't like ter look on the still whenst--whenst it's yaller." He pointed with a burst of callow merriment at the big copper vessel, and once more the easily excited mirth of the circle burst forth irrepressibly.

Encouraged by this applause, Leander resumed: "Why, *I* even turns my back on the still myself out'n respec' ter the family--Cap'n an' Neighbor bein' so set agin liquor. Cap'n's ekal ter preachin' on it ef ennything unexpected war ter happen ter Brother Vickers. An' when I *hev* ter view it, I look at it sorter cross-eyed." The flickering line of light from the crevice of the furnace door showed that he was squinting frightfully, with the much-admired eyes his mother had bequeathed to him, at the rotund shadow, with the yellow gleams of the metal barely suggested in the brown dusk. "So I tuk ter workin' at the mill. An' *I* hev got nuthin' ter do with the still." There was a pause. Then, with a strained tone of appeal in his voice, for a future with Uncle Nehe-miah had seemed very terrible to him, "So ye warn't a-sarchin' hyar fur me, war ye, Uncle Nehemiah?"

Nehemiah was at a loss. There is a peculiar glutinous quality in the resolve of a certain type of character which is not allied to steadfastness of purpose, nor has it the enlightened persistence of obstinacy. In view of his earlier account of his purpose he could not avow his errand; it bereft him of naught to disavow it, for Uncle Nehemiah was one of those gifted people who, in common parlance, do not mind what they say. Yet his reluctance to assure Leander that he was not the quarry that had led him into these wilds so mastered him, the spurious relinquishment had so the aspect of renunciation, that he hesitated, started to speak, again hesitated, so palpably that Hilary Tarbetts felt impelled to take a hand in the game.

"Why don't ye sati'fy the boy, Yerby?" he said, brusquely. He took his pipe out of his mouth and turned to Leander. "Naw, bub. He's jes tradin' fur bresh whiskey, that's all; he's sorter skeery 'bout bein' a wild-catter, an' he didn't want ye ter know it."

The point of red light, the glow of his pipe, the only exponent of his presence in the dusky recess where he sat, shifted with a quick, decisive motion as he restored it to his lips.

The blood rushed to Nehemiah's head; he was dizzy for a moment; he heard his heart thump heavily; he saw, or he fancied he saw, the luminous distention of Leander's eyes as this Goliath of his battles was thus delivered into his hands. To meet him here proved nothing; the law was not violated by Nehemiah in the mere knowledge that illicit whiskey was in process of manufacture; a dozen different errands might have brought him. But this statement put a sword, as it were, into the boy's hands, and he dared not deny it.

"Pears ter me," he blurted out at last, "ez ye air powerful slack with yer jaw."

"Lee-yander ain't," coolly returned Tarbetts. "He knows all thar is ter know 'bout we-uns--an' why air ye not ter share our per'ls?"

"I ain't likely ter tell," Leander jocosely reassured him. "But I can't help thinkin' how it would rejice that good Christian 'oman, Cap'n Sudley, ez war made ter set on sech a low stool 'bout my pore old fiddle."

And thus reminded of the instrument, he picked it up, and once more, with the bow held aloft in his hand, he dexterously twanged the strings, and with his deft fingers rapidly and discriminatingly turned the screws, this one up and that one down. The earnest would-be musician, who had languished while the discussion was in progress, now plucked up a freshened interest, and begged that the furnace door might be set ajar to enable him to watch the process of tuning and perchance to detect its subtle secret. No objection was made, for the still was nearly empty, and arrangements tending to replenishment were beginning to be inaugurated by several of the men, who were examining the mash in tubs in the further recesses of the place. They were lighted by a lantern which, swinging to and fro as they moved, sometimes so swiftly as to induce a temporary fluctuation threatening eclipse, suggested in the dusk the erratic orbit of an abnormally magnified fire-fly. It barely glimmered, the dullest point of white light, when the rich flare from the opening door of the furnace gushed forth and the whole rugged interior was illumined with its color. The inadequate moonlight fell away; the chastened white splendor on the foam of the cataract, the crystalline glitter, timorously and elusively shifting, were annihilated; the swiftly descending water showed from within only a continuously moving glow of yellow light, all the brighter from the dark-seeming background of the world glimpsed without. A wind had risen, unfelt in these recesses and on the weighty volume of the main sheet of falling water, but at its verge the fitful gusts diverted its downward course, tossing slender jets aslant, and sending now and again a shower of spray into the cavern. Nehemiah remembered his rheumatism with a shiver. The shadows of the men, instead of an unintelligible comminglement with the dusk, were now sharp and distinct, and the light grotesquely duplicated them till the cave seemed full of beings who were not there a moment before--strange gnomes, clumsy and burly, slow of movement, but swift and mysterious of appearance and disappearance. The beetling ledges here and there imprinted strong black similitudes of their jagged contours on the floor; with the glowing, weird illumination the place seemed far more uncanny than before, and Leander, with his face pensive once more in response to the gentle strains slowly elicited by the bow trembling with responsive ecstasy, his large eyes full of dreamy lights, his curling hair falling about his cheek as it rested upon the violin, his figure, tall and slender and of an adolescent grace, might have suggested to the imagination a reminiscence of Orpheus in Hades. They all listened in languid pleasure, without the effort to appraise the music or to compare it with other performances--the bane of more cultured audiences; only the ardent amateur, seated close at hand on a bowlder, watched the bowing with a scrutiny which betokened earnest anxiety that no mechanical trick might elude him. The miller's half-grown son, whose ear for any fine distinctions in sound might be presumed to have been destroyed by the clamors of the mill, sat a trifle in the background, and sawed away on an imaginary violin with many flourishes and all the exaggerations of mimicry; he thus furnished the zest of burlesque relished by the devotees of horse-play and simple jests, and was altogether unaware that he had a caricature in his shadow just behind him, and was doing double duty in making both Leander and himself ridiculous. Sometimes he paused in excess of interest when the music elicited an amusement more to his mind than the long-drawn, pathetic cadences which the violinist so much affected. For in sudden changes of mood and in effective contrast the tones came showering forth in keen, quick staccato, every one as round and distinct as a globule, but as unindividualized in the swift exuberance of the whole as a drop in a summer's rain; the bow was but a glancing line of light in its rapidity, and the bounding movement of the theme set many a foot astir marking time. At last one young fellow, an artist too in his way, laid aside his pipe and came out to dance. A queer *pas seul* it might have been esteemed, but he was light and agile and not ungraceful, and he danced with an air of elation--albeit with a grave face--which added to the enjoyment of the spectator, for it seemed so slight an effort. He was long-winded, and was still bounding about in the double-shuffle and the pigeon-wing, his shadow on the wall nimbly following every motion, when the violin's cadence quavered off in a discordant wail, and Leander, the bow pointed at the waterfall, exclaimed: "Look out! Somebody's thar! Out thar on the rocks!"



“ ‘LOOK OUT! SOMEBODY’S THAR!’ ”

It was upon the instant, with the evident intention of a surprise, that a dozen armed men rushed precipitately into the place. Nehemiah, his head awl, hardly distinguished the events as they were confusedly enacted before him. There were loud, excited calls, unintelligible, mouthing back in the turbulent echoes of the place, the repeated word "Surrender!" alone conveying meaning to his mind. The sharp, succinct note of a pistol-shot was a short answer. Some quick hand closed the door of the furnace and threw the place into protective gloom. He was vaguely aware that a prolonged struggle that took place amongst a group of men near him was the effort of the intruders to reopen it. All unavailing. He presently saw figures drawing back to the doorway out of the *melee*, for moonshiner and raider were alike indistinguishable, and he became aware that both parties were equally desirous to gain the outer air. Once more pistol-shots--outside this time--then a tumult of frenzied voices. Struck by a pistol-ball, Tarbetts had fallen from the ledge under the weight of the cataract and into the deep abysses below. The raiders were swiftly getting to saddle again. Now and then a crack mountain shot drew a bead upon them from the bushes; but mists were gathering, the moon was uncertain, and the flickering beams deflected the aim. Two or three of the horses lay dead on the river-bank, and others carried double, ridden by men with riddled hats. They were in full retreat, for the catastrophe on the ledge of the cliff struck dismay to their hearts. Had the man been shot, according to the expectation of those who resist arrest, this would be merely the logical sequence of events. But to be hurled from, a crag into a cataract savored of atrocity, and they dreaded the reprisals of capture.

It was soon over. The whole occurrence, charged with all the definitiveness of fate, was scant ten minutes in transition. A laggard hoof-beat, a faint echo amidst the silent gathering of the moonlit mists, and the loud plaint of Hoho-hebee Falls were the only sounds that caught Nehemiah's anxious ear when he crept out from behind the empty barrels and tremulously took his way along the solitary ledges, ever and anon looking askance at his shadow, that more than once startled him with a sense of unwelcome companionship. The mists, ever thickening, received him into their midst. However threatening to the retreat of the raiders, they were friendly to him. Once, indeed, they parted, showing through the gauzy involutions of their illumined folds the pale moon high in the sky, and close at hand a horse's head just above his own, with wild, dilated eyes and quivering nostrils. Its effect was as detached as if it were only drawn upon a canvas; the mists rolled over anew, and but that he heard the subdued voice of the rider urging the animal on, and the thud of the hoofs farther away, he might have thought this straggler from the revenue party some wild illusion born of his terrors.

The fate of Hilary Tarbetts remained a mystery. When the stream was dragged for his body it was deemed strange that it should not be found, since the bowlders that lay all adown the rocky gorge so interrupted the sweep of the current that so heavy a weight seemed likely to be caught amongst them. Others commented on the strength and great momentum of the flow, and for this reason it was thought that in some dark underground channel of Hide-and-Seek Creek the moonshiner had found his sepulchre. A story of his capture was circulated after a time; it was supposed that he dived and swam ashore after his fall, and that the raiders overtook him on their retreat, and that he was now immured, a Federal prisoner. The still and all the effects of the brush-whiskey trade disappeared as mysteriously, and doubtless this silent flitting gave rise to the hopeful rumor that Tarbetts had been seen alive and well since that fateful

night, and that in some farther recesses of the wilderness, undiscovered by the law, he and like comrades continue their chosen vocation. However that may be, the vicinity of Hoho-hebee Falls, always a lonely place, is now even a deeper solitude. The beavers, unmolested, haunt the ledges; along their precipitous ways the deer come down to drink; on bright days the rainbow hovers about the falls; on bright nights they glimmer in the moon; but never again have they glowed with the shoaling orange light of the furnace, intensifying to the deep tawny tints of its hot heart, like the rich glammers of some great topaz.

This alien glow it was thought had betrayed the place to the raiders, and Nehemiah's instrumentality was never discovered. The post-office appointment was bestowed upon his rival for the position, and it was thought somewhat strange that he should endure the defeat with such exemplary resignation. No one seemed to connect his candidacy with his bootless search for his nephew. When Leander chanced to be mentioned, however, he observed with some rancor that he reckoned it was just as well he didn't come up with Lee-yander; there was generally mighty little good in a runaway boy, and Lee-yander had the name of being disobejent an' turr'ble bad.

Leander found a warm welcome at home. His violin had been broken in the *melee*, and the miller, though ardently urged, never could remember the spot where he had hidden the book--such havoc had the confusion of that momentous night wrought in his mental processes. Therefore, unhampered by music or literature, Leander addressed himself to the plough-handles, and together that season he and "Neighbor" made the best crop of their lives.

Laurelia sighed for the violin and Leander's music, though, as she always made haste to say, some pious people misdoubted whether it were not a sinful pastime. On such occasions it went hard with Leander not to divulge his late experiences and the connection of the pious Uncle Nehemiah therewith. But he always remembered in time Laurelia's disability to receive confidences, being a woman, and consequently unable to keep a secret, and he desisted.

One day, however, when he and Ty Sudley, ploughing the corn, now knee-high, were pausing to rest in the turn-row, a few furrows apart, in an ebullition of filial feeling he told all that had befallen him in his absence. Ty Sudley, divided between wrath toward Nehemiah and quaking anxiety for the dangers that Leander had been constrained to run--*ex post facto* tremors, but none the less acute--felt moved now and then to complacence in his prodigy.

"So 'twar *you-uns ez war smart enough ter slam the fumace door an' throw the whole place inter darkness!* That saved them moonshiners and raiders from killin' each other. It saved a deal o' bloodshed--*ez sure ez shootin' 'Twar mighty smart in ye. But"--suddenly bethinking himself of sundry unfilial gibes at Uncle Nehemiah and the facetious account of his plight--"Lee-yander, ye mustn't be so turr'ble bad, sonny; ye mustn't be so turr'ble bad."*

"Naw, ma'am, Neighbor, I won't," Leander protested.

And he went on following the plough down the furrow and singing loud and clear.