

THE CURSE OF THE TIGLATH.

Along a dark and lonely road in the southern part of England, and through a tempestuous storm that raged with fury, Abner Mitchel drove his fast tiring horse on his way to a little village that he hoped to reach in a few hours. But the strong wind and the heavy rain greatly impeded his progress, and he feared he would be forced to spend the night in the open beneath the raging elements. Through his heavy clothing the rain had soaked, and he could feel the water trickling down his legs; and his head was unprotected to the violence of the storm, as he had lost his hat.

His thoughts as he rode along were abruptly broken by the sudden stop of his horse. He peered into the darkness, but could discern nothing. Slowly dropping to the ground, he stepped cautiously forward to ascertain the cause of this strange action on the part of his horse. He had taken but a few steps when he stumbled and fell over a tree that had been blown down by the gale. However, after some time, and with great difficulty, he succeeded in getting his horse across this obstruction and continued on his journey, not noticing that his animal, instead of following a bend in the main road, proceeded by an unused lane.

During the next few hours the tempest did not subside, but grew worse. The rain beat upon his face and uncovered head, and the howl of the wind among the trees was like so many voices yelling defiance at him. Still he urged on his horse, ever on the look-out for a light, which would mean shelter, fire and food. But the weary animal was unable to move any faster; it seemed as though at each step his pace was decreasing. Then suddenly, as if it had sprung from the ground, a black structure loomed up before him, completely obstructing his path. His exhausted horse stumbled and fell, at the same time breaking his neck and throwing Abner heavily to the ground.

Slowly Mitchell recovered from the fall, and gradually the mass began to take form and shape itself into an ancient manor house, but it resembled the night so much that he was unable to see how big it really was. As he stood wondering what to do, a flash of lightning illuminated the place, and he caught a momentary glimpse of a door but a few feet from him. Thinking only of shelter, he quickly advanced and shook the portal. A rumbling sound like thunder went through the building; but undaunted and intrepid he applied his shoulder to the door. With a creaking and groaning of rusty hinges it yielded, and Abner Mitchell passed out of a tempestuous storm into a mysterious and obscure building.

He waited within for a sound, but all was silent, and the air was heavy, which gave Abner the impression that the place was unoccupied. With an uncanny feeling the traveller slowly and carefully took a step. His footstep sounded to him like the report of a gun, and for an instant fear gripped his heart; but, chiding himself for being a coward, he placed his hand on the wall for guidance and moved along. After groping some time in the darkness, he found a door. He tried it, but it would not open. Turning away he struck a piece of furniture, and, glad to find somewhere to rest, he sat down. With a crash that rent the air, the stool—for such it was—was shattered beneath his weight. For some minutes he sat horror-stricken among the debris, while discordant sounds issued from every corner, and re-echoed throughout the building.

As he sat motionless he was bewildered by a sudden stream of light that shot along the floor from behind him. He was terrified. His blood froze. He waited, but not a sound could he hear. Slowly and warily he rose and turned toward the door which so lately he had tried to open. With renewed courage he again sought entrance: this time his efforts were successful, and he threw open the door.

The bright light of the room blinded him, and he quickly covered his eyes with his hands; then slowly he withdrew them. What a scene he beheld! Beautiful decorations graced the chamber. Exquisite tapestries hung from the walls. Here and there were trophies of the chase. Opposite, a big fireplace threw dancing shadows on the wall. Rugs of many patterns covered the floor. It was all so wonderful. Before the fireplace were two large armchairs, in one of which sat a young man with a paper in his hand, which seemed to be a letter. Seeing Abner he rose, crossed the room, and stopped in front of him. Mitchell's resolution melted, his daring courage crumbled, his body grew limp, as that gaze pierced his very heart. He was paralyzed. The stare seemed to last a lifetime; but not a word was spoken, and as silently as he came, the young man returned to his seat.

As he reached his place there was a sound of footsteps, and immediately another man entered the room. He greatly resembled the young man, but was much older. The occupant of the chair did not seem to perceive that there was another person in the room, and continued to read the note. The old man looked across at him, and Abner heard him say: "Who sent you that, David?"

At the sound of his voice the one addressed David hurriedly shoved the piece of paper into his pocket.

"It's only a letter, father," he answered, endeavoring to conceal his confusion.

"I know it is a letter," returned the father. "But I want to know from whom you received it."

"Oh, father, I am sorry, I can't tell you."

"You must; it is my duty to know," commanded the father, becoming angry.

"Please forgive me, father," begged the son. "But it is impossible for me to tell you."

The old sire's countenance became white, his eyes turned a dull reddish color like those of an enraged beast; trembling with rage he looked at his son.

"You have good reason for not telling me. It is from that young pauper who has allured you. What do you mean by dragging the name of Tiglath, a name that is honored and respected throughout the kingdom, down to the depths you have lowered it by associating with her? I am ashamed of you. I am ashamed to call you son; to have you bear the name of Tiglath. I command you to stop your relations with her, or——"

"But, father," interrupted the son, "I love that girl. She is my whole life. And, what does it matter if she is poor? That is no disgrace."

"It is the greatest disgrace that ever befell a man, and you have disgraced me—yourself—your name, by speaking to her. Leave her at once."

"I can't, and I won't," wrathfully cried the son, jumping to his feet.

The old man staggered.

"You, you go," he hissed, pointing to the door. "And the curse of the Tiglath go with you."

"No, it won't, the curse will remain in this room," cried the enraged son, and drawing his sword he thrust it into the old man's heart. Instantly the house trembled, as if shaken by an earthquake and at the same moment all disappeared. Mitchell fainted.

The sun was streaming through the windows of the old house when Mitchell awoke from his stupor. Arising from the floor, he did not wait to examine the place, but rushed from the building.

About noon that day he arrived at the village, worried, fatigued, and famished. He entered the inn, and, sitting down at a table he called for something to eat, and asked for the innkeeper. His order was filled and soon after a short, fat, intelligent looking man came to him.

"You wish to see me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, sit down," replied Abner. "I suppose," he continued, "you have lived around here a considerable time."

"Oh, yes, nearly all my life. I guess I know things around here about as well as anybody."

"I thought so. That is why I asked for you."

"Yes, often, almost every day, people drop in here and find out things about these parts."

"There is some mighty fine buildings around here," said Abner, after a few moments of silence. "I passed one today that particularly impressed me. It was about two miles from here. Could you tell me anything about it?"

"There are some mighty fine buildings around here," said the one you mean. It is the oldest in these parts. I would say from what I have heard about it, that it must be at least three hundred years old. It is called Tiglath Manor." Mitchell trembled at the name, but the innkeeper did not notice it, and kept on speaking. "But it has been deserted as long as I can remember, and that is a long time. It is a very mysterious old building, and not very much known about it. In fact, I have told you all that any one knows. Here, I must be going." But his voice betrayed him.

"You know more than that. Come, tell about it. Here, have a drink."

The innkeeper sat down again, and after drinking, he turned to Abner.

"Well, sir, I guess there is no harm in telling you about it, but it is a story that I rarely repeat. I don't like telling it, somehow. A long time ago, in the days when that old castle flourished, there lived a family by the name of Tiglath, from whom the manor gets its name. Well, they were proud and rich, hating anyone that was poor. In some way the young Tiglath—the only heir to the estate and name—fell in love with a little girl whose parents were very poor; and one day the lord caught his son reading a letter he had received from the girl. He became angry and ordered the son to give up the girl. But the young fellow was

stubborn—like all young fellows in love—and told his father he wouldn't. Thereupon the old man cursed him, and told him to leave the house. The young Tiglath, becoming enraged, killed the old man, saying that the curse would remain in the room. And I believe it—until this day it still hangs over that room, and—say, what's the trouble? You're pale. Are you sick? Wait, here's a drink."

"Stop!" cried Mitchell. "Don't say any more. I saw it all!"

"You what?"

"I saw it. I tell you, I saw it."

"Good God, man! Were you in that house?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night during the storm."

"Tell me about it, quick!"

Abner then related his story. The old man's face twitched, and fear was written on every feature.

"What's wrong?" asked Abner.

"Oh, nothing."

"Yes, there's something. Tell me."

"Do you really want to know?" asked the old man in a stern and solemn voice.

"I want to hear the end. Go on, will you?"

"It's that curse, that curse of the Tiglath—you fall under it."

"What is it? Tell me. Don't keep me in suspense."

"The curse that was left in that room is that whoever sees that scene between the Tiglaths, will not live long after his experience."

Mitchell's face was rigid as the innkeeper pronounced the curse.

"Did anyone ever see it before?" asked Abner.

"I don't know," lied the innkeeper.

"I'll take a chance on the curse. Death has no fear for me after last night."

That day he left the inn, provided with a horse and a quantity of food. A few days later a man was found dead on the road, some distance from the village; he was badly cut about the face, as though he might have been thrown and kicked by a horse.