

LITERATURE.

A SKETCH.

HERS was a lowly and a lonely fate :
Far from the world's gay throng, unseen, unknown,
Like a fair floweret in a woodland vale
She grew in beauty, 'neath the fostering shade
Of an old stately tree—her father's home—
Which centuries had seen thus proudly stand,
Braving the storms of winter and of fate,
In lone magnificence. She, fair and young,
The child of that high race, was gently nursed
With smiles and loving tears—the sunny beams
And vernal showers of her quiet spring.
And days and years passed on—unmarked the flight
Of Time—till she blushed forth a glorious flower.

But none were there to see, and none to love
(To see had been to love). Far otherwise
Her fate ordained. And finding all around
No ocean for the stream of love that gushed
Warm, pure, and holy from her youthful heart,
Meekly she turned her soft blue eyes to Heaven;
And there, amid her native woodlands, like
The woodland flower—her emblem—on the soft
And wooing breeze that gently round her played,
She lavished all her sweets—a fragrant store—
And there she garnered up her love, her hope,
Her heart's sweet virgin bloom.

So passed her spring; and summer glided on,
Yet still she lonely dwelt—blessing and blessed
In that fair vale, and by the world unknown.
Pleasure, the butterfly, unheeding passed
On jewelled wing; but the bee, Happiness,
Dwelt lovingly within her gentle breast,
And lingered, charmed with its sweet resting place,
Drinking the honey of her soul; and Peace,
The dove-like, brooded in the shadowy boughs,
And lulled her with its whispered melody;
And evermore the eye of Heaven gazed
In her pure eyes, and found reflected there
Its holy image.

Thus waned her summer; and now autumn drear
Obscured with clouds the sunshine of her lot.
Loved blossoms faded round—and sere and wan,
Rustled with dying moan above her head
The kindred leaves of her 'time-honoured' tree.
She wept to see them parted: day by day,
Or faded on the parent bough; and then
Falling around her once bright dwelling place,
And mingling with the dust of years gone by,
Dimmed were those gentle eyes; yet 'mid their tears
With faded light turned lovingly to Heaven:
And so she died.

Mourn not her lonely fate. True all unknown
Passion to her, and greatness, and renown;
Yet blest in this was she; unfelt was Love,
Therefore Inconstancy, Greatness unknown,
And hence Ambition's restless flood had ne'er
Disturbed the placid current of her life.
Sweet ties of household love—and charity,
Friendship, and pure benevolence—in these
Passed all her quiet hours. Oh say, ye sad
And weary ones of earth! was she not blest
Whom peace and love surrounded, and who died
Tranquil and hoping, gazing up to Heaven?

THE MYSTERIOUS HUNTSMAN.

BY PAUL CRAYTON.

Concluded.

CHAPTER IV.

The Interview and the Fatal Messenger.

In an hour the hunter was in the presence of Ellen Austin. The two went forth and wandered along the banks of the Des Plaines.

'Ellen,' said Clinton, 'do you know why I wished to speak with you; why I have led you hither?'

'No—but you look pale—very pale!'

'Well might I be pale, for this night I have committed a horrible deed! Ellen, I have had a quarrel—a foolish quarrel, and I have slain a man!'

'Clinton!' shrieked the poor girl, fainting in his arms—'Heavens! what do you say?'

'I fear that I have killed him, and I am come to bid you farewell. You know the penalty.'

And Clinton stooped to bathe the brow of the fainting Ellen in the water.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, reviving; 'you are then—a—'

'A murderer, perhaps,' interrupted Clinton.

'But it was not my fault altogether; he provoked the duel.'

'A duel—did you say a duel?'

'Yes, he insulted me, and the consequences followed.'

'Oh! you are not then a murderer?'

'The world will not regard me as such, Ellen, but if you do not I am contented! But yet, dear Ellen, we must part! I will escape to St. Louis; whither, if you love me—'

'Oh! Clinton!'

'You will not hesitate to follow in time.—Your father

will understand my position. But now let us return to the house, for I must away!'

Clinton pressed her to his heart, then led, or rather carried her to her father's house.

'Farewell?' he murmured, when they were near the door.

'Oh! must we part?' sighed Ellen.

In a burst of tenderness Clinton clasped her to his bosom.

At that moment, a horseman rode furiously by them and thundered at the door. The two were concealed in the shadow of the house, but they heard and saw all that passed.

'What can be the matter?' murmured Ellen.

'Wait a moment, and we will see.'

Ellen's father appeared at the door.

'Does Mr. Austin live here?' cried the horseman.

'I am he!'

'Mr. Austin, I am come to inform you that a young man at the White Rabbit Inn, calling himself your son, has fought a duel, and is now lying at the point of death!'

'God of mercy!' exclaimed the old man, rushing into the house.

'Clinton, Clinton!' sobbed Ellen; 'you have killed my brother.'

The girl fainted; the hunter clasped her in his arms, bore her into the house, imprinted a last kiss upon her ashly lips, and rushed wildly from the presence of her astonished parents.

At midnight when the stars looked coldly down upon the earth, and no sound was heard save the hum of insects and the howl of the prairie wolf, Clinton was wandering alone over the earth, a fugitive, crushed with remorse and vain regrets.

CHAPTER V.

The Recovery.

Mr. Austin hastened to the inn where lay his wounded son; wounded we say, for Frederick was not dead. Stretched out upon a bed of agony the anxious father found him, and thanked heaven that he was still alive.

'You are severely hurt?' said Mr. Austin, pressing his hand while tears gathered in his eyes.

'A slight wound—a mere trifle,' replied Frederick; and a faint smile played upon his lips.

The surgeon arrived; the wound was pronounced exceedingly dangerous, but not mortal. The old man wept for joy!

On the following morning, Mrs. Austin and Ellen went to visit Frederick. The poor girl had scarcely recovered from the shock of the preceding night, but anxiety for her brother bore her up. She had not yet dared to confess to her parents who was the antagonist of their son, nor could she realise the fearful truth herself.

The travellers had left the inn, but the landlord gave a full relation of the duel, concealing only the name of Clinton. On the arrival of Ellen and her mother, however, he changed his resolution and revealed the whole. At the name of Clinton, Austin started.

'Ah! that explains his conduct of last night,' he cried.

'He has fled!' said Ellen, covering her face with her hands.

'And it is well!' exclaimed her father sternly.

For three weeks, Frederick Austin was unable to leave the inn; but at the end of that time, he was sufficiently recovered to be transported to his father's house.

Still Ellen heard nothing of her absent lover. Her anxiety and grief for the absence, were unequalled only by her joy to think that he was not the murderer of her brother. To him Ellen told all her heart; and when she related many acts of generosity in Clinton, Frederick, who knew by experience that he was brave, openly approved of her choice, and while he forgave his former antagonist, regretted exceedingly that he had fled where none pursued.

Frederick was soon able to walk about; he and his sister then took short strolls upon the prairie and on the river banks, and ended by gradually prolonging their walks. When the young man had regained his strength, he either went forth alone with his dog and gun, or accompanied by his sister, made short excursions on horseback. It is needless to say that Ellen, like a true maid of the prairie, rode with the utmost grace and ease.

Frederick, notwithstanding the arrogance of which we have seen him guilty, was naturally of a pleasing disposition, generous and obliging. His love of satire and fun sometimes carried him to extremes, and his self-will bordered on insolence; but he had changed somewhat since his recovery, which fact was owing perhaps to the lesson Clinton had taught him at the inn, and the fatal consequences of his presumption.

Two months passed by, and still no news from Clinton Grover reached the ear of the anxious Ellen.

Summer was gone, and autumn, with its chilling frosts, had robbed the prairie of its robe of green. The leaves of the forest had fallen to the ground, and the prairie grass had become withered and sere.

It was on one of those days, when the melancholy of autumn is joined to the beauty of summer, Frederick and his sister rode forth upon the prairie, and excited by the fresh prairie breeze, unconsciously proceeded several miles from home.

They were upon the broad prairie, which extended

far away on every side, undulating and beautiful, although covered with dry and withered grass.

The sun went down before they thought to return; but as the evening approached, and the silent prairie became clothed in gloom, they paused with one consent and turned their horses homeward.

They now galloped on at a rapid pace; but night came and they were far from home.

Night, but not darkness!

Behind them, far away on the prairie, a broad gleam of light appeared—quivering intense!

The prairie was on fire!

'Heavens!' exclaimed Frederick—'look!'

'The fire!' cried Ellen.

'Yes—the prairie is burning! forward or we are lost!'

The steeds needed no urging, they bounded away as if conscious of the danger.

The breeze freshened, and the dry grass was consumed like powder in the flames which swept along the earth.

Onward, onward dashed the steeds, bearing their riders swiftly over the prairie; but the flames were behind them, more swift, more furious than they!

Onward, onward still they flew; but the deer bounded by them in his flight, and the fluttering of wings over their heads, told that the birds of the air were swifter than they.

Trembling with fear, Ellen lashed her steed and kept by her brother's side. Oh! that was a wild spectacle—the prairie illuminated by the fierce glare of light, the raging flames, and the cloud of black and dismal smoke, which gave to the canopy of heaven a fearful tint of gloom!

Onward dashed the steeds, but the winds were swifter than they; and the flames were on the wings of the wind. Already the hot breath of the conflagration swept over them like the Simoon of the desert!

All behind them was a fierce glare of light; before them was darkness and gloom. Suddenly a faint light was seen upon a distant hill—like a torch held by the hand of man—and it approached waving to one fro. At last the form of its bearer was indistinctly visible.

'Faster!' cried Frederick, 'and we are saved! Heavens! the flames are gaining on us still—faster—faster!'

But to increase their speed was impossible. The crackling flames were already upon them, when the torch which they had seen approaching was suddenly plunged into the grass a hundred rods before them.

In a moment the flames shot upward, and the form of a stranger was seen, still holding the torch. Frederick and Ellen were between two fires, but the one was fleeing before them, while the other was close—close upon their backs. They saw the form of the stranger already upon the black space which the foremost fire had left, and terrible was their struggle to reach it before overtaken by the flames behind. The smoke rolled over them—the swift flames were already beneath the hoofs of their steeds—they were blinded, suffocated, burned—but they were saved!

The fire before them swept onward—onward—leaving in its track the earth all charred and bare. The flames behind died away at the point where the stranger had plunged his torch into the grass, or swept round them in a broad circle—a circle of raging fire!

Arrived on the black space of ground, the jaded horses staggered and fell exhausted to the earth. Ellen uttered a cry of alarm as her animal reeled beneath her, but as she fell, the stranger, their saviour, caught her in his arms. Feeling herself thrown headlong to the ground, she had closed her eyes; but now she opened them, and they fell upon the countenance of the stranger.

'Ellen! it is indeed you!' murmured the hunter, clasping her to his bosom. 'Thank God! thank God!'

'Thank God!' echoed Frederick, 'you have saved our lives!'

CHAPTER VI.

Conclusion.

Upon hearing a voice behind him, Clinton looked around. By the glare of the flames, the two young men recognized each other!

'Heavens!' exclaimed the hunter, 'what do I see?'

'Your friend,' cried Frederick, grasping him by the hand.

'Whom I supposed dead—dead by my hand!' murmured Clinton. 'Ah! what joy!'

'Indeed, what joy!' echoed Ellen, a faint smile playing upon her lips.

When the excitement and surprise was over, Clinton told his history since the fatal meeting between him and Ellen's brother, supposing that Frederick was dead, and fearing not only the law but also the hatred of Ellen, he had roamed for weeks over the prairie, spending but little of his time in the towns. At last he became tired of such a life, and resolved to return to the Des Plaines and learn whether he was really the object of the hatred he supposed. For several days he lingered about the house, not daring to discover himself to his former friends. On the night in question, he sought refuge in the house of a squatter, who had taken up his abode far out upon the prairie. He saw the fire; he waited for it to approach, when he beheld the forms of two persons on horseback between him and the flames. The squatter's house was safe, for it was surrounded by furrowed ground that it was impossible for the fire to reach it; and Clinton remained not there. He seized a torch, and rushing into the midst of danger, saved the lives of Frederick and his sister.