

THE COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT.

I have sworn upon the Altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of Tyranny over the Mind of Man.—Thomas Jefferson

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MISCELLANEOUS.

From the Democratic Review.

HARRY BLAKE.

A STORY OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LUCKY CRAWFORD."

CHAPTER I.

Somewhere about the time when the ill feeling, which had long been gathering strength and venom, between England and her American colonies, was ripening to a rebellion, there stood on the road between Albany and Schenectady a fantastic old building, whose style had been hatched in the foggy brain, and whose walls had been reared by the sturdy hand of some Dutch architect. It was a substantial, antiquated house, time worn, gray, but not dilapidated; half smothered in trees, with odd-looking wings stretching out in every imaginable direction, with little reference to uniformity or regularity. Sharp gables, with steps to the tops of them, jutted up among the green branches of the trees; crooked chimneys, forked for the benefit of storks, which never came there, and of all possible forms, were perched on the roof; some of them stiff and upright, like stark warriors on guard, and others twisting and bending, like so many inquisitive old fellows, endeavoring to peep into the narrow little windows which garnished the second story. But everything about it was solid, strong and old. The very barns had a generous look. They were low, roomy, and extensive, with broad wide doors and windows, and had a comfortable, liberal air, not unlike some sturdy short-legged fellow, with a large stomach, and ample breeches pockets.

From the lowest branch of a large sycamore, in front of this house, hung a sign-board, ornamented with the figure of a horse of a deep blue color—a variety of that animal possibly common in those days, but at present extinct—indicating that it was a place of public entertainment. Such an inn, however, was little needed in its own immediate neighborhood, for the Blue Horse was a place noted throughout the whole country round for its good ale, its warm fireside, and its jolly, jovial old landlord, who told a story, drank his ale, and smoked his pipe, with any man in the country; and so he could but get a crouny at his bar-room fire, he cared little whether the fellow had an empty pocket or not, or whether the ale which was making him mellow was ever to be paid for. It is no wonder, then, that the Blue Horse became the delight of the men, and the horror of their wives, who wondered that their husbands would wander off at nights, to old Garret Quackenbosc's house, and listen to his roystering stories, when they could be so much more usefully employed in splitting wood or rocking the babies to sleep at home. Rumors of their venom reached the ears of old Garret; but he smoked his pipe closed his eyes, and forgot them. His customers did the same, and in spite of conjugal opposition, the bar-room of the Blue Horse was rarely empty.

This bar room was a large barn like chamber, with a wide, gaping fire place, and great sturdy fire dogs squatting in front of it, with huge logs of wood resting on and warming their hinder parts—by the

way, an application to warmth in a direction which has latterly come quite common, not only to fire dog, but to all frequenters of bar rooms. Heavy rafters, blackened by time and smoke, crossed the top of the room, and from them projected hooks on which hung hams, hind quarters of smoked beef, baskets, kettles, and various articles of culinary use. Over the chimney were several guns, covered with dust and cobwebs, and which probably had never been used since the landlord was a boy; but on which he now occasionally cast an anxious eye, as rumors of war and strife reached him from the more eastern colonies. Wooden chairs, wooden tables, a wooden dresser, garnished with pewter plates, shining like so many mirrors, and a huge arm chair in the chimney corner, with Garret Quackenbosc's fat body and jolly face in the midst of it, completed the furniture of the room.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of a fine bright day in autumn, and in this very room, and in the midst of a group of half a dozen men, with the face of the landlord of the Blue Horse shining out, like a red sun, from among them, that we open our narrative. They were all men of the same class as Garret—plain, sturdy, substantial—mostly farmers of the neighborhood, who had loitered in to pick up the gossip of the day; or those who, on their way from Albany or Schenectady, had dropped in to have a talk with old Garret, before indulging in that same pleasure with their better halves at home.

The subject, however, which now engrossed them was far from a pleasant one. It seemed so even to the landlord, for he was silent, and turned a deaf ear to all that was going on; it being a fixed rule of his, to interfere in no man's difficulties but his own. And as this, which was a hot dialogue between the two of the party was evidently fast verging into a quarrel, after eyeing the parties steadily for some time, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and quietly left the room. Before closing the door, he turned and looked solemnly at the disputants, to let them see that, owing to their misconduct, they were about being deprived of the light of his countenance, and then shaking his head, and emitting from his throat a grumbling indication of supreme discontent, he shut the door and went out.

'Come, come—stop this, Wickliffe,' said an old man, one of the party, on whom at least Garret's look had produced an effect. 'Don't you see you've driven Garret off? This dispute is mere nonsense.'

The person whom he addressed was a short, square built man, with a dark sallow face, with a scar on the nose, and one crossing both his lips, as if he had been slashed there with a knife; a dark black eye, that at times kindled and glowed, until it seemed a red hot ball set in its socket, a low wrinkled forehead, and lips that worked and twitched baring and showing his teeth like a mastiff preparing to bite. And as he sat there, with his fingers working with anger, and his lips writhing, he was about as ugly a looking fellow as one would wish to see.

He turned slowly to the old man who spoke to him, and snapping his fingers in his face, said 'D—n old Garret! Let him go, let him, and as for this dispute with that boy, it's my affair, not yours; so don't meddle with what don't concern you.'

The old man drew back abashed. But the opponent of Wickliffe a young fellow of three or four and twenty, whose frank handsome countenance, and glad eye seemed a warrant of an open generous disposition now put in.

'Well Wickliffe' said he, 'if you will quarrel, I won't. I didn't want to drive Garret out of his own bar room, and you know he never will stay where there's quarreling. So drink your ale and we'll say no more about this matter.'

'But I will say more about it,' retorted the man half rising from his seat, and at the same time shaking his fist at him. 'I will say more; and who'll hinder me, I'd like to know that? And as for you, Mr.

Harry Blake I will say too, that in spite of your big carcass, you have no more spirit than a woman. That is what I'll say.'

'Well, well say it if you please,' replied Blake going to the fire and seating himself on a bench, in front of it, 'I'm sure I don't care.'

As he spoke he laughed; and leaning forward picked up a chip which lay on the hearth and commenced stirring the fire with it; at the same time whistling, and paying no attention to what his opponent said, other than by an occasional laugh at his evident anger at being thus foiled. At last however Wickliffe turning to a man who sat next to him, muttered something between his teeth which drew the cry of 'Shame! shame!' from those around him, and of which Blake caught but the words 'Mary Lincoln.'—But they brought him to his feet.

'What's that you say about Mary Lincoln?' said he advancing toward the man who was looking at him with a grin of satisfaction at having at last aroused him.

'Nothing, nothing' replied several at the same time rising and placing themselves between him and Wickliffe. 'Don't mind him Harry; don't mind him. He's in a passion and doesn't mean what he says.'

'But I do mean it' shouted Wickliffe. 'I do mean it; and I repeat it, Mary Lincoln is—'

'What!' demanded Blake quickly, his eyes glowing with anger.

Wickliffe eyed him for a moment with a fixed dogged stare; and it might have been shame, or it might have been a feeling of trepidation, at having at length aroused him and at seeing the powerful frame of Blake with every muscle strung ready to leap upon him, that deterred him; for he turned away his head and said—

'No matter what. I've said it once, and that's enough. They all heard it.'

Harry Blake's face from a deep scarlet, became deadly pale as he answered: 'Wickliffe I did not hear what you said, but I dare you to repeat it. If you do, and there is one word in it that should not be, this hour will be the bitterest of your whole life. I'm not the man to make a threat and not act up to it.'

He stood for a moment, waiting for him to repeat his remark, and then turned on his heel and walked to the furthest end of the room; and as he did so it was remarked by several who thought nothing of it at the time, but who remembered it long after when every word then uttered and every action done became important; that he ground his teeth together, and seizing a large knife which lay on the table with his teeth still set, drove it into the table, and left it sticking there.

Still his adversary did not seem disposed to give up a dispute which it was evident had already been carried too far; for he demanded in an impatient tone.

'What's Mary Lincoln to you my young fellow, that you bristle up so at the very mention of her name? What is she to you? continued he, becoming still more excited 'be she pure as snow—or-or-or what I will not name. G—d! One would think you were a sweetheart. A glorious pair you'd make! Your red hot temper would be finely balanced against her sweet face and disposition. Sweat—very sweet—and so d—d yielding—and dove like—that she cannot resist importunity however improper—ha! ha! It makes me laugh.'

His laugh however was a short one; for before the words were fairly out of his mouth Blake was upon him. Exerting his great strength, now doubly increased by fury, he fairly swung the speaker from his feet, and flung him across the room and against the opposite wall; striking which, he fell at full length on the floor. For a moment Wickliffe lay stunned; but recovering himself, he sprang up, and shaking his hand at Blake and saying 'My boy you may take your measure for a coffin after this; for you'll need one,' darted from the room. A speedy opportunity might have been afforded to him to have put his threat into execution had not several persons sprang forward and

seized Blake, as he was following and held him back by main force.

'Don't stop me' exclaimed he struggling to get loose, and dragging the strong men who held him across the room. 'Let loose your hold Dick Wells, let loose your grip I say,' exclaimed he to one who held him by the shoulders with a strength nearly equal to his own. 'Let me go or I'll strike you.'

'No you won't Harry,' replied the other. 'But even if you do I'll not let you go on a fool's errand. So there's no use scuffling in that way.'

Blake saw that nothing was to be gained by a struggle with so many, and so he said 'Let me go, I'll promise not to follow him. But mark me,' said he, as they relinquished their hold, 'you have this night heard this scoundrel defame one of the poorest girls that ever lived because he had a grudge against me, and knew that she was to be my wife. He shall pay for it if it cost me my life.'

'Come, come Harry; don't be a boy,' said the old man, who had before interfered with Wickliffe. 'The man was half drunk and quarrelsome, and saw that you couldn't stomach what he was saying and so he said it. No one cares for him or his words. We all know that Mary Lincoln hasn't her equal in these parts. God bless her! I only wish she was my own child. Not but what my poor little Kate is a good girl; and kind and affectionate too, poor little Kate is; but yet she's not Mary Lincoln; but Kate is a good girl though, a very good girl.' And the old man shook his head reproachfully, as if there were a small voice whispering at his heart, that he should not have placed his own poor, little Kate next with Mary Lincoln.

Harry Blake's fine face brightened as he looked at the old man; and he took his hand and shook it warmly. 'You're right Adams—you're right. Mary needs no one to speak up for her. I see it. God bless you all for your kind feelings towards her. And now I think of it Adams, tell Kate that Mary may not be Mary Lincoln long, and may soon want her to stand up with her.'

'I will do that Harry, I will,' said the old farmer, rubbing his hands together and right glad I am to hear of it; but Harry you'll not carry this quarrel further—promise me—I can trust you I know.'

Blake however laughed and shook his head. 'I'll think of it,' said he. 'Beware of rash promises,' was what I learnt from my copy book. But now I must go. Five miles are between me and my home.' As he spoke he turned from them and left the room, and in a short time was heard galloping down the road.

Harry Blake had not been gone many minutes, when one of the company an old man, dressed in a suit of grey homespun, who had been sitting at the fire, an inactive spectator of the altercation got up and turning to a man who was leaning carelessly against the opposite side of the fire-place said 'Come Walton let's follow Harry's example. Our paths are the same and we'll go in company; and as you are the youngest you can get the horses.'

The person thus addressed seemed to agree to the proposal, for after yawning and stretching himself he went out and in a few minutes was heard calling from without that the horses were ready.

The road which they pursued was the same already taken by Wickliffe and Blake; and as they had far to go, and it was late they struck into a brisk trot; so as to pass a dreary portion of it, which ran through waste and forest, before the night set in.—Part of it was sad and solitary enough, shrouded with tall trees, covered with long weeping moss, trailing from the branches to the earth, and resembling locks blanched by age. Dense and tangled bushes with giant dead trees, stretching out their leafless branches over them, with here and there a solitary crow, pluming its feathers on them, crowded up to the very path; and in other parts there were miles of pines and cedars, shooting up amid sumachs and dwarf bushes.

They had passed that portion of the road, which had been here and there enlivened by farms and orchards, and were trotting briskly between two green walls of swamp and forest—a dreary spot—when suddenly, a sharp, a shrill cry rose in the air. It seemed to proceed from the wood, a short distance in front of them.

They were both bold men; but their cheeks grew white, and they instinctively drew in their horses.

'Was that a shout or a scream?' said Grayson, instinctively turning his heavy whip in his hand, so as to have it loaded handsly ready for a blow.

'It smacked of both,' replied Walton. 'Hark,' said old Cabel Grayson, 'there it is again.'

Again the same piercing cry shot through the air, and went echoing through the woods, until it seemed to die away in low wail.

'There's foul play there,' shouted Walton, and striking his horse a heavy blow with whip, the animal sprang forward at a full gallop. 'There it is again. By God! it's some one begging for mercy.'

'Stop, Walton,' said old Cabel Grayson, suddenly reining in his horse. 'Did you hear the name?'

'No.'

'I did, and it was Harry. Can Harry Blake be settling scores with that braggart Wickliffe?'

'God of Heaven! I hope not!' exclaimed Walton. 'There was bad blood enough between them to lead to a dozen murders.' Go it, Jack,' said he, again striking his horse, 'we'll on them at the next turn of the road—the bushes hide them now.'

A dozen leaps of their horses brought them round the copse of trees, which had shut out a sight that made them shudder. Within twenty yards of them, extended on his back on the ground, lay Wickliffe, stone dead. Bending over him was Blake, grasping a knife, which was driven to the hilt in his bosom.

'Good God! Harry Blake taken red-handed in a murder,' exclaimed Grayson, seeing Blake endeavoring to pull the knife from the wound. 'Don't stab him again. O! Harry, Harry, what have you done?'

Blake let loose his hold on the knife, and started up as they advanced. He looked hastily about him; made one or two irresolute steps; but before he could make up his mind whether to fly or not, Walton sprang off his horse, and flung himself upon him. 'Harry Blake, I charge you with murder!'

Blake stared at him. 'Me with murder? Are you mad? Why, I didn't kill him.'

'It won't do, Harry; it won't do,' said Walton bitterly. 'I saw you with his knife in your grasp—in his bosom—and him dead. Oh! Harry! This is a sad ending of this afternoon's quarrel.'

'Will you hear me?' said Blake earnestly, and you, Cabel—you are older than Walton, and less impetuous, listen to me. I came here but a moment before yourself. I heard a person calling for help, and galloping up, found Wickliffe dead, with this knife driven in his heart; and was endeavoring to pull it out when you came up. This is truth, so help me God! Don't you believe me, Cabel?'

Grayson shook his head, as he replied 'Would that I could, Harry; but I hope to be saved, I saw you stab him, I did.'

Harry clasped his hands together, as he asked, 'And do you intend to swear that? and to charge me with this deed?'

'There is no help for it as I see,' said Grayson. 'This man is murdered. You didn't murder him, who did? Answer me that.'

As he spoke, he proceeded to examine the body, to see if it retained any signs of life; but it was rigid and motionless, with its open eyes staring at the sky, and its teeth hard set, as if the spirits had gone agony. The knife had been driven