

The Democrat.

BY HAWLEY & CRUSER.

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THE DOORSTEP.

The conference meeting through at last,
We boys around the vestry waited
To see the girls come tripping past
Like snowbirds willing to be mated.
Not brave he that leaps the wall
By level musket-flashes listen,
Than I, who stepped before them all,
Who longed to see me get the mitten,
But no; she blushed, and took my arm!
We let the old folks have the high way,
And started toward the Maple Farm
Along a kind of lover's by-way.
I can't remember what we said,
'Twas nothing worth a song or story;
Yet that rude path by which we sped,
Seemed all transformed and in a glory.
The snow was crisp beneath our feet,
The moon was full, the fields were gleam-
ing.
By hood and appet-sheltered sweet,
Her face with youth and health was
beaming.
The little hand outside her muff—
O sculptor, if you could but mould it!—
So lightly touched my jacket-cuff,
To keep it warm I had to hold it,
To have her there with me alone—
'Twas love and fear and triumph blended
At last we reached the foot-worn stone
Where that delicious journey ended.
The old folks, too, were almost home;
Her dimpled hands the latches fingered,
We heard the voices nearer come,
Yet on the doorstep still we lingered.
She shook her ringlets from her hood,
And with a "Thank you, Ned," dissem-
bled.
And yet I knew she understood
With what a daring wish I trembled.
A cloud passed kindly overhead,
The moon was slyly peeping through it,
Yet hid its face, as if it said,
"Come, now or never! do it! do it!"
My lips till then had only known
The kiss of mother and of sister,
But somehow, full upon her own
Sweet, rosy, darling mouth—I kissed her!
Perhaps 'twas boyish love, yet still,
O listen woman, weary lover!
To feel once more that fresh, wild thrill
I'd give—But who can live youth over?

THE SICK MAN'S SECRET.

SOUTH RIDGE was a grand old place. The house, or grange, as it was called, stood on the summit of a gentle eminence and always on either side stretched the broad acres appertaining to the estate. Here were nicely cultivated fields, and there long reaches of woodland, covered with the primeval forest. On one side at the foot of the eminence lay a beautiful lake, its surface dotted with many green islands, which lay like so many emerald gems upon its bosom. A fairer domain there was not to be found within the broad borders of the State. The house itself was grand and imposing. A broad veranda ran about on either side, from which, at any point, a most beautiful view was to be obtained. Within, the rooms were high and lofty, and furnished with all that wealth and taste could suggest. The owner of South Ridge had always been blessed with plenty of the world's goods. The founder of the house had brought from the mother country plenty of wealth, and this had been husbanded frugally by his successors, although there had been nothing niggardly about them. Each and all had striven to make South Ridge Grange the most attractive of any place in that region of country, and in this they had succeeded without a doubt. So much for the Grange and its surroundings, and now let us introduce to the reader its inmates at the time our story opens. Its owner, Hugh Allen, was a man somewhat past the prime of life, yet his form was still unbent, and his hair hardly silvered by the hand of time. The only change that the fleeting years seemed to have made upon him was upon his face. Here there were deep wrinkles, and marks of care, the fruits, maybe, of deep emotion. People who had known him well had marked them there for the last ten years. There were those who said that they had set their seal there in one short week of time. A great cross had come to him, then, such a cross as but few people are required to bear in this world. His son, his only child, had been lost to him. But it was not death who was the robber. He could have borne this, have submitted to what was inevitable with as good grace as thousands and thousands of others who lose near and dear friends, but this case was different. For ought he knew, his son was still alive. Yet he was as dead to him as though he had mouldered in his grave for the ten years past. He had committed a crime for which he had been obliged to flee and hide from the face of men to save his life, which he had forfeited by his act. He had been accused of murder, and the proof was so great against him that there was no earthly hope that he could not make his innocence manifest. Still he had stoutly declared that he was innocent. But there were none who believed that

he spoke the truth. The evidence was too strong. Eye for eye, his father believed him guilty. It was this terrible trial which had brought the wrinkles upon his face, and made him look so old beyond his time. Stern justice, he felt, would have sent his son to the gallows; but this he could not do. His own flesh and blood must be saved, if possible, this disgrace. Therefore he had connived at his escape, and by extreme good fortune had got him out of the country. Since he had been assured of this, no living soul had heard him mention his son's name. From him one would never have known what he had been childless all his life. Friends he had but few. He was not a man in those days, who would attract people to him. Those old ones who still lived near by never mentioned his son's name to him. There was not one of them who had the courage to do it. Had they done so it would probably have been an end to all future intercourse between them. Thus it was the days of Hugh Allen's life came and went. There was only one inmate of the Grange, save the servant. This was a distant relative, Dora Adams. His wife had died before the great disgrace was brought upon the family, and thus she had been spared the blow, which, with a terrible torture would have wrung her life from her. Soon after her death, Dora Adams, then a mere child, had come to South Ridge to live. She was an orphan, the child of a cousin of Hugh Allen's, and she came to him penniless. But he had enough for himself and her, and when his son was the same as dead to him, he turned to the child for all the consolation he could hope for in this world. As the years went on, he regarded her as his own. Had he indeed been her father, he could not have been kinder to her. He made his will in her favor, and, although the fact was not generally known, yet it was shrewdly surmised that she was to be the heiress of South Ridge. People said that if the outcast was living, and Hugh Allen knew of his whereabouts, not a dollar of his wealth would ever go to him. And they were right. Hugh Allen did not know the fate of his son. He might be living, or he might be dead. At any rate he was dead to him forever. At the time our story opens, Dora Adams was a beautiful woman. None of the fair ladies of that section eclipsed her. She was the acknowledged belle and beauty of that region of country. Suitors had she scores, but as yet her heart was free. None had managed to win it from her own keeping. Hugh Allen guarded her jealousy. He wished to keep her to himself, until at least the time should come when a man should seek her who in his estimation was worthy of her. Many others were in her train who were her equals in wealth and position, but he saw no one to whom he felt that he could confide her. It might be that he was selfish, and wished to keep her by him while he lived. One day there was an arrival at South Ridge. A stranger made his appearance at the Grange and demanded to see its owner. Hugh Allen was busy in his study, but he gave orders for the stranger to be admitted. The servant showed him in, and he rose to receive a gentleman who by his looks seemed to be a foreigner. The stranger introduced himself as Carl Bathe, and asked leave to present to him a letter of introduction, of which he was the bearer. Hugh Allen took the missive, and opened it, slowly perused its contents. It was from an old friend and schoolmate of his, who had made a German town his home for many years. It begged leave to introduce to the kind attention of his friend, Prof. Bathe of the celebrated university of his adopted town. He was about paying a visit to America on a tour of observation, and to add what he could to the knowledge of geology, and he had decided to spend some weeks in his immediate neighborhood, in the furtherance of that object, in accordance with his recommendation. Two reasons decided him to receive the stranger cordially, aside from his own gentlemanly instincts. One was that he would do anything in reason to oblige his old friend; and the other, that he was interested in the same pursuit himself. Geology had always possessed a charm for him, and he was quite well posted for one who had not made it the study of a life-time. It was not long before he and the stranger were on the best of terms. They read and talked, rode and walked together, and Hugh Allen found himself taking more interest in his pursuit than he had ever done before.

As well posted as he was, he felt that he knew really nothing when it was put into the scales and weighed with that of his new acquaintance. People about South Ridge wondered why it was that he opened his house to the stranger, and was seen so much in his company. And well they might, for it was something unusual for him. Dora Adams, too, became very much interested in him. She, too, was with him a great deal, and seemed to take wonderful interest in his pursuits. When Hugh Allen was indisposed to accompany him, or something made it inconvenient for him to do so, she took his place. Ere long it came to be whispered that she was more interested in the man than she was in his calling. But it might have been envious people who said this. There were plenty of followers in her train who were jealous of her evident partiality for the professor. Whether she regarded him in the light of a lover, or not, was known only to herself. As yet it was certain that she had made no one her confidant. No one could surmise the state of her feelings towards the guest at South Ridge. Perhaps what her feelings were, was, as yet, hardly known to herself. That she admired the professor she was willing to admit. Had she been accused of loving him, she would have discovered the fact. One day it chanced that some business connected with the estate kept the owner of South Ridge at home to consult with his lawyer, who had come to the Grange without any notice of his intention to do so. He had planned a trip with his guest to some rocks at a point several miles away, and now he was disappointed in not being able to accompany him. Dora was solicited to take his place as a guide, and she at once consented. Her favorite black steed was brought around, and mounting, she rode beside her escort, who was also mounted on a fine charger. The couple rode briskly away, down over the hill, across the bridge that spanned the stream, and through the busy little village, which lay thereon, with its many clattering wheels, they dashed, Dora as guide, a little in advance. In due time the place of destination was reached. Leaving their horses, they clambered over the rocks, and set about the work on which they had come. An hour had passed in this manner and they had seated themselves in a spot sheltered from the rays of the sun, to rest from the fatigue which they felt after the scramble over the rocks. From one subject to another the conversation glided along, until it came to Hugh Allen and the past history of South Ridge. "He had a son, I believe?" said the professor, carelessly, with his eyes fixed on a specimen lying beside him, which he had hammered from the rocks. Dora looked up quickly. "Why do you ask that question?" she asked evasively. "I have heard so. My friend had told me something about the sad affair before I left home." "You have never mentioned it to Mr. Allen?" "No. Of course I would not do that. I should say nothing on the first subject. "I would not do so. If you know the whole history of that terrible affair, you can imagine how he feels. Although I am the same as a daughter to him, he never spoke his name to me. From him I never learned that he had a son, but from others I have heard the terrible story. "No clue had ever been had which might go to show that his son might have been innocent?" As he said this, the professor raised his eyes to her face with a strange, wistful look. "No. If the story be true how could there be? There is proof that he and his victim had quarreled; proof that could not be denied. Then he was found standing above the body of the murdered man in the breast of whom his knife was found. He denied the deed, and said that he had only that minute arrived at the spot. Yet he could not prove his innocence. Everybody was sure that he did the deed—his own father among the rest. He contrived to escape and since that moment I do not think that he has ever heard from him, and knows not whether he is living or dead. If he does he has kept the secret to himself. There is none with whom he has shared it. "And he never speaks of him?" "I do not think that his name has passed his lips since that fatal hour." "It is a sad case," said the professor, musingly. "In truth it is. People say that Hugh Allen is not the man that he was before the event which threw such a cloud over his whole life, I can well believe that he is not. It was enough to change any

man, though he be made of iron. "You are right. It was a terrible thing. For his sake, and for the sake of the son, if he be living, I wish that the latter's innocence might be proved. What a weight it would lift from his heart if it could be done. "Yes, but that seems impossible. He must bear the burden to his dying day. The professor said no more, and the conversation changed to another subject. An hour later they were on their way homeward. The grounds of South Ridge were almost reached, when a woman darted wildly out from a cottage by the wayside. "For the love of Heaven come in, Miss Dora!" she cried, "my husband is dying. He has sent for Master Hugh. There is something upon his mind which he says he must tell before he dies. Come in. It may be that you can do something for him. Dismounting, they followed her into the house, and to the bedside of the sick man. It needed only one glance on their part to show them that he was dying. He gazed up eagerly at them, and there was a disappointed look mingled with one of agony on his countenance. "It is not Hugh Allen!" he cried. "Why do you not bring him here? I cannot die until I tell the secret which has made a place of torment of my heart for so many years. Why is it that he does not come?" "Can you not confide in me?" said the professor, eagerly, as he bent above the dying man. "Speak. It may be too late when he comes." "No, no; I must tell it to him. I cannot die until I have told him. No one could take my life until I have spoken. Bring him here—bring him here!" At that moment the door of the cottage opened, and Hugh Allen, followed by his lawyer, whom the messenger found still with him, entered the apartment. The dying man saw and recognized them at once. "Hugh Allen, I am glad you have come and that you have brought the lawyer with you. I want him to write down what I have to say. I am dying, and what I have to tell must be told quickly." "Not so bad as that I hope, Tom," answered Mr. Allen, in an encouraging tone. "Why did you not send to me that you were sick? but we will try to get you up even now. "I am dying, Sir Hugh, I know you cannot see it as well as the other. But I cannot die until I have confessed a terrible crime, and a crime against you, besides you who have always treated me so well—Hugh Allen, your son was innocent. It was I who took the life of Richard Haven!" For a moment Hugh Allen stood, as though he was made of stone. Then he sprang forward with his hands outstretched as though he would clutch the dying man by the throat. This he would have done, had not the professor held him back. "Do him no violence," he said, in a tone which trembled with emotion. "Don't you see that he is fast going? Let him speak while he may, and let the lawyer take down the confession." "Speak!" said the injured father, in a terrible tone. "You have the blood of two upon your soul. No wonder that you could not die and carry your guilty secret with you." As though he had heard nothing of this the dying man went on. "Yes, Sir Hugh, it was I who was the murderer. I struck the fatal blow with a knife I had stolen from your son. I did it for the money I knew he had about him; but I did not get it. Your son Ralph happened to come to the spot. I heard his footsteps and fled. He did not see me, and so the guilt was fastened upon him. A great many times I was tempted to speak, and so meet the penalty of my crime. I should have done so had he been brought to the scaffold; but he made his escape, and so I was silent. My life has been one of torment, but it is ended now." These were the last words the dying man uttered. There was one convulsive struggle as the spirit departed from the body, and then all was over. For the space of a moment Hugh Allen stood motionless, gazing upon the dead man. No sound was heard in the room save the scratching of the lawyer's pen as he wrote down his confession and the sobs of the dead man's wife. Dora Adams was the first to speak. Stepping to the side of Hugh Allen, she said: "Heaven be thanked, father, that the truth is known at last. Your son and my adopted brother, as I must call him now, is free from the stains which rested upon his name so long." "I am thankful, Dora; but why did Heaven decree that it should have come so late? Oh, my boy—my boy! And I turned against you like all the rest. I might have known that you were innocent, although the proof against you was terrible. Oh, my child! would to Heaven that I knew at this moment whether you were dead or alive!"

"Ralph Allen is alive," said the professor, in a low, tremulous voice. Hugh Allen turned upon him with the rapidity of thought. "My son alive?—is that what you said?" "Yes." "Where is he?" "Here, father—I am he. Look—do you not know me now?" He pulled the long, false beard he wore from his face, and the spectacles from his eyes, and stood before him looking every inch an Allen, though older and more careworn than when his father had seen him last. "My son—my son! Thank God, you are given to me again!" and he clasped him in a close embrace. Little more there is to add to my story. That much the reader has already conjectured. Ralph told of his wanderings in foreign lands; of his meeting with his father's old friend there; how at last he had ventured home in disguise, in hopes, if time was given him, and if he was not discovered, he might obtain some proof which would establish his innocence. That proof had come now, in a way little suspected. A year later, Dora Adams married Hugh Allen's heir, and all the country side agreed in saying that South Ridge had never seen a fairer bride. **A Prayer that Created Unpleasantness.** They come near having a row in a colored prayer meeting a few nights ago. One of the sisters who had a grievance prayed: "Oh, Lord! look down 'pon Dy rased children hyre die eben!" an' moob 'em wid Dy grace. Tetch dyer hearts wid de spirit ob all boundin' lub. Build up dar faith so strong dat de debil can't budge it, an' specially would we ax, if it am possible wid de redeemer, dat Dom put a little more sence into de obstinate pate ob de yallow wench what am a giggling on de bench preopposite Dy belubbed sarvant." "What's dat you're sayin' to de Lord 'bout me?" asked the wench, rising to a point of order. Not seeming to notice the interruption, the supplicator continued: "Gib our fool an' errin' sister more disputation, oh Lord! to see de difference atwixt wright an' wrong, an' larn de huzzy to behave herself in Dy holy sankhoony, 'stead of wrigum round like she was swallowed a corkscrew, an' 'taminatin' dese saked presinks wid unholy winkin' at de male an' maskeline proportion ob die assembled gatherin'. An' oh!" "It's a lie! good Lord, it's a lie! an' Dou in Dy inflammate wisdom knows I nebbor done it!" shouted the traduced member, who had now become nearly wild with rage. Dar's not one particle of troth in it. It's a lie! an' I can mash de lie!" With these words she threw herself over the bench on the back of the kneeling sister, plunged her hands into the bustle of that devout but indiscreet person and lifted her up bodily. Confusion reigned and dire drama was in many faces but that a moment before were bright with hope of heaven. But a stalwart deacon finally separated the females reduced the unnaturally elevated feeling of the other, and, addressing the relieved audience in an impressive tone, said: "Bred-ern, it am better dat we dwell together in impunity. Less 'pal to de frone ob grace dat dar be no moah such gracefult disruption in our midst. Will Brudder Johnson please made de 'peal in one of his powerful prahrs?" **Struggle For a Square Meal.** There were two of them squatted down on the sunny side of a show bill board, munching the remnants of a ginger cake. The blackest one remarked melancholically: "Mose, did yer eber tink how 'sensive dis freedom is to a nigger?" "You bet, honey! It mighty nigh makes dis ole man sometimes wish he was done back on de plantation, whar de smoke-house was e'en amost as big as de State capertel." "Dat's de ticket. Now, jis take dat breakfast what I had dis mornin'. Dar was a piece of beef, dat was ten cents; hunk ob bread, dat was five cents; fried sweet 'taters, dem was five cents, and dat whole breakfast costs dis nigger thirty cents; clar cash. Think ob dat now." "Dem's purty billions figures, fur a fack!" said the old man. "Billions! Why, dey's jis down right bankruptin' dey is. Hyar I hab to play seben up ez hard ez I can ebery night de Lord sends to git a squar meal for breakfast, an' de big odd's agin de breakfast, to boot!" Then they relaxed into silence and finished the ginger cake. Handier than a pocket in de sleeve of your overcoat, your girl to put her hand in. Tea for the gossip's tables.