

THE TIMES.

An Independent Family Newspaper,
PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY BY
F. MORTIMER & CO.

TERMS:
INVARIABLY IN ADVANCE.

One year (Postage Free) \$1 50
Six Months " " 80

To Subscribers in this County
Who pay in ADVANCE a Discount of 25 Cents will
be made from the above terms, making
subscription within the County.

When Paid in Advance, \$1.25 Per Year.

Advertising rates furnished upon application.

The Battle for the Cedars.

BY PRESSLY W. MORRIS.

CONTINUED.

HOW circumstances change the opinions of some men!

These thoughts, opposite to the reasoning of the previous day, flashed quickly through Evan's mind, while he spent a minute in examining the will.

"Where did you discover this?" asked Evans, glancing up from his examination.

"How did it happen that you knew nought of it before?"

"All is explained," replied the master of The Cedars, "by the fact that I found the will in a secret drawer, which I suppose has not been opened for years, of course. I discovered the drawer and its contents accidentally. Ha, ha! we can checkmate old Wylie now, and all impostors in whose name he may bring suits."

But there came to the mind of the man the recollection of a narrative, hidden away in a secret drawer, and he knew how falsely applied the term was!

"Will you let Wylie go ahead till the last?" asked Evans, "or will you make him aware of the fact that you hold the winning card immediately?"

"Would I stretch out my hand to prevent him or her from stepping over a precipice? No! They may proceed to the very last step they can take. Then they shall be waked from the dream they have had."

Evans agreed with the master of The Cedars in his plan. They continued to discuss their schemes.

"You must remain with me to-night, Evans," said the master of The Cedars, presently, "and we will celebrate this lucky turn in my fortunes. What say you?"

Evans demurred a little at first, but finally accepted the invitation.

Night soon mantled the earth. Dark shadows fell around The Cedars. The owl hooted in the distance, and the mournful cry of the whip-poor-will came from nearer at hand.

Within the library lights shone brightly. The master of The Cedars had apparently forgotten the lesson that he had so lately been taught, the lesson that had cost him nearly his life, and was drinking wine in large quantities. And Evans departed from his usual custom, and drank considerably.

The two men were jubilant. "It is an era in my life, Evans," cried the master of The Cedars; "one well worth rejoicing over."

The hours sped. A great clock in an adjoining apartment struck the hour of eleven.

The lawyer's brain was not much accustomed to wine, like that of his host, and he sank back in his cushioned chair and slept soundly.

The minutes glided away. The master of The Cedars was sleepless enough. He sat and mused, his heart beating quickly, keeping time with his triumphant thoughts. A few hours previous how precarious had seemed his hold upon the Cashel fortune. Now—

Why sounded the moan of the sea in his ear? Why before his vision was a white babe, floating on the waves? After all, had he fallen asleep? He sprang to his feet, and at the same moment the great clock sounded out a stroke, repeating it eleven times.

It was midnight. The last stroke of the clock died away, and there was an instant of deep silence. Then there came a long, mournful sound that echoed through the stone mansion like a cry of agony. There was a brief pause, and then it was repeated. The

blood of the master of The Cedars, was heated with wine. He seized a lamp and started from the library.

"I will teach some fool better than to be playing his tricks," he muttered.

Again and again sounded the solemn, mournful wail, to guide the man in his course. The cries were coming from a remote part of the building.

They ceased, but the master of The Cedars kept on his way. The wine he had taken added to his courage, and in his anger he felt determined to reach the bottom of the mystery.

At length he reached the bottom of a long oaken stairway, carved in fanciful design. This stairway led into a part of the mansion that was unused, and which echoed to the tread of human footsteps scarcely once in a year.

The master of The Cedars paused. He possessed brute courage, but it was not strange that he hesitated here, under the circumstances. He considered for a moment, and then was about to turn back, when once again that cry rang out. It sounded so near at hand that the man started in sudden fright.

He looked about him, but beheld no one. Once more he was about to retrace his steps, when he chanced to glance up the stairway. Far up it, at the head, he perceived a dim light, and in the light stood what seemed to be a tall human figure, faintly outlined.

Brighter and brighter grew the light, till the figure was defined clearly to view.

The master of The Cedars stood for a time as though he was fascinated. Then, with a wild exclamation of superstitious fear, he turned and fled.

The face of the figure was like the one that often came before his vision, looking out of the waters of the sea, at him.

Swiftly the terrified man sped from one hall to another, till he reached the library. He grasped Evans and shook him till he awoke.

"Oh, Evans," he cried in terror, "I have seen a wraith, a ghost, a dream!"

"The devil!" exclaimed Evans, still half asleep.

"No, not the devil, but worse. His ghost!"

"Whose ghost?" asked Evans, more wide awake, and becoming a little frightened himself, looking wildly about him. "Where?"

The master of The Cedars became calmer. "I heard some strange cries," he returned, "and followed the sounds till I came to an oaken stairway in the west wing. There, at the head of the stairway, I beheld a tall figure, shown by a mysterious light."

"Perhaps your imagination deceived you," said Evans, trembling some. "No! I tell you no!"

The two men sat down, and there was silence.

Outwardly, the master of The Cedars was now calm enough, but his hands were clenched till the nails were eating into the palms, and a dead weight was sinking upon his heart.

The clock struck one. The stroke caused the two to start.

"Let us retire," whispered Evans. "I think we will both feel better in bed. Besides, we need some rest."

The suggestion was acted upon, and ten minutes later the heads of both rested on soft pillows. They were in apartments that adjoined and opened into each other. The doors between were left unclosed.

The wine that Evans had drunk, had lost its effect on him. He could sleep no longer, but tossed about restlessly. He fancied that something oppressive and frightful was in the very air.

"I believe this cursed place is haunted," he muttered.

At last he sank into a slight doze.

A dull thud as of the contact of some bodies, and which seemed to fairly shake the building, roused Evans. He sprang to a sitting posture. In an instant a pistol shot rang out, reverberating through the stone mansion with a hundred echoes. It was followed by a terrible cry of pain, a cry that seemed scarcely human in its agony.

Dark clouds hung overhead, so black and thick that not a single star shone through. Zig-zag flashes of lightning ran across the sky, at times. The thunder reverberated through the heavens

with deep mutterings. The wind sighed with mournful sound. The tokens of a violent storm were surely abundant.

Along a lonely road that was scarcely wide enough for his steed, a solitary traveler was riding. The forest stretched out on either side of him. He had been galloping madly, but the difficulties of the path caused him to slacken his pace. The darkness was so dense that the man could distinguish nothing, not even the branches of the tall trees that reached above him, between earth and sky, being visible. And the flashes of lightning only served to blind and startle him and his beast.

Surely the traveler was greatly belated, for it was some hours past midnight. No man would willingly be out at such an hour with such a storm threatening!

"I have lost my way, evidently," muttered the man, as the path became more and more difficult.

"It is useless to continue farther in the course that I am traveling."

He changed his course in the opposite direction.

This change did not better the case any. The man discovered presently that he was wandering aimlessly in the woods. The overhanging branches brushed roughly against him, and his horse stumbled over logs and roots. The lightning flashed more frequently, and the roll of the thunder became louder and deeper. Still the storm seemed to be merciful, for it did not burst upon the traveler's head.

At length the man dismounted and slowly picked his way along, leading his horse by the reins of the bridle. The lightning's flashes showed a tall figure, with handsome face and long red beard. Could it be Victor?

It was no other. His horse followed, obedient to his touch; but very slow was the progress they made. Victor considered that it mattered little whether he made any or not, for what could aimless wandering in the darkness of a great forest avail?

"If I could only find a shelter of any kind from the coming storm, I would ask no more," Victor muttered to himself.

As if in answer to his words, a light flashed up before him. His heart bounded joyously. Then it seemed as if he was destined to be disappointed, for the light disappeared.

"A mere will-o'-the-wisp," cried Victor bitterly.

But in a moment he beheld it again. It was fixed, not a delusive *ignis fatuus* to decoy him into swamp or marsh. The foliage of a tree had hidden it from him for a time.

The light was not far away, and, with an exclamation of relief, Victor continued toward it. His course was easy enough, though occasionally the trunk of a huge tree or low-swinging branches would hide it from sight, or the blinding light of heaven would dim it till it was not visible.

When it was apparently but a few rods away, there came a flash which revealed a building that Victor could almost touch. He felt around it till he found an entrance at which no door was swung. Doubtless it was a new stable; and Victor led his horse in, the animal giving a whinny of pleasure. Evidently, the structure was but a few feet square, and was occupied by no other living creature. Victor left it, and walked on toward what he supposed must be the dwelling house of a family. He discovered that the light was shining through a small window in the side of the building. He could not avoid a glance through, into the apartment within.

Before a fire blazing in an open fireplace was the figure of a woman, bowed low. Her body was moving back and forth, keeping time with a wild melody which she was singing in a voice uncultivated, but clear and musical, and which came audibly to Victor as he paused.

Victor judged that the building was naught but a rude hut, as he could see no furniture in it save a rude table, a few stools, and a couch. A candle was burning on the low mantle. Victor wondered if the woman was the sole occupant of the hut, but soon discovered that it was not so, for, as he stood, a rough door opened, and a strange figure

entered. Victor was startled. Was the being before his sight human? Doubtless it was, but how indescribably hideous! He was of great stature, with long arms, and shoulders broad as a giant's. His features were distorted so that his face was a caricature upon humanity as horrible to look upon as that of an inhabitant of Hades might be. In his eyes was no light of intelligence, and he grinned and gibbered, gazing about with idiotic stare.

Such was the creature that appeared before the startled gaze of Victor, who could not but wonder for the moment if he were having an ugly dream, and this the distorted figure of his vision.

But, no; it was all real.

"Georgio," said the woman, "did the threatenings of the storm rouse you, as they did me?"

Her English was not quite perfect, but intelligible enough.

There was no reply save a wild laugh.

Victor stood at the window hesitating. He asked himself the question should he enter this place where this horrible creature was? The latter threw himself down before the fire, while a peal of thunder shook the hut. "Hark!" cried the woman. "Georgio, what a night this would be for our purpose. How grand, Georgio, it would be to have the very elements celebrate our revenge?"

Still the idiot only laughed wildly.

"Georgio, let us enact the tragedy," continued the woman, her voice gathering strength, and tremulous with emotion. "Brave fellow! where is the betrayer?"

The idiot sprang to his feet with an agile bound. He disappeared through the doorway by which he had entered. Almost instantly he returned with a burden in his arms.

"A human figure!" murmured Victor. "A man, as I live! What means this? Is he to be a victim?"

The idiot held the figure erect. Victor shuddered. Before him was the man who called himself Lionel Cashel, master of The Cedars.

"Strange! Impossible!" muttered Victor. "Was I deceived?"

The idiot grinned and gibbered, while the woman rose, lifted high her clenched hand. She was tall, of middle age apparently, and had certainly once been handsome.

It was a strange, dramatic scene. The flickering firelight cast weird shadows on the wall, the woman's face was glowing with wild rage, and the idiot continued to grin and gibber. How unreal it all seemed! yet it was no scene of the imagination, but an actual, vivid reality.

This act of the drama was to become more tragical still.

The woman advanced a step; her lips parted, and a cry came from them.

"Revenge, Georgio! Revenge!"

The idiot struck the figure in his grasp a terrific blow upon the side of the head with his hand.

Victor heard no cry from the master of The Cedars.

The blow was repeated upon face and head and heart.

"Though my deadliest foe, I cannot see him die thus!" cried Victor. He hastened along the side of the hut, and, as he expected, found a door.

"To the death, Georgio! To the death!" came in a wild scream from within.

Victor threw his weight against the door. At the same instant a peal from heaven's artillery shook the earth; the wind swept by with a wild howl; a weird blue flame seemed to light the universe; the rain came down in torrents,—a perfect deluge.

The storm had burst at last.

Victor's efforts availed nothing. The door stood firm, and he could not effect an entrance.

He walked back to the window.

It was a wild sight that met his view. The idiot had his hapless victim prostrate upon the floor, his long fingers wound and interlocked about the throat. Great Heaven! he is dead already," cried Victor, sick at heart.

"To the death, Georgio! To the death!" sounded the cry of the woman, audible even above the roar of the storm.

"Murder! murder!" shouted Victor,

with all the strength of his voice. "Fiends, cease!"

But his repeated cries were unheeded. Doubtless the patter of the rain, the howl of the wind, the crashing of the elements, drowned them. The sound of voices would be carried from the interior outward, while that without would be unheard by the occupants of the hut. Besides, Victor could see this tragedy, and was listening, straining his senses to catch the sounds, and the very motion of the lips of the participants was an aid to his hearing; while the woman and the idiot were absorbed in their work.

At length the idiot ceased from his murderous assault, and looked toward the woman with a grin of delight.

"Eloisa, sweet Eloisa," came to Victor in a wild wail, "sleeping beneath the skies of your sunny South, you shall be avenged! By your wrongs I swear it!"

The idiot raised the prostrate figure of the master of The Cedars. Victor was astonished beyond degree; for upon the face was no sign of blood or bruise or wound.

"Is this the work of necromancy?" cried he. "Can a man be murdered, and give forth no sound? Can he be beaten and stamped and choked, and no marks left upon him?"

Evans leaped from his couch, cold chills of terror running over him. He felt that that wild scream was the death-cry of some creature; could it have proceeded from the master of The Cedars?

Evans was immediately relieved of fright upon that point, for a voice came to him from the adjoining apartment, calling,—

"Evans! Evans! are you awake?"

"Yes," answered Evans.

"Come here."

The lawyer entered the apartment of the master of The Cedars. A lamp was burning there.

"Evans, did you hear those sounds?" asked the master of The Cedars, who was half dressed, and sitting on the side of his bed.

"Yes, I heard them," Evans returned. "This place must be haunted."

"Those sounds are inexplicable at present, Evans," said the master of The Cedars; "but nevertheless they were not at all ghost-like. I believe they were real."

Then he added in a hollow tone,— "The occurrences of this night are mysterious; but I will fathom them yet."

Evans glanced into his face, and saw there the evidences of deep emotion. In the man's eyes was a strange terrified look. Evans did not think him a coward, so he could not explain this to himself.

"Cashel is a braver man than I am; then why this singular expression of fear in his face?" was the lawyer's thought.

But Evans had not beheld a face, that, living, he would dread more than that of any spectre! The master of The Cedars, lying on his couch, in the silent hours of the night, had thought about the presence he had beheld, and had told himself that the figure was but a creature of the imagination; if not that, an apparition indeed. But the fear that it was real could not be driven away; and that fear tormented him dreadfully.

The silence that had fallen between the two men was broken by a peal of thunder.

"There is going to be a storm," said Evans.

"Yes," assented the master of The Cedars absently.

Evans had taken a seat. For some time the two sat silent, listening to the repeated and long-continued peals of thunder. At length the master of The Cedars rose to his feet, and grasped his coat firmly in his hand. He was very pale, but set his lips resolutely.

"I do not propose to be tormented with doubts any longer," he said. "We can as easily reach the solution of this mystery now as at any time. Ay! more easily. Come, Evans."

He walked to a table where a pair of richly mounted pistols were lying, and, picking up one, gave it to Evans, retaining the other himself; then he started from the apartment. Evans hesitated for a moment, and then followed after him.—To be continued.