

chimney, on the hearth of which were still burning a few embers. He threw on some logs, to try and kindle a blaze, for the night had become chill; and the single lamp, suspended from the lofty ceiling, cast but a sombre light on all around. By degrees his attention became attracted from his own melancholy reflections to the story, which at length absorbed him so completely, that the awful scene he had so recently witnessed, for the time being was forgotten. At a future period the Baron noted it down, exactly as he had heard it related by Hoffman, and this document being preserved amongst his papers, became, after a while, publicly known, and was repeated by the old peasant in the following words:—

HOFFMAN'S TALE OF THE BROTHERS.

ON the banks of the Rhine, and crowning one of the vine clad mountains, stands the ruined castle of the old Count Ravensberg, who died at an advanced age, leaving two sons—his eldest, Gustavus, becoming heir to his title and estates. From their earliest youth these brothers had exhibited the most opposite characters, though educated precisely with the same care and watchful tenderness; but while nature had endowed Gustavus, in addition to his manly beauty, with transcendent talents, and a most amiable disposition, she had dealt with a parsimonious hand her gifts to Wilfred, who stunted in his growth, and forbidding in appearance, his mind seemed to contract in sympathy with these. The expression of his countenance was most sinister—never could he meet the open, unsuspecting gaze of another without shrinking, as if he feared they might penetrate his thoughts. His temper was obstinate and morose—cruel and cowardly. A smile rarely relaxed his features, unless some wanton act of mischief extorted it. An honest laugh never burst spontaneously from his heart. Sly and artful, he delighted in all those petty frauds which a grovelling, debased mind, will pursue with peculiar tact and avidity. It is needless to add, that to all noble, generous impulses he was a stranger. It might indeed be said of him, as in the Eastern tale, that “the blessings of the evil Genii, which are curses, were upon him.” He felt his brother’s immeasurable superiority—he envied and he hated him,—while the amiable Gustavus, unwilling that he should feel the wide difference of their positions in life, from the day he became Count Ravensberg, opened to him his heart, his home, his purse. At this period he married Adelaide, the beautiful daughter of Baron Weimar, to whom he was devotedly attached; but Wilfred, viewing her as another barrier between him and the coveted wealth of his brother, indulged in the most rancorous feelings towards her, which he well knew how to dissemble in the presence of the Count; but which

were sufficiently evident to her, to make her fear and shun him.

The mind never at once becomes hardened in iniquity. Satan too well knows his part to startle his victims by displaying before their sight sin in her most frightful aspect; but he leads them gently, step by step, (and after the first alas! the gradations are more rapid,) until that which, in the onset, would have struck them with horror, ceases to cause any violent emotion or repugnance. Thus it was with Wilfred, who, though detesting his brother like another Cain, for his very excellence, and gloating upon his riches, to possess which became his day-dream, and the fevered vision of his nightly restless slumbers. Yet to gain them by any act of violence had never crossed his mind. Nor would it but for the constant contamination of evil associates, who darkened by their counsels every lingering ray of light within him, and hurried him on towards the gulf of destruction. He had one friend especially, who possessed great influence over him, Hartz Wolfstein, a man several years older than himself, consequently more daring in the ways of sin. He soon discovered the secret wishes and desires of Wilfred, and determined to strengthen them by pouring into his ear the poison of flattery, and the deadly venom of enmity against his innocent brother.

Count Ravensberg frequently remonstrated with Wilfred on his increasing habits of intemperance, which were encouraged by the society he kept, and sought by every kindness to lead his mind to better things; but as well might he have striven to purify, by his weak voice, the polluted waters of a land accursed for its crimes, or to render salubrious the dew-drops of the deadly upas tree, as lead him back to virtue who never knelt in prayer to God, or uttered his sacred name save in oaths. When the Count at length found how unavailing were all his efforts to reform him, he told him that however much he lamented the necessity of appearing harsh he must desire him to withdraw from the castle, as he would no longer subject his innocent wife to the constant alarm and agitation, she experienced in his presence. This put the final stroke of the axe to the noble forest tree, and roused every demoniac passion nurtured in the breast of Wilfred. He flew to his friend Wolfstein, and revealed to him, his brother’s fiat, who, after some deliberation, said with a sneer:

“It is well—of course you will not presume to appear before the Countess again, or tread your father’s halls to pollute them.”

“What mean you, Hartz?” exclaimed the infuriated Wilfred. Have I no right to enter my home; because forsooth her dainty ladyship is offended at my manners?”

“I said not that—the right is yours certainly, but if your lordly brother denies it you, you dare not disobey him, you are only his vassal.”