

THE GARLAND.

"TO RAISE THE GENIUS AND TO MEND THE HEART."

VOL. I.

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POPULAR TALES.

THE WAGGONER.

Passing over a period of more than two months, we come to the morning of the 8th of March, 1761. It was between the hours of three and four o'clock, and the weather was miserably inclement. A cold easterly wind swept howling down the road, driving fast-falling piercing sleet full into the face of a man who, almost perishing with cold, poor fellow, sat on the shaft of a small cart laden with greens, scarce able to hold together with his benumbed fingers the two ends of an old piece of sacking to protect himself from the wet. It was pitch-dark, and the carter's thoughts were sad and cheerless. While driving slowly on his way to Wrexham, from which he was distant about eight or nine miles and to the market of which place his cart-load of vegetables was consigned, he suddenly leaped off the shaft on which he had been sitting; for he heard himself called by his name from the right side of the hedge. He was almost petrified with surprise and alarm, and stood motionless a moment or two, while his cart drove slowly past him.

"Fowler! William Fowler! speak for your life!" was repeated in a louder and distinct tone; and the astounded carter caught sight of two or three figures approaching him at but a few yards distance. A recollection of his friend Dick Forster's adventure flashed across him, and off he sprang down the road at the top of his speed, in a contrary direction to that in which his horse was moving.—He made for a farm-house, about a quarter of a mile off, where he was known, and whither he was pursued—but by how many he knew not. He was fast outstripping his pursuers, when one called out, "stop Fowler, stop, before a bullet overtake you!" Fowler flew forward, however, like the wind, but suddenly stumbled over a large stone lying in the highway. He was in the act of rising and again rushing forward, when the report of a pistol fired at but a short distance from behind him, and the ball of which he heard hissing close past him, brought him to his knees; when two men, quite breathless, made up to him. "You—fool and coward!" exclaimed one of them panting for breath, "take that for the trouble you've give us!" and he hit the poor carter a heavy blow on the side of the head. Fowler, however, was a little of a bruiser, and springing to his feet in a moment, he levelled his assailant to the ground with a swinging blow between the eyes, and was preparing to do the same for the other, when a third suddenly

stole up to him from behind, and with the butt-end of a horse-whip or walking-stick, felled him at one stroke to the ground, where he lay completely stunned. When he recovered his senses, he affrightedly found himself in precisely similar circumstances to those which he had so often heard his friend Forster describe. He was moving on rapidly in some kind of vehicle, with his eye bandaged, his arms fastened to his side, his legs tied together, and a gag in his mouth. He attempted to rise from his seat, bound as he was; but was instantly forced down by the two men between whom he sat. He moaned and gasped piteously; when one of them addressed him, saying, that if he was not a fool, he must know that resistance was useless; and that if he would hold his peace, the gag would be taken out his mouth. "If you mean to be silent, nod your head three times," continued the voice. He complied, and the gag was the moment after withdrawn.

"For pity's sake, what have I done?" he commenced.

"This pistol and your head must become close acquaintance, unless you are silent," said the gruff voice which had addressed him from the first. Fowler sullenly resigned himself in silence to his fate, which he expected would be murder. After a long interval of twenty minutes, during which not a syllable was spoken by any one within the coach, he was again addressed: "There are three persons in this coach besides yourself, who have each loaded pistols, which will be fired at you if you make the least uproar or resistance. We shall shortly alight, and you must suffer us to do with you what we wish and then we will not hurt a hair of your head. It will be useless to cry out; for we take you to a house which is at least a mile from all others, and there will be none but ourselves. So, remember what your life depends upon," concluded the voice; and presently the coach drew up. Fowler was then led out, his legs having been first untied, and conducted through the same places which had been traversed by his predecessor Forster, till he was finally led into the same room where Forster had been sworn and questioned, as described. He was placed in a chair; and the same voice that had spoken to Dick Forster proceeded to address Fowler, and in a similar strain of solemn menace:—"That wretched man, Richard Forster," he was told, "has deceived us, and broken his tremendous oath taken in this very room;—for which he must, and will certainly die.—there is one even now waiting from hour to hour, from day to day, a favourable moment