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THE SQUATTER.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HALLS OF THE NORTH," ETC. ETC.

[WITH AN ENGRAVING.]

"I had na' ridden a mile, a mile;
A mile but barely ten,"

When I found the roads getting worse, instead of better, as I had fondly hoped. I had now got into a more thickly settled part of the country, and the natural consequence, I thought, would have been that the roads would have been better broken—instead of which, they were now deeply drifted up, owing to the winds having a less obstructed sweep through the large and frequent clearings that now succeeded each other more rapidly, as I drove along, or rather waded through the deep snow.

This was the last day of my leave of absence, and I more than feared I should not reach my home that night. My horse, in every succeeding drift he floundered through, manifested stronger and more unequivocal symptoms of failing strength, till at length he absolutely stuck fast, and was so exhausted he could not make a single effort more to extricate himself, and I really thought my gallant grey would die.

I need not longer dwell upon that tedious journey, than to state that it was the following night before I reached the end of it.

My first enquiry was naturally after my man McPhaul. He had not been heard of since he left with me more than a week before. I became seriously alarmed at this intelligence, as it immediately led me to suspect that he had gone back to the Squatter's hut—and then, I shuddered as I thought and feared what the poor man's fate might be. I determined, however, to find it out, and to this end, I meant to return to the cottage much sooner than I'd promised, and to get my young friend Henry Wrottesley to aid me in the search,—a scheme, I thought, that no power on earth could possibly have thwarted, or prevented me from carrying out. But, alas! I never saw

that lovely cottage since, and most likely never shall again. And yet—but I'm again anticipating.

The next enquiry was after my men. They had been guilty, I found, of all sorts of irregularities and misconduct; and some busy body, more ready to attend to other people's affairs than to his own, had complained of them at headquarters; and, in consequence of this complaint, as I had the further mortification of learning, my superior officer had come up to the post to investigate the matter. And, what was worst of all, I found he had arrived the day before.

I anticipated an awkward meeting with him on the morrow, and I was certainly not mistaken.

"Why," he said, after a bitter cold "Good morning, Sir?" "Why were you not at your post the day before yesterday, when your leave expired?"

I told him.

"Ha!" he replied, with a supercilious and contemptuous smile; "I am then to infer that the same snow-storm did not extend to the road I came that day."

"Perhaps it did not," I replied; "storms in this country are often very local. Or, if it did, you must recollect you came through a thickly peopled district, where the inhabitants are obliged by law to turn out after every storm, and break the roads."

"Then I would ask, Sir," he continued, in the blandest tones of extreme politeness, "whether or not, it was prudent in you, with this important charge upon your hands, to go beyond the reach of those laws."

"I go where I please, Sir, when I've leave of absence," was my too quick rejoinder.

"And come back, when you please, it appears

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