

death. Drink, man, drink; the pencil will save you from the effects of the poison."

Ernest looked wildly around—none were present save the Marchese, who eyed him with a look of mingled astonishment and horror; Antonio, who stood before him like an avenging spirit; and Aloysia, who covering her face with her hands, sought to shut out the strange and eventful scene.

"Drink, drink, drink," whispered his ancient friend.

Ernest took the goblet from the hands of Antonio with a sort of calmness which the presence of every violent emotion will sometimes induce; raising it he exclaimed, "Health to my beautiful bride!" and drained it to the dregs.

"Pardon me, Count," said the Marchese; "your present action obliterates all false suspicion."

"I hope to rise yet further in your esteem," cried Ernest, and he rushed from the saloon. The artist hurried home, sought his studio, fastened the door, and abandoned himself to reflection. Ernest Hartmann was a very different being from the Count Aldini, who had left that apartment some few hours before.

In his agitation, Ernest had not noticed an individual who sat at the extreme end of the studio; but that person, having allowed him a few minutes to compose himself, now addressed him, and the words were delivered in the well known tones of the old gentleman.

"Well, Signor, you perceive the correctness of my anticipations. I told you that nothing but Antonio's drinking the contents of that phial could accomplish your purpose."

Ernest had started with horror at the voice, and now gazed, with ill-concealed detestation, upon the person of the old gentleman.

"That purpose," he replied in a hollow tone, "is abandoned."

"Indeed! I presumed so. How like ye the wine"—with a sneer—"prepared for your rival?"

"Was it not poison?"

"It was."

"Cannot you counteract the effect of the draught, or must I die?"

"The pencil will assist you," said the old gentleman; and then he took a pinch of snuff, and, taking the instrument from the willing hands of Ernest, he once more unscrewed it, and from the tube with a produced a phial similar in all respects to that which he had already shown him. "It is not yet too late to retrieve your folly; here is a similar draught—administer it to some other individual—Antonio, or whom else ye please—and the act of his drinking will release you from the penalty you thus entail upon another."

"Never!"

The old gentleman laughed. "Chuse ye then to die?"

"Can nothing save me?"

"Nothing but what I have said. Deliberate and resolve wisely: the poison will not effect its work for a week to come. During that period, torments will distract you—agues will shake your limbs—cramps will contract, with fearful agony, your sinews; your spring of life will be dried up, and when the sun of the seventh day ceases to brighten the western sky, you will sink, a being fearful to look at, into a state of everlasting torment."

Ernest groaned.

The old gentleman laughed, and then resumed:—"Should you change your present determination and prefer pleasure to pain, ease to torment, health to sickness, life to death, only express your willingness to consign another to similar suffering; and, whether you mutter it to the gloom of midnight, or to the sunshine of noon—whether you tell it to the roar of ocean, or to the winds of heaven—I shall hear you."

Ernest shuddered. "I will not buy my life at so fearful a price."

"Why not, what have you to lose? You possess a gift from me—nay, every thing you possess is a gift from me—and while you accept my bounty"—the old gentleman laughed—"you are bound to me."

Ernest half screamed with horror; the gentleman with the white and venerable-looking locks took another pinch of black rappee and scented Scotch.

"Monster! you deceive me!"

"Time will show," said his ancient friend. "Farewell, and ponder on my words." He bowed consciously and departed.

"Idiot that I was," exclaimed the wretched artist, "to accept a gift from such a personage! Now do I pay a penalty severe indeed!" He turned a look of frantic horror on the fatal pencil. "Thou cause of all my misery," he said, "would to Heaven I had never beheld thee! but now that wish is worse than useless; that prayer must be prayed in vain. All now left me is to me, my terrible fate with manly fortitude."

Embossed amid one of those extensive and picturesque ranges of mountains which furnish forth such wild and romantic legends to the inhabitants of Germany, stood the small but beautiful village of Braunfels. So imperious chieftain, envious of the happiness which he could not, with all his dear-bought luxuries, obtain, pressed the honest tiller of the soil; but, defended by good, yet powerful, master, the villagers lived on increasing every year in rustic wealth and prosperity.

From the high road, a narrow and somewhat intricate path leads to the hamlet just mentioned, and along this devious bridle-way, about a week after the past occurrence, rode a solitary traveller, pale with fatigue and illness, meanly clad and sorrowfully mounted. It was the painter, Ernest, who, with his bright hopes marred, his gay anticipations cooled to despair, his prosperity gone, his very life precarious—hurried back to his native village, there to expiate with death his errors.

The sun was sinking rapidly and in all gorgeous magnificence—Ernest gazed toward the darting luminary. "Another hour, and what shall I have come. Well, well, as far as human power admits, I have atoned for my errors. By this time, Antonio—instead of filling a loathsome grave—is happy with the object his love; Aloysia is blest, and her parent joyful. They ask me dead—my hated treasure is their's, and, though gained by me, will surely lose its venom in virtuous hands. See, the sun sinks apace; already his beams but the mountain's top; the mists gather fast in the gorges; the bark of the watch-dogs announces the retreating flocks, and the casement of each cottage in the hamlet below me is lit by the cheerful evening fire within!" He was on a shelving path, which projected from a steep cliff; on his right was an unfathomable abyss, whence, from some great depth below, the sound of subterranean waters would occasionally catch the ear of the ascended traveller. Suddenly he stopped, put his hand within his girdle, and drew forth the pencil. "What vents me," he gloomily cried, "from dashing this fatalist far from me? I promised, indeed, neither to sell nor to give it away, but now I cast it from me, and to the old beneath me throw the accursed charm!" He hurled it from him, and down it went to an incalculable depth.

The spirits of Ernest rose; his very horse seemed lightened of his burden, and, trotting on, the distance to Braunfels rapidly diminished.

After passing this dangerous path, the road to the village was but brief; the first house was one devoted to entertainment, and, at that time, mine host of the Golden Eagle was alike celebrated for the goodness of his wine, and the devoted affect with which he himself regarded it. Some little distance beyond stood the ancient church dedicated to the Lady of Braunfels, which moreover contained the maiden effort of our unfortunate painter.

Ernest, to whom the surrounding scenery was well known, hurried on, but, as he passed the Golden Eagle, the well remembered voice of the jolly landlord arrested his progress.

"Pause ye, pause ye."

Ernest reined his horse, and turned somewhat impatiently. "Nay, now, what would ye?"

"Marry, just this much (hiccup), few pass this house

without tasting the wine (hiccup); but nevertheless that (hiccup); is your name Ernest."

"Ernest! Ha! it is."

"Then I have to give you," producing a small packet. Ernest tore away the outer covering, and lo! the pencil presented itself. He shuddered.

"Where got ye this?" he inquired.

"Marry, why thou knowest best; thy friend, an old gentleman, left it here some five minutes back, and told me to tell thee something (hiccup), but I forget what, about not escaping him. I'm waxing old and forgetful (hiccup); he drank some wine, and commended it mightily, and told me to drink plentifully, and so I will (hiccup)." The toper staggered away, and, Ernest rode on. "Yes," he said, "'tis plain the foul fiend has

a firm hold of me, and will not easily resign his victim."

He looked upwards the sun had set. "My very minutes are numbered—ah! here is the church where so oft I have prayed for wealth and eminence; well have my prayers been granted. I will at least terminate my career in a hallowed fane—at least give my last thoughts to Heaven." He dismounted with difficulty—his limbs already seemed stiffening—he unclosed the door and entered; yet, ere he did so, once more with loathing and disgust he hurled from him the pencil.

All within was silent, all dark, save where a solitary lamp burned by the altar. He paced slowly and with pain up the aisle, and knelt with lowliness, not only of body but of mind, before the high altar. There was his own identical painting, representing, in glowing colours, St. Michael destroying the Serpent of Evil; and, as he gazed upon it, thoughts of the days of happy boyhood thrilled his heart, and he was filled with them anguish and despair. Then did the words of prayer spring from his whitening lips—the tear of penitence from his dim and closing eye. Anon, his mind became confused; visions of horror distracted him; frightful cries rang in his ears; and every sense seemed teeming with that which to it was most abhorrent. Then did he fancy, in an interval of his tortures, that the head of the serpent in the picture before him resembled that of the old gentleman—his features distorted with disappointed malice. Then again came agony, then darkness, and then insensibility.

Gaily shone the summer sun which lit the young and beautiful Elsi to that church on the morning morning. She went to pray for the speedy return of her long-lost, lover—and lo! there he lay, apparently dead, on the steps of the altar! Elsi screamed with surprise and dread—and that shriek seemed to arouse him, for the colour revisited his pallid cheek—his eyelids unclosed, and he gazed around in listless languor. The sight of Elsi excited his dormant mind—he sprang up, and she rushed in his arms.

"Dearest Ernest, how I have longed for your return!"

"Is this fact, Elsi?"

"Can you doubt it?" reproachfully.

"But Johann—he—he loved you."

"No, no, 'twas my sister; he is married to her. O, Ernest, how glad am I to see you again! My father has given his consent to our union, and your uncle, the miser, who lived amid the hills, is dead, and has left his flocks to you. But say, Ernest, are you ill? or, perhaps,"—and the tears started—"perhaps some other maiden has won your heart."

"No, no, my Elsi; 'tis you, and you only, I love. But come, I have had some dangerous adventures; let us thank protecting powers for my present safety and happiness." And so together they knelt before the high altar of our Lady of Braunfels.

What a pity it is that there are so many in the world who, unlike Ernest Hartmann, receive the greatest possible benefits, without any return of gratitude or even of thanks!

The pencil was never again seen by our painter—but, whenever the rich and happy farmer, Ernest, heard of any one rising to eminence, whose intrinsic merits and talents did not justify such exaltation, he would ominously shake his head and trutter to himself, "Heaven help him! he has got the Old Gentleman's Pencil!"