

father was concerned in the affairs I have just described. The description given, too, of the principal burglar tallied well enough with my remembrance of the ruffian Kite; and, added to this, was the previous appearance of the old ballad-singer in our part of the country. It seemed all plain to me now. The regularly organized community of evil-doers had fixed on this distant spot for their winter campaign; had commissioned the wretched old man to obtain needful information of available points of attack—an office for which, alas! he was too well fitted by long habit and inclination; had probably furnished for him means of more expeditious transport from and to headquarters than his own bodily powers could have furnished; and had taken care to provide such retreats for themselves, with other appliances for baffling the pursuit of justice; as long experience would suggest. Looking at it thus, it was no longer a mystery to me that the nefarious plans of the housebreakers had been so far successful.

I need not describe the agony these thoughts produced in my mind, and the attempts I made to escape from their obvious conclusions. Oh, what would I not have given, if the most costly gifts had been at my disposal, to have been assured that I wronged my unhappy parent by these suspicions! And how mournfully did I regret that my father had ever sought and made himself known to me! An orphan condition would have been comparative bliss! I was worse than orphaned.

'You have done right to tell me of these suspicions of yours, Roland,' said Mr. Simmonds, when I spoke to him on the subject; 'and it seems likely enough that they are well founded. And you think that we have to expect a visit from these people before they leave this part of the country?'

'I am afraid we must, sir,' said I, remembering the inquisitive glances cast by the old spy over the available parts of the house, and knowing that he had ample means of finding out the weakness of our garrison.

'I think so too,' said Mr. Simmonds, pale and trembling with apprehension, (I have intimated that he was both timid and hypochondriac); 'and I don't know what I had better do.'

'Would it not be well to let the groom and gardener sleep in the house?' I suggested; 'and if you would not mind the expense, sir, it might be prudent to employ a night-watchman for a few weeks, till these alarms have passed away.'

'No, no!' exclaimed my master vehemently, 'I will not have men in my house; they are not to be trusted, Roland. You are the only one I can trust, and I won't have anybody else about me.'

I expected this; for it was one of my poor master's fancies that every person he employed had base designs on, not only his property, but his life; and it seems as strange to me now as it did then, that he had made a solitary exception in my favour; and could see that even my proposal, natural as it was, excited for a moment his jealous suspicions of my good faith.*

'No, no,' he repeated more calmly, 'I think that you and I should be a match for the villains, if they come; and open enemies are better than false friends, eh, Roland?'

I would do what I could, I said; but if the men were the gang I supposed them to be,—and, indeed, judging by what they already had done, whoever they might be—they were very desperate villains indeed. And would it not be well to write to Mr. Richard, (my employer's son), and ask him—

'You don't know what you are talking about, Roland,' said Mr. Simmonds, hastily, and relapsing into his previous nervous excitement. 'Do you think I would expose my dear boy to such danger as you seem to fear? No, no; we will be a match for them; you are not afraid, are you?' he demanded, speaking more harshly than he had ever before spoken to me.

It was impossible to move Mr. Simmonds from his determination; and thus, with no human protection against the designs of wicked men, our small household separated and retired night after night—thankful every succeeding morning for another day's reprieve from the fears which had haunted our very dreams.

Meanwhile, however, tidings of the outrages

* I have not cared to dwell upon the eccentricities of my kind employer; and I will not do so now. But some of my readers may remember a somewhat similar instance of mental hallucination, in the case of the Rev. Mr. H—, who, though possessed of large property, and living in a large mansion, could not be prevailed on to keep more than one servant of either sex; and who was so painfully suspicious even of them that he securely locked them up every night, lest they should be tempted to rob him, and perhaps murder him for the sake of his wealth. 'He lost his life,' says his biographer, 'in the following extraordinary manner. Going one morning to let out his servant, who according to the narrative, must have slept in a detached building, his dog sprang upon him suddenly, and threw him into a pond. The servants heard him call for assistance; but, being locked up, they could not help their master, and he was accordingly drowned.'

I have described reached the ears of Mr. Richard; and it was some relief to me, at least, when he unexpectedly made his appearance, accompanied by a servant, and declared his intention to remain at Templeton Lodge for the protection of his aged father, until the cause for alarm had been removed.

CHAPTER XLV.

SLOPPY STEVENS MAKES HIS LAST APPEARANCE—IGNOMINIOUSLY.

That same night I was aroused from the first refreshing sleep I had had for many preceding ones, by the violent ringing of an alarm bell, the cord of which I knew to be in the chamber of my master; and by tumultuous sounds from the lower part of the house, closely followed by the shrieks of the two female servants, who, like me, had been thus suddenly awakened.

It was past midnight, dark and stormy. Wind howled in and around the chimneys, and heavy rain rattled against the casements of the old mansion; but above this peaceful din I could distinguish voices.

I sprang from my bed bewildered. In another moment I had hastily cast on some of my garments, and was groping my way down the dark staircase. At the first landing place I nearly stumbled over a man, who was crouching, as it seemed, against the wall.

'Is it you, Leigh?' gasped he. It was Mr. Richard's servant, who, the previous evening, had been rather loud in his boastings of what he would do if the house were attacked.

'Yes. What is the matter? What do these noises mean?'

'They have got in; and they are murder—don't go away from me; if you go down, you'll be murdered too,' he cried, trembling violently, and clinging to me: but I broke from his grasp.

The noise appeared to come from Mr. Simmonds's chamber; and as I hastened toward it, it became more loud and distinct. I could now not only distinguish voices, but I knew them; and I know not now whether my blood more curdled with fear, or boiled with indignation; they were the voices of Kite and Slop-py Stevens, raised in threats of fearful import. There were other voices, too—those of my poor master, entreating for forbearance and mercy, and of his son, shouting for assistance. Then there was a scuffle; and, before I could reach the spot, the sound of a pistol.

I rushed forward. I claim no credit for ex-