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RICHARD CRAIGNTON;

OR,

INCIDENTS AND ADVENTURES IN THE HISTORY OF THE "MARKHAM GANG."

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CHAPTER I.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

"Don't go to-night, Edward! There's a heaviness at my heart, that tells me there is some evil hanging over us. Don't go to the meeting."

"I will go! I've put my foot in it, and hang me if I shall be the first to draw back. Important business will be done to-night. I must go."

"And wherefore must, Edward! I never thought you would put yourself in the power of men,—and such men too! I never thought to hear you confess that you *must* associate with them."

"Hold your tongue, Alice. You don't know what you talk about. I must go, and yet they can't compel me. If slaves must of necessity be among us, they are and shall be mine—pupets to be worked at my will. I shan't be in their power; or if I am, there are none among them who have not heavier weights than I have, to sink them."

"Nevertheless, dear Edward, you need not sink with them. We can live well enough without such dangerous and hateful practices. Why will you endanger your own safety, and your hard earnings, and break my heart, for the sake of what in better days we would have both despised? Our son Richard, too,—and little Mary! I am ashamed, dear Edward, to look them in the face, and think that they may justly be branded as a felon's children!"

"Hold your tongue, Alice. I will go on, so there's no use talking. I'll have no more hard earnings. I've had little enough of them for the trouble I've been at. More talk will only make

me angry, and I'm bad enough without that. But go to the meeting, I shall."

The wife said no more. She sat down in a dark corner, and wept bitterly but silently. It was evident that they had seen better days, and that there had been a time when they were full of hope and innocence. Why the man, who was well educated, and had a good farm moderately stocked, should in his declining years have thrown off the habits of a life, and joined a horde of plunderers, was a problem his gentle wife could by no means solve. He had appeared to be content with the moderate means at his command, until within a year or two, when gradually he slackened at his work, and gave himself up to musing. Rough and suspicious characters began to come about his comfortable dwelling,—and at last he went with them.

Months passed before his wife knew the meaning of his frequent and lengthened absences from home, and when the truth did break upon her, the suffering she experienced threw her into a dangerous fever, from which it seemed a miracle that she recovered. Frequently, indeed, the bitter thought occurred to her that it would have been well had she never risen from the bed which many believed was that of death. But she did rise from it, and by every kindly art which a gentle and loving woman knows, she endeavoured to win the partner of her youth back to the ways of rectitude and honor.

But it would not do. He had risen to a post of weight, by the energy and intelligence of his character, among one of the most extensive and extraordinary associations that the world has ever