

approached, and then again faded into distance. The night was cold and dark, and the rain fell thickly.

"It was a voice," whispered McGowan.

"Hush!" cried Stanley.

Again the shout was heard, and presently another, and the two voices seemed almost immediately to mingle, and sink into a lower tone. In another moment the distant tread of horses' feet was heard, and the patter of their hoofs was rendered more distinct by the sheets of water that covered the road. It was impossible to distinguish a human figure at ten yards distance, except when it crossed some white object, or rose upon the horizon above the height of the hedge. But the sound became more and more clear and rapid as it approached, until at last its quickness and vibration gave confident assurance to Stanley and his companion that Norton and his son were within pistol-shot. The horses were now palpably below them, and the heads of the riders, in a straight line with the spot where they lay—they could not be mistaken.

"Now," cried Stanley, in an assumed voice, "fire!"

McGowan discharged his pistol: the near figure sprang a yard out of his saddle, and, with a cry of horror, fell from his horse. It was Norton. In an instant he was dead. Stanley, who was now standing behind McGowan, eagerly watched the result, and, when he perceived Norton drop, drew a second pistol, and fired its contents deliberately into McGowan's back. The murderer and the murdered expired at almost the same moment of time, and Stanley rushed across the field and escaped.

The death of Norton, accompanied by the mysterious circumstance of McGowan's murder, excited an unusual alarm in the country. The unfortunate deceased was an extensive and reputable farmer; and having preserved a strict neutrality on all questions of conflicting politics during a long intercourse with the neighbourhood, he had obtained the respect and confidence of all parties. A person who had so justly earned attachment could not be suffered to pass away without some public token of regret, and some general exertion towards the discovery of the assassin. A meeting of the magistrates and gentlemen of the county was accordingly convened to assist in procuring evidence at the inquest. It was supposed that McGowan had perpetrated the deed, as his enmity to Norton, on account of a by-gone grudge, was universally known. McGowan's associates were men who followed pursuits of the same dark character; their haunts were in the mountains; a district within which, at that period, a king's writ had never been exe-

cuted. Had they, however, been concerned in the murder, the temptation of pardon that was held out might have induced an accomplice to give information to the authorities; but they had themselves committed too many aggressions on the law to risk its penalties by openly appearing at a moment so fraught with danger.

McGowan's cottage was searched. His wife, the woman Judith, had fled, for the wretched hut was wholly uninhabited. The inquest proceeded, therefore, without proof, presumptive or direct, to lay before the country. Stanley was among the magistrates on the occasion, and by an overwrought zeal endeavoured to blind all suspicion of the share which he had taken in the outrage. Few witnesses were brought forward, and, although they were subjected to the severest scrutiny, their testimony produced no further disclosures. At one period during the investigation a hope arose that a train of circumstantial facts would be elicited, but Stanley's ingenuity baffled the examination of the witness, and drew off attention from the point. The witness was a wheelwright, who lived in the field adjoining to that where McGowan's body lay. He deposed to the circumstance of having found, on the morning after the murder, a piece of torn paper on his ground near a track of fresh-ploughed earth that bore the marks of having been trodden by some person during the night; and, also, that close to the spot where McGowan lay, a breach had been made in his fence, as if some person had burst through it. A juror asked if he had the paper; the witness replied in the affirmative: he was desirous to produce it. Stanley watched his hand, and eagerly snatching it, exclaimed,

"Before this paper is read as evidence, I have an important question to ask this witness. Can you swear that you were the first person who went out upon your grounds that morning?"

The witness hesitated.

"That is important," cried a magistrate: "endeavour to recollect whether any member of your family might not have had occasion to cross the ground at an early hour."

In the meantime Stanley took an opportunity, while the jury were waiting the reply of the witness, to turn aside to a window. He hastily examined the paper. His lips became livid, and his face ghastly pale. It was part of the back of a letter addressed to himself, which he had incontinently intended to use as wadding for the pistols. He hastily tore away the direction, and commanded sufficient presence of mind to conceal it without observation. Secure of safety, he boldly resumed his seat, and again put the same question.

The tone in which he urged it confused the