

THE SHERRODS

CHAPTER I.

THE SOFT SUMMER NIGHT.

THROUGH the soft summer night came the sounds of the silence that is heard only when nature sleeps, imperceptible except as one feels it behind the breath he draws or perhaps realizes it in the touch of an unexpected branch or flower. The stillness of a silence that is not silent; a stillness so dead that the croaking of frogs, the chirping of crickets, the barking of dogs, the hooting of owls, the rustling of leaves are not heard, although the air is heavy with those voices of the night—the stillness of a night in the country. All human activity apparently at an end, all sign of life lost in somber shadows. The ceaseless croaking, the chirping, the hooting, the rustling themselves make up this unspeakable silence—this sweet, unconscious solitude.

A country lane, dark and gloomy, awaited the moon from the clouded east. Lighted only here