

THE MYSTERIOUS GRAVE.

BY H. M. P. TAYLOR.

It was October. The frost had come and touched the deciduous leaves of the forest, changing them into beautiful crimson, brown and gold, variegated and arranged as only Nature can place them, and in beauty and pleasing effect surpassing the power of an artist's brush, or of the most gifted writer's pen. It was evening. The sun, in all the resplendent glory of a Canadian autumn, had set behind the western hills that so picturesquely mark the landscape in the northern part of the county of Hastings. Silently the stars would one by one peep forth, and then withdraw for a second their feeble light as though bashful at being the first to appear.

Around the stove in the only store that Fort Stewart could boast, sat a group of men and boys, talking as only those who meet in such a place can talk. Occasionally a stray customer came in and was waited upon by Mr. Lumb, the proprietor, who, as soon as they were gone, came and resumed his seat near the fire and joined in the conversation.

Some of the boys had brought in some partridges they had shot, and sold them to Mr. Lumb who sent them to the city.

Jack Stewart, one of the group around the fire, was telling the rest of an immense eagle he had seen that day. His description no doubt exceeded the reality of the bird but all agreed that it was the largest bird that had ever been seen around there. All, I said, but not all, for Jack's father—"old man Stewart" he was called—sat silent for a long time with his hands clasped around his one knee and his foot on the rung of his chair. Finally he spoke slowly and as if still lost in deep thought. "Boys," he said, "I guess I never told you about the big bird I saw once. It

was so big that you could put a thousand such birds as Jack has told you he seen, inside of it." "None of your yarns now old man," said Ned Martin, the blacksmith, for the old man was quite noted as a yarn spinner. "It's solemn truth Ned," replied old Stewart, "I never felt more like telling the truth than I do to-night."

"Why don't you tell it then?" cried Tom Kerr, but the look of displeasure that crossed the old man's face, told him that the words were cruel and cutting.

Once more the old man sat silently smoking his pipe and gazing into the cheerful blaze of the fire; then suddenly as if from it he drew his inspiration, he raised his head and said, "Boys, it's twenty-five years since what I am going to tell you happened and though I have wanted to tell it many and many a time before, I dare not because I had sworn, ay, had sworn by my uplifted hand with God as my witness that I would keep the secret, and you all know me well enough to know that I would do as I had sworn, even though I had died in the meantime and the secret had died with me and we both had been buried as was he who made me swear to keep it."

The old man's pipe had now gone out and putting it in his pocket he resumed his position on the chair with his hands clasped over one knee and was silent.

Every one expected to hear a story from him and one such as perhaps he had never told before, but it began to seem as though he would never commence; but after a while he again raised his head from looking in the fire and said: "Perhaps some of you young fellows may have noticed, down near Humphrey's landing on the river, a mound of earth that looks as though it