

was musing upon the vicissitudes and curious occurrences of the past twelve months; so deeply engaged and preoccupied was his mind with these subjects, that he failed to notice Mr. Purdee speaking to him, until Wyatt gave him a rough but friendly shake by the shoulder.

"Why Tom," he said, "are you off into the land of dreams to fetch Crooks back to us?"

"No," said Tom, "what must I do?"

"I want you," said Mr. Purdee, "to go and tell our folks that I may not be home till very late, or it may be to-morrow morning before I get home."

"Why not let me stay in place of you? I don't think you ought to stay."

"Never mind that Tom," said Mr. Purdee, "I don't mind staying at least until the doctor comes."

Tom went out, but shortly after returned, "I've sent word," he said, "I'll stay too."

Before the doctor arrived Crooks had so far recovered that he could open his eyes, for a few moments, and look round but he had not spoken. Towards morning Crooks fell into a slumber broken by occasional starts and moans. The sun rose in almost unbroken splendour upon the snow-clad landscape, but it brought no cheering influences to the eye or the heart of the suffering man. Soon the snow wreaths were dissipated; the drifts melted; dark openings in the white covering grew larger; the black patches in the moors lengthened into long strips or ridges; Sol was triumphant.

Wyatt as the morning advanced walked up to the scene of the previous night's adventure. He found on enquiry at the "Bank" that Mr. Purdee was gone home, but had promised to return during the day, and that a messenger had been sent to Mrs. Crooks to inform her of what had happened. Wyatt strolled leisurely down to the foot bridge and carefully examined the place where Crooks had been found. While thus engaged, his eye was caught by the disturbed condition of the stone-work, and evident marks of violence recently made; his suspicions thus aroused he more closely examined both wall and bridge, and descending to the ledge of rock, found, immediately underneath the

plank, the iron bar stuck into the wall where it had been forced the night previous by Crooks. An idea flashed through his mind, but he did not at once take in the correct view of the case, but he had got the clew, and it now wanted nothing more than sagacious management to lead to a full exposition of the affair. Scrambling up to the roadway he at once started for Mr. Purdee's.

"Whatever could be the man's motive for doing such a thing as that?" enquired Mr. Purdee, after listening to Wyatt's information so far as he could give it.

"I think," said Wyatt, "that he wanted to injure me some way, but I don't see how he intended to do it, without hurting other folks as well, and surely the fellow is not a complete fiend."

"I must go and see the place for myself, and then, if he is able I will have a talk with him."

Accordingly the two men walked down to the bridge and examined the wall carefully. By that time the sun had melted the snow so completely that the marks of his crow were quite conspicuous.

"I wonder said Mr. Purdee, whether the bridge is still quite secure; because if it is not we must attend to the matter at once."

Wyatt swung himself down to the ledge once more, and as he did so, Mr. Purdee noticed that the stone-work moved slightly.

"See," Mr. Purdee said, "whether you can move the plank."

The sudden push dislodged the structure and stone-work and bridge went tumbling with a crash into the chasm below.

The two men stood quietly contemplating the wreck. Mr. Purdee was the first to speak.

"Well, we shall have to put up a new bridge now, better go this way than the way yonder miserable man intended it to go; but I must go up and see him about this business, and if I cannot soften, I must frighten him, that is my plain duty."

As the day advanced Crooks had considerably improved, and was sitting up on the *squab* when Mr. Purdee entered.