



"TO RAISE THE GENIUS AND TO MEND THE HEART."

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POPULAR TALES.

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THE DROVER.

CONCLUDED.

So saying, he hastily wrapped the lash of his whip about his hand and arm, and grasping it firmly, whirled it around his head, and then aimed its heavy handle full at the face of his only standing opponent. But the quick eye of the highwayman detected the intent, and by a sudden dart he eluded the tremendous sweep of the instrument, which, had it taken effect, must inevitably have equalized the combat, and placed one of the actors out of the power of resistance. But such success did not attend it, and the self-named Jeremy Birch was instantly on his guard, endeavoring to parry the blows which the drover dealt incessantly, with a powerful and skillful hand. The Scot, whose limb had been well nigh broken by the unexpected assault, attempted in vain to rise, but muttering in the intervals of pain the deepest curses, he dragged himself through the snow to assist his comrade in their nefarious design, for he saw the contest was of very doubtful issue. The robber, unable to cope with the nervous arm of the drover, and only avoiding his blows by surprising agility, appeared at length to waver; his antagonist perceiving the advantage, gathered all his remaining strength for a final and decisive stroke; grasping his weapon with both hands, he raised it high above his head, at the same time advancing his left foot; unfortunately it was not set down with sufficient firmness, it slipped; he strained to recover his posture, but tottered, and received a half spent blow that brought him to the ground. In the twinkling of an eye his foe was upon him and the forms of both close intertwined like two serpents in deadly strife. Each one strove to gain the upper hand, but so swift were their involutions that neither retained the superiority for a moment. The Gael hovered around like an evil spirit, breathing blasphemy and vengeance; his-eye flashed, and his upraised knife gleamed in the faint star-light; three times did his arm descend, and three times was it arrested in mid course; the danger of

piercing his associate was as great as the chance of striking their common victim; at length the drover was above, his hand was clasped tightly on his adversary's throat, his strength was failing, for he heard the hoarse gurgle; the heaving and throbbing breast proclaimed the inward struggle for life; at the very moment of his victory the cold steel entered his back; his grasp relaxed, again the weapon was plunged into his flesh, and he felt the blood gushing from his wounds. In another moment he lay breathless and insensible, to all appearance dead. Even then the vengeful cruelty of his assassin was unquenched, and the senseless and bleeding body was mutilated and disfigured in a most horrid manner, after having been despoiled of every thing of the slightest value.

A long and imperfect existence followed this fearful proximity to death, and when Workman began to receive real and healthful impressions from outward objects, and his thro'ts to perform their accustomed office, he was bewildered and finding himself in a neatly furnished chamber, that recalled some vague but pleasing sensations to his mind; he strove to rise, but his closely swathed limbs were so rigid as to forbid every attempt at motion; a well-dressed man was at his side, scarcely distinguishable, however, through the dim light; one hand held a watch at which he gazed with an air of deep anxiety, while the other rested on the patient's pulse.

"Good!" exclaimed the physician, "the fever has abated, the prospect is more favorable." A deep drawn sigh caused him to start and a smile of benevolence beamed across his fine features, as he congratulated the patient on the restoration of his reason.

"I have," said he, "for three long days, been balancing between hope and fear, and confess that a dread of serious result was enhanced by the wandering state of your mind; but thank heaven all is now well, enjoy a little more rest, and in the afternoon all shall be more fully explained."

As the sufferer began to reflect upon the past, he seemed to have been haunted by a horrid and painful dream; his brain had been