The Demon Trapper of Umbagog.

A THRILLING TALE

OF THE MAINE FORESTS.

BY

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THE DEMON TRAPPER OF UMBAGOG.

CHAPTER I.

"God made the country and man made the town."

So wrote the charming Cowper, giving us to understand, by the drift of the context, that he intended the remark as having a moral as well as a physical application; since, as he there intimates, in "gain-devoted cities," whither naturally flow "the dregs and feculence of every land," and where "foul example in most minds begets its likeness," the vices will ever find their favorite haunts; while the virtues, on the contrary, will always most abound in the country. So far as regards the virtues, if we are to take them untested, this is doubtless true. And so far, also, as regards the mere *vices*, or actual transgressions of morality, we need, perhaps, to have no hesitation in yielding our assent to the position of the poet. But, if he intends to include in the category those flagrant crimes which stand first in the gradation of human offences, we must be permitted to dissent from that part of the view; and not only dissent, but claim that truth will generally require the very reversal of the picture, for of such crimes we believe it will be found, on examination, that the country ever furnishes the greatest proportion. In cities, the frequent intercourse of men with their fellow-men, the constant interchange of the ordinary civilities of life, and the thousand amusements and calls on their attention that are daily occurring, have almost necessarily a tendency to soften or turn away the edge of malice and hatred, to divert the mind from the dark workings of revenge, and prevent it from settling into any of those fatal purposes which result in the wilful destruction of life, or some other gross outrage on humanity. But in the country,

where, it will be remembered, the first blood ever spilled by the hand of a murderer cried up to Heaven from the ground, and where the meliorating circumstances we have named as incident to congregated life are almost wholly wanting, man is left to brood in solitude over his real or fancied wrongs, till all the fierce and stormy passions of his nature become aroused, and hurry him unchecked along to the fatal outbreak. In the city, the strong and bad passions of hate, envy, jealousy, and revenge, softened in action, as we have said, on finding a readier vent in some of the conditions of urban society, generally prove comparatively harmless. In the country, finding no such softening influences, and no such vent, and left to their own workings, they often become dangerously concentrated, and, growing more and more intensified as their self-fed fires are permitted to burn on, at length burst through every barrier of restraint, and set all law and reason alike at defiance.

And if this view, as we believe, is correct in regard to the operation of this class of passions, why not in regard to the operation of those of an opposite character? Why should not the same principle apply to the operation of love as well as hate? It should, and does, though not in an equal degree, perhaps, apply to them both. It has been shown to be so in the experience of the past. It is illustrated in many a sad drama of real life, but never more strikingly than in the true and darkly romantic incidents which form the groundwork of the tale upon which we are about to enter.

It was on a raw and gusty evening in the month of November, a few years subsequent to our last war with Great Britain, and the cold and vapor-laden winds, which form such a drawback to the coast-clime of New England, were fitfully wailing over the drear and frost-blackened landscape, and the wayfarers, as if keenly

alive to the discomforts of all without, were seen everywhere hurrying forward to reach those comforts within which were heralded in the cheerful gleams that shot from many a window, when a showy and conspicuous mansion, in the environs of Boston, was observed to be lighted up to an extent, and with a brilliancy, that betokened the advent of some ambitious display on the part of the bustling inmates. Carriages from different parts of the city were successively arriving, discharging their loads of gaily-dressed ladies and gentlemen at the door, and rattling off again at the crack of the whips of the pert and jauntily equipped drivers. Others on foot, and from the more immediate neighborhood, were, in couples and singly, for some time constantly dropping in to swell the crowd, witness, and perhaps add to, the attractions of the occasion, which was obviously one of those social gatherings that have been sometimes, in conventional phrase, not inaptly denominated a *jam*; where people go to be in the fashion, to see, be seen, and try as hard as they can to be happy; but where the aggregate of happiness enjoyed is probably far less, as a general rule, than would be enjoyed by the same company at home in the pursuit of their ordinary avocations.

Meanwhile, as the guests were assembling and being conducted to the withdrawing rooms, through the cash-bought and obsequious politeness of some of the troop of waiters hired for the occasion, the master of the mansion had taken his station in the nook of a window commanding the common entrance, and was there stealthily noting, as the company, severally or one group after another, mounted the doorsteps, who had honored his cards of invitation whom he wished to see there, and who had come whom he wished to have stayed away. He was a well-favored man, somewhat past the middle age of life, with regular features, and a

good general appearance, but with one of those unsettled, fluctuating countenances which are usually found in men who, while affecting, perhaps, a show of independence, lack self-reliance, fixed principles, or some other of the essential elements of character. And such indeed was Mark Elwood, the reputedly wealthy merchant whom we have thus introduced as one of the leading personages of our story. Though often moved with kind and generous impulses, he yet was governed by no settled principles of benevolence; though often shrewd and sagacious, he yet possessed no true wisdom; and, though often bold and resolute in action, he yet lacked the faith and firmness of true courage. In short, he might be regarded as a fair representative of the numerous class we are daily meeting with in life,—men who do many good things, but more questionable ones; who undertake much, accomplish little; bustle, agitate, and thus contrive to occupy the largest space in public attention; but who, when sifted, are found, as Pope maliciously says of women, to

"have no character at all."

After pursuing his observations a while, with an air of disappointment or indifference, Elwood was about to turn away, when his eye caught a glimpse of an approaching group of guests, whose appearance at once lighted up his countenance with a smile of satisfaction, and he half-ejaculated: "There they come!—the solid men of Boston. The presence of these, with the others who will all serve as trumpeters of the affair, will quell every suspicion of my credit till some new strike shall place me beyond danger. Yes, just as I calculated, the money spent will be the cunningest investment I have made these six months. But who is that tagging along alone after the rest?" he added, his countenance suddenly changing to a troubled look, and slowly, and with a strange

emphasis, pronouncing the name, "GAUT GURLEY!" he hurried away from his post of observation.

The person whose obviously unexpected appearance among the arriving guests had so much disturbed our host, having leisurely brought up the rear, now paused a few paces from the door, and took a deliberate survey of all that was visible through the windows of the scene passing within. He was a man of a personal appearance not likely to be forgotten. His strong, upright, well-proportioned frame, full, rounded head, and unexceptionable features, were unusually well calculated to arrest the attention, and, at a little distance especially, to secure the favorable impressions of others; but those impressions faded away, or gave place to opposite emotions, on a nearer approach, for then the beholder read something in the countenance that met his, which made him pause,—something which he could not fathom, but which at once disinclined him to any acquaintance with the man to whom that countenance belonged.

Perhaps it should be viewed as one of the kindest provisions of Providence, made in aid of our rights and instincts of self-preservation, that man should not be able wholly to hide the secrets of his heart from his fellow-men,—that the human countenance should be so formed that no schooling, however severe, can prevent it from betraying the evil thoughts and purposes which may be lurking within. It is said that God alone can read the secrets of the heart; but we have often thought that He has imparted to us more of this attribute of His omniscience than that which is vouchsafed us in any one of our other faculties; or, in other words, that, to the skill we may acquire by practice in reading the countenance, He has added something of the light of intuition, to enable us to pierce into the otherwise impenetrable recesses of the

bosom, and thus guard ourselves against the designs which may there be disclosed, and which, but for that, the deceptions of the tongue might forever conceal. All this, we are aware, may pass as a mere supposition; yet we think its correctness will be very generally attested by officers of justice, policemen, jailers, and all those who have had much experience in the detection of crime.

But, whether the doctrine is applicable or not in the generality of cases, it was certainly so in that of the unbidden guest whose appearance we have attempted to describe. Unlike Elwood, he had character, but all those who closely noted him were made to feel that his character was a dark and dangerous one.

After Gaut, for such he was called among his acquaintance, had leisurely run his eye from window to window of the many lighted apartments of the house, and scanned, as he did, with many a sneering smile, the appearances within, as long as suited his pleasure, he boldly walked in, and, with all the assurance of the most favored, proceeded to mingle with the company.

On quitting his lookout, Elwood repaired to the reception-room, where Mrs. Elwood, the mistress of the mansion, was already in waiting, nerving herself to perform, as acceptably as she could, her part of the stereotyped ceremony of receiving the guests, and exchanging with them the salutations and commonplaces of the evening. Mrs. Elwood, though not beautiful, nor even handsome, was yet every way a comely woman; and the quiet dignity and the unpretending simplicity of her manner, together with a certain intelligent and appreciating cast of countenance, which always rested on her placid features, seldom failed to impress those who approached her with feelings of kindness and respect. She looked pale and fatigued, from the labors and anxieties she had gone

through in the preparations for the present occasion; and, in addition to this, which is ever the penalty to the mistress of the house in getting up a large party, there was an air of sadness in her looks that told of secret sorrows which were not much mitigated by all the show of wealth that surrounded her.

By this time the company, having mostly arrived and divested themselves of hats, gloves, bonnets, shawls, together with all other of the loose etceteras of dress then in vogue, and carefully consulted the confidential mirrors to secure that adjustment of collars, curls, smirks, and smiles which are deemed most favorable for effect in public, were now shown into the suit of apartments where the host and hostess were waiting to receive them.

But it is far from our purpose to attempt a detailed description of the thousand little nothings which go to make up the character of one of these great fashionable parties. Who ever came from one the wiser? Not one guest in ten, probably, is found engaged in a conversation in which the ordinary powers of the speaker are exercised. A forced glee and smartness seem everywhere to prevail among the company, who are continually sacrificing their common sense in their eager attempts to appear gay and witty. Who was ever made really happier by being in such an assemblage? Although the participants may exhibit to casual observation the semblance of enjoyment, yet a close inspection will show that they are only *acting*, and that, as we have already intimated, their apparent enjoyment is no more deserving the name of social happiness than that which is often represented as enjoyed by a company of stage actors, in the harassing performance of the fictitious scenes of some genteel comedy. Who was ever made any better? Any rational discussion tending to exalt or purify the mind would be deemed out of place; and any moral teachings would be

ridiculed or find no listeners. And, finally, who was ever made healthier? In the bad air generated among so many breaths in confined apartments, the high nervous excitement that usually prevails among the company, and the exposure to cold or dampness to which their unprepared systems are often subjected in returning home, Death has marked many a victim for his own; while, at the best, lassitude and depression are sure to follow, from which it will require days to recover.

In these strictures on overgrown parties, we would not, of course, be understood as intending to include the smaller social gatherings, where men and women do not, as they are prone to do in crowds, lose their sense of personal responsibility, in deporting themselves like rational beings; for such doubtless often lead to pleasing and instructive interchange of thought, and the cultivation of those little amenities of life which are scarcely less essential than the virtues themselves in the structure of good society.

But it is time we had returned from this digression to the characters and incidents immediately connected with the action of our tale.

A short time after the frosts of formality, which usually attend the introductory scenes of such assemblages, had melted away and given place to the noisy frivolities of the evening, and while the bustling host, and pale, anxious-looking hostess, were together taking their rounds among their three hundred guests, bestowing their attentions on the more neglected, calling out the more modest, and exchanging civilities with all,—while this was passing, suddenly there arose from without a confused noise, as of quick movements and mingling voices, which, from its character and the direction whence it came, obviously indicated some altercation, or other disturbance, at the outer door. This attracting the quickened

attention of Mr. and Mrs. Elwood, the former left his companion, and was threading his way through the throng, when he was met by a servant, who in a flurried under-tone said:

“There is out here at the door, Mr. Elwood, a sort of a countryfied, odd-looking old fellow, in rusty brown clothes, that has been insisting on coming in, without being invited here to-night, and without telling his business or even giving his name. And he pressed so hard that we had to drive him back off the steps; but he refused to go away, even then, and kept asking where Mark was.”

“Mark! why, that is my given name: didn’t you know it?” said Elwood, rebukingly.

“No, sir, I didn’t,” replied the fashionable *pro tempore* lackey. “And if I had, my orders has always been on sech occasions not to admit any but the invited, who won’t send in their names, or tell their business. And I generally calculate to go by Gunter, and do the thing up genteel.”

“Well, well,” said Elwood, impatiently cutting short the other in the defence of his professional character, and leading the way to the door, “well, well, we had better see who he is, perhaps.”

When they reached the front entrance, they caught, by means of the reflected light of the entry and chambers, an imperfect view of the object of their proposed scrutiny, walking up and down the bricked pathway leading to the house. But, not being able to identify the new-comer with any one of his acquaintances, at that distance, Elwood walked down and confronted him; when, after a momentary pause, he seized the supposed intruder by the hand, and, in a surprised and agitated tone, exclaimed:

“My brother Arthur! How came you here?”

“By steam and stage.”

“Not what I meant: but no matter. We were not expecting you; and I fear the waiters have made a sad mistake.”

“As bad an one as I did, perhaps, in declining to be catechized at my brother’s door.”

“No, *you* were right enough; but the waiters, being only here for the extra occasion,—the bit of flare-up you see we have here to-night,—and not knowing you, thought they must do as others do at such times. So overlook the blunder, if you will, and walk in.”

Mark Elwood, much chagrined and discomposed at the discovery of such an untoward first reception of his brother, now ushered him into the brilliantly-lighted hall, where the two stood in such singular contrast that no stranger would have ever taken them for brothers,—Mark being, as we have before described him, a good-sized, and, in the main, a good-looking man; while the other, whom we have introduced as Arthur Elwood, was of a diminutive size, with commonplace features, and a severe, forbidding countenance, made so, perhaps, by intense application to business, together with the unfavorable effect caused by a blemished and sightless eye.

“Well, brother,” said Mark, after a hesitating and awkward pause, “shall I look you up a private room, or will you go in among the company,—that is, if you consider yourself in trim to join them?”

“Your rooms must all be in use, and I should make less trouble to go in and be lost in the crowd. My trim will not kill anybody, probably,” was the dry reply to the indirect hint of the other.

In all this Mark's better judgment coincided; but he had no moral courage, and, fearing the cut and color of his somewhat outre-looking brother's garments might excite the remarks of his fashionable guests, he would have gladly disposed of him in some private manner till the company had departed. Finding him, however, totally insensible to all such considerations, he concluded to make the best of it, and accordingly at once led the way into the guest-crowded apartments.

Here, contrary to his doubting brother's expectation, Arthur Elwood, whose character appeared to be known to several of the wealthier guests, was soon treated with much respect, for, in addition to what a previous knowledge of him secured, Mrs. Elwood had promptly come forward to greet him, and be cordially greeted in return, and, unlike her husband, had not hesitated to bestow on him publicly the most marked attentions. As soon, however, as she had thus testified her sense of the superiority of worth over outward appearance, and thus, by her delicate tact, given him the consideration with the company which she thought belonged to the brother of her husband, she gracefully relinquished him to the latter; when the two, by tacit mutual consent, sought a secluded corner, and seated themselves for a private conversation.

"As I said, I did not expect you, Arthur," commenced Mark Elwood, in the unsteady and hesitating tone of one about to broach a matter in which he felt a deep interest. "I was not looking for you here at all, these days; but presumed, when I wrote you, that, if you concluded to grant the favor I asked, you would transact the business through the mail."

"Loans of money are not always favors, Mark," responded the other, thoughtfully; "and when I make them, I like to know

whether they promise any real benefit. I could, as you say, have transacted the business through the mail, but I confess, Mark, I have lately had some misgivings and doubts whether your commercial fabric here in Boston was not too big and broad for the foundation; and I thought I would come, see, and judge for myself."

"But I only asked for the loan of a few thousands," said Mark, meekly. "The fact is, Arthur, that, owing to some bad luck and disappointments in money matters, I am, just now, a little embarrassed about meeting some of my engagements; and I trust you will not refuse to give me a lift. What say you, Arthur?"

"I don't say, but will see and decide," replied the other. "But, Mark," he added, after a pause, "Mark, what will this useless parade here to-night cost you?"

"O, a mere trifle,—a few hundreds, perhaps."

"And you think hundreds well spent, when you are wanting thousands to pay your debts, do you?"

"O, you know, Arthur, a man, to keep up his credit, must *display* a little once in a while."

"No, I did not know that, Mark. I did not know that the throwing away of hundreds would help a man's credit in thousands, especially with those whose opinion would be of any use to him. But go," added the speaker, rising, "go and see to your company: I can take care of myself."

The brothers, rising from an interview in which they had felt, perhaps, nearly an equal degree of secret embarrassment,—the one believing that his last hope hung on the result, and the other feeling

conscious of entering on a most ungracious duty,—now separated, and mingled with the gay throng, who, swaying hither and thither, and, seemingly without end or aim, moving round and round their limited range of apartments, like the froth in the circling eddies of a whirlpool, continued to laugh, flirt, and chatter on, till the advent of the last act of the social farce,—the throwing open of a suit of hitherto sealed apartments, and the welcome disclosure of the varied and costly delicacies of the loaded refreshment tables, which the company, by their strong and simultaneous rush thitherward, the rattling of knives and forks, spoons and glasses, the rapid popping of champagne corks, and the low, eager hum of gratified voices that followed, evidently deemed the best, as well as the closing, act of the evening's entertainment.

While this scene was in progress, Gaut Gurley, who had been for some time in vain watching the opportunity, caught Mark Elwood unoccupied in one of the vacated apartments, and abruptly approached and confronted him.

"Well, what now, Gaut?" exclaimed Elwood, with an assumed air of pettishness, after finding there was no further chance of escaping an interview which he had evidently been trying to avoid; "what would you have now?"

"I would just know whether you intend to keep your engagement," replied Gurley, fixing his black, quivering eyes keenly on the other.

"What engagement?"

"To give me a chance to win back that money."

"Which you demand when you have taken from me an hundred to one!"