

THE  
ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

A MAGAZINE OF

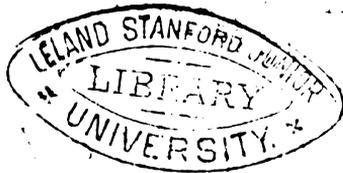
*Literature, Science, Art, and Politics.*

VOLUME XXVII.



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THE ORIGINS OF FOLK-LORE.

“La mythologie, cette science toute nouvelle, qui nous fait suivre les croyances de nos pères depuis le berceau du monde jusqu’aux superstitions de nos campagnes.” — EDMOND SCHERRER.

FEW mediæval heroes are so widely known, as William Tell. His exploits have been celebrated by one of the greatest poets and one of the most delightful musicians of modern times. They are doubtless familiar to many who have never heard of Stauffacher or Winkelried, who are quite ignorant of the prowess of Roland, and to whom Arthur and Lancelot, nay, even Charlemagne, are but empty names.

Nevertheless, in spite of his vast reputation, it is probable that no such person as William Tell ever existed, and it is certain that the story of his shooting the apple from his son’s head has no historical value whatever. In spite of the wrath of unlearned but patriotic Swiss, especially of those of the *cicerone* class, this conclusion is forced upon us as soon as we begin to study the legend in accordance with the canons of modern historical criticism. It is useless to point to Tell’s lime-tree, standing to-day in the centre of the market-place at Altdorf, or to quote for our confusion his crossbow preserved

in the arsenal at Zurich, as unimpeachable witnesses to the truth of the story. It is in vain that we are told, “The bricks are alive to this day to testify to it; therefore, deny it not.” These proofs are not more valid than the handkerchief of St. Veronica, or the fragments of the true cross. For if relics are to be received as evidence, we must needs admit the truth of every miracle narrated by the Bollandists.

The earliest work which makes any allusion to the adventures of William Tell is the chronicle of the younger Melchior Russ, written in 1482. As the shooting of the apple was supposed to have taken place in 1296, this leaves an interval of one hundred and eighty-six years, during which neither a Tell, nor a William, nor the apple, nor the cruelty of Gessler, received any mention. It may also be observed, parenthetically, that the charters of Küssenach, when examined, show that no man by the name of Gessler ever ruled there. The chroniclers of the fifteenth century, Faber and Hammerlin, who minutely de-

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With his clear gray eyes and golden beard,  
 Like a strong young king of the sea,  
 The younger came, and, "Mother!" he said,  
 "O mother! listen to me."

She answered him with a sudden cry:  
 "Our friend is gone!" he said,  
 "O mother, our comrade, tried and true,  
 At the foot of the rock lies dead.

"The breaker cuffed his shining head  
 And struck him from the light;  
 And with a hundred arms the waves  
 Swift drew him out of sight.

"O, darkened are his kind blue eyes,  
 That were so fair to see,  
 And still and cold the ready hands  
 That worked so faithfully."

Sore mourned the younger brother,  
 But the elder did not speak;  
 He bowed his head upon his breast,  
 With the salt tears on his cheek.

And no voice had the mother  
 For her heart that beat so wild,  
 But wistfully her eager eyes  
 Embraced each sorrowing child;

And as she saw from the windows  
 The breakers flash and gleam,  
 She shuddered afresh at the warning  
 In Kittery Annie's dream.

*Celsa Thaxter.*

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## THE RED HAND.

THERE lives to-day in a wider world than this a certain man who was to me while here the most perfect specimen of our species I have ever seen. He was with me that day I emerged into a more actual existence from the shell of the Institution — no better institutions than that same in all the land — in which I had been preparing for my life's work. Laying his hand upon my head he said to me:

"The first thing for you to do is to go West. Here is an invitation for you from the very wildest part of all that region. Go; apart from any good you may do, where good is most needed to be done, it is the best of all schools in which to be taught for your work!"

It seems to me like yesterday, that morning I obeyed, and left for that then westernmost West. I recall that my horse was a good deal too hand-

some, and my saddle and like equipment vastly more striking in finish than was at all necessary, judicious even, for such a mission. That, however, was the fault of the giver, an instance of his one weakness. But it is not of this I wish to speak now, nor of any other of my manifold experiences while being trained — I wish it had turned out a worthier graduate — at the exceedingly severe Oxford or Cambridge in question. Through all the web of my life in the West, like a scarlet thread, there ran — murder, cold-blooded murder! Allow me to record some of the instances of this, merely asking the reader to be so kind as to do his own moralizing as we go along.

In strict justice to the West, let me say that my earliest experience dates from a time before I started thither. I have but to close my eyes, and this moment there floats before their inner vision a certain face which I cannot forget forever. I have no memory of the place in which I first saw it, or the name of the person to whom it belonged, not even of the rest of the body. Only a face! It is a large, honest, unbearded, very white, and exceedingly sorrowful face. It is struck into my memory like a medallion; if I had the least skill with pencil or brush, I could place it before you, never to be forgotten again by you either. It is the countenance of a young man, say of sixteen, struck, while in full health and youthful enjoyment, with sudden anguish and old age; a rose as it opened smitten forever with a frost which petrified while it killed! As was the case with every one upon first seeing it, that Medusa-like face arrested my attention and terrified me. No absence of either mind or heart from it; both intensified rather and brought to an unusual degree to the surface and congealed there. The impossibility of the owner thereof ever smiling again, that was the impression made upon every eye, which was the fact also; and I knew the reason even before I asked and found my supposi-

tion right. The details I have wholly forgotten, but the youth had killed some dearest friend, killed him or her instantly, terribly, — intentionally or accidentally, I do not recall. Even if the former, no one could look upon the murderer without utter pity; a child could see that within the jail of that face the miserable man lay doomed to solitary imprisonment for life!

As I put this face away from my very eyes with an effort almost physical, Dr. Harrington rises in its place. We are across the Mississippi River now; for the Doctor, handsome, thoroughly educated, exceedingly refined, almost effeminate in tone and manner, was the exceedingly popular physician of a community there, which was to him as the quartz to the gold held in its gritty grasp. Dr. Harrington had, I recall, that reputation as a consummate surgeon which is possessed in singular degree by practitioners of a slight, lithe, womanly frame and temperament; peculiar frailty, as of a permanent hurt or ill health, though not the case with Dr. Harrington, seeming to impart that combination of exceeding delicacy and iron determination essential to a surgeon, as to any artist, — specially essential, perhaps, to one whose tools are applied to human flesh, with its tangle of muscles, veins, and nerves. I remember the Doctor also as a sincere Christian, an officer in the church, the beloved superintendent of the Sabbath school, the sweetest singer of all the congregation. I ask myself, was it a touch of dandyism which caused the Doctor, always dressed with the utmost care, to carry that gold-headed cane?

Why make a long story of it? Any satisfactory information as to the name or cause of anger of the bully who attacked the Doctor that day in the public square I do not possess. How well I recall the ferocious face of the black-guard, — bearded, bloated, his mustaches bristling like those of a cat, as, after long and loud abuse, he suddenly whipped out an eighteen-inch bowie-knife and rushed upon his foe as a

butcher would upon a sheep,—if you could but imagine a butcher enraged against the sheep. Up to that moment the Doctor had done his utmost in low and almost beseeching tones to deprecate the wrath of his assailant, wholly free from all fault himself, as every one knew then and afterward, and without the need of explanation. Every gesture was one of deprecation, his left hand holding his cane behind him. When the bully sprang upon him with drawn knife and the yell of a savage, almost before the rapidly assembling crowd realized that nothing could prevent the instant death of the quiet victim, there flashed before the eyes of the would-be assassin the long, slight sword which the Doctor had drawn with the instinct of self-preservation from his cane. It seemed like a silver wire, glittering here and there, no defence at all to the downward slashing of the great knife in the hand of the desperado determined to slay!

We all remember that exquisite bas-relief on the pediment of the Parthenon, the chariot race, the victor therein,

"With calm, uneager face,  
The foremost in the race!"

Even then the Doctor's face, in profile to me where I stood, brought that Phidian face to my mind, so unhurried, so statue-like in repose at the moment existence hung upon eye and hand.

Allow me to say just here that it is very easy for you, respected reader, to ask, — indignantly, too, — why I stood, why everybody on such occasions always does stand, so inactive while precious life was in peril? Will "It was all so sudden" do for an answer? This then, "It was so evidently somebody *else's* business to stop the murder." Justly and deeply outraged, that somebody else did not act. As for myself, it is, somehow, not *my* matter at all. *I* only happened along here from the post-office. I might get killed! That is the last analysis of the whole matter. And you would have reasoned in exactly the same way. I see before me at this moment the whole scene! The

ring of spectators extemporizing a Roman amphitheatre for these gladiators, the horror of the Christianity assembled there, not without a flavor, too, of the heathenish delight in mortal combat of two thousand years ago; the bloodthirsty bully on the one side with blazing face, quick breathings, incessant curses; the calmness of the Doctor on the other side, his face pale, his breathings as those of a sleeping babe, now and then a word of quiet entreaty as he warded off with the ease of a master of fence the desperate slashings of his foe; it was the struggle of two civilizations, a lower and a higher. Although spoken in low tones, in that silence broken only by the ring of the bowie-knife upon the slight sword, the entreaty of Dr. Harrington in the intervals of his assailant's oaths could be distinctly heard.

"I don't want to kill you. — For God's sake, stop. — You are not fit to die. — Must I kill you? — Will no one stop this madman? — You are utterly mistaken. — Will I *have* to kill you? — You are not *prepared* for death!"

With every cut and thrust of the great butcher-knife the crowd winced and shuddered; *that* must kill the Doctor! Yet every time the knife was turned aside by the steady eye, quick hand, miraculous wire of steel. It was even beautiful. But it could not last forever, the little sword must sooner or later be smitten in two by those heavy downward cuts. It was plain the Doctor knew it.

"For the last time, stop!" he said, in imploring accents. "I will *certainly* kill you! Lord, what else? I *must* do it," he said, as if in the tones of prayer. Merely a slight turn of the wrist, a little thrust forward of the glittering wire, a quick withdrawal in the same instant, a stepping of the Doctor to the left as the desperado fell dead to the earth, — for the Doctor was the most skilful of surgeons, too, and his sword had gone through the very heart. No man in all that community but knew that Dr. Harrington could not, with due regard to his own family,

to say nothing of his own life, have done otherwise than he did, yet no man viewing, as soon as the deed was done, the slayer and the slain, but felt that the former was the ghastlier object of the two.

"O God, how could I do it!" was his one exclamation in lowest tones, as I laid my hand upon his shoulder. I do not think he was conscious of his holding the point of his sword against the earth and pressing his foot upon it until it snapped as he spoke, dropping the gold-headed haft upon the earth at the same moment; and so he went, with crowds of friends, to the office of the justice of the peace to give himself up, while I hastened to break the tidings as I best could to his household.

It was an easy matter the speedy release of Dr. Harrington, so far as the law was concerned. No citizen, acquainted personally with him or not, but manifested the universal sentiment by special respect of manner in every chance encounter. I doubt, however, whether he was even conscious of it. At least, I know that no assurances or reasonings of his most intimate friends had the least power to diminish the deep melancholy into which he fell. Never again did he act as officer of the church or superintendent of the Sabbath school. He was never known to be present, even, at church upon communion occasions, much less to unite in singing, although fully restored to church membership after a period of suspension. I know he continued his family worship, for his wife told me his supplications were almost too pitiful to hear. But, weak as I agree with you it was in him, from that hour Dr. Harrington was a ruined man; that any one could see in his neglected dress and profound sadness. He still, as if mechanically, practised his profession, but soon fell into a decline and died. "Better the other way, better the other way!" he was often heard to repeat in answer to all reasonings with him.

I was about passing to Isagger

Clumb, as the next of the crowd of cases of the Red Hand which are pressing upon the gates of my memory for outlet as I write, when I paused to listen again to that sharp stab-like "What!" of Mrs. Harrington that day I broke the news to her, hastening down to her parlor in morning-wrapper to meet me. What lovely children they had! I recall how my left hand holding the rose-leaf palm of little Lily, my right lay upon the fair hair of Zoozoo, — a diminutive for Susan, I think, — all the more beautiful for its uncombed tangles at that unseasonable hour. But they were not truly mated, — the parents I mean; had the Doctor been less feminine or the wife more masculine, the circle made up of the two would have been truer and stronger. I fear that "What!" of Mrs. Harrington never lost its razor-like edge in all her after conversation and influence with her husband in regard to this killing. I do not know but we all had an unspoken idea that she could have saved her husband from that conscience of his, as wirelike, alert, and deadly of thrust as his own sword, if she had pursued a course less coincident with his own in the matter. As it was, I remember, that day of the funeral of the Doctor, I said in thought to the bully of the fight, whose name I wish I could recall but cannot, as if he stood in ugly spirit on the other side of our dead, "Be satisfied, you have killed him at last!"

But, Isagger Clumb? Yes, you are next, though we must step as off a precipice to get to *your* level. I suppose the man was named Hezekiah when a babe, but he was one of those persons who degrade everything they come in contact with, fouling, for all decent uses forever after, the very name they bear. What good does it do to say that this animal was very low and thick-set, a big head sunk deep between his shoulders, a face neither bearded nor shaven, manner a compound of strut and shamble? You would have to know the man, — five minutes with him sufficient for that,

— before you can loathe him aright. *Filthy* is the label nature itself applies to a man like Isagger; nor could all the barbers and tailors in the world have cleansed him, had he come into a fortune, from this, his pre-eminent characteristic; it was in blood and marrow.

To this hour I have a twinge of conscience when I recall how I married this satyr to as pleasing a girl for her class as you could easily see. She was an orphan without a cent, who had lived, a violet growing upon a dung-hill, for years in the log-cabin home of which Isagger was the only other member beside the parents. If she knew how to read and write, it was the utmost of her accomplishments. Never had her foot trodden a carpet, nor her ear heard a piano, I suppose, in her life. Washing the coarse clothing, sweeping the puncheon floor, cooking the corn-bread, greens, and fat pork of the household, stitching together in rudest fashion the raiment of the family, made up her life; a rare wedding somewhere in "the bottom" her only amusement, her only instruction derived from the "meeting" once a month held by the "circuit preacher," the blessed, because sole agent of civilization and Christianity over vast regions of our Republic.

I was very slow in performing that marriage ceremony. There was that in her bearing as she stood by his side, so gracefully erect in contrast with his *stocky* form, so beautiful in face as of a forest flower, and he so full of all poisonous ugliness like a swamp weed, such transparent purity to be given legally and utterly over to his loathsome foulness. Then, such certainty of her becoming the loveliest of her sex if she but had the opportunity, such equal certainty of her being dragged down into the foulest of hags, in the end, chained to Isagger. And I knew — every soul there was perfectly aware of the fact — that, with heartiest aversion to the man, she married him simply because, poor wretch, there was nothing else left in all the world for her

to do. The old people had died, she could not live in the cabin with the man not married to him, there was no possible place for her elsewhere. I have known young girls actually hedged up to marrying — not for money, mind, but solely that they might continue to exist — very old men whom they utterly detested. Poor things, refusing the withered hand over and over again, writing desperate letters in every conceivable direction, making all attempts to escape they knew how, weeping all night, — all in vain; the poor palpitating partridge netted at last till unable to move, only the miserable heart throbbing in its imperishable aversion! No minister who reads these lines but has officiated as the executioner over many just such a Lady Jane Grey, and understood, as perfectly as if it were all spoken out, that last dying speech and confession of the victim, "Yes; but because I have no escape whatever from it!" Nothing more inscrutable than such providence as that.

But, Isagger Clumb! Somewhat like a thief taken in the act, I have to say. It is useless to deny the thing. Yes, I married them, and there was a boastful air about the man, an open expression even in words of his doing a very generous thing indeed in marrying the shrinking beauty, which added bewilderment to pain. A month after, a ponderous backwoods friend of mine, red-bearded, stoop-shouldered, said — and he had to take off his slouched hat, although we were in the front porch of his house and the weather was quite cold as he said it: —

"I tell you, sir, I could n't stand it, there in that store by the river this morning! O, I've known Isagger years now. Everybody knows *Isagger*. An' I've heard him before. He always talks that way, you know. But to-day I could n't stand it. About his own wife he was talkin', too. It was awful. I vally my life's much as any man, but it was *so* bad I broke out on him an' made him dry up. *Such* talk!"

You may better understand why my friend hesitated to rebuke Isagger,

when I tell you what happened three days after. I was standing upon the river-bank, watching the rolling off of the barrels of whiskey and flour, ten of the first to one of the latter, when I observed one of the deck hands of the steamer which was discharging its freight. Nothing in him called for a second look as he walked down the bank toward me, beyond a large frame surmounted by a rough face in an aureole of black hair and whiskers. He had been only a moment from his work "to get a drink" at a doggerly on the bank, and was wiping his mouth as he hurried back. In the same instant of seeing him I saw Isagger Clumb ten steps behind him aim with his revolver at the man and fire. With the shot the man fell dead at my very feet, his hair touching my boots as I stood. I recall the very attitude of Isagger, holding his revolver ready in his hand for another shot, the only expression in his face being a waiting to see if his first shot had been sufficient. There was a momentary move as if to replace his weapon, satisfied; then a careless step or two forward and another shot, this time through the back of the dead man's head as he lay. Then a turning away, as from game certainly killed but not worth the picking up, and a leisurely walking up the bank and into town again.

I remember the unanimous reasoning of all the deck hands as they carried the body aboard, that it was the sole and exclusive duty of the victim's "mate" to avenge his death; which they all rested certain said "mate" would promptly do. Whether this "mate" was absent or unarmed or a coward was never known; but when he was wholly ready to do so, Isagger in a leisurely manner mounted his piebald mare and rode in a walk out of town and homeward. Why there were no officers of the law in reach to arrest him I do not know, but I do believe, had there been one man there fully vested in his own mind with the personal business of taking the murderer, he would have done so, or been killed in

the effort. When the proper officers did go to Isagger's house the next morning, of course the man had fled the country. I wish I could add that his wife was thus forever rid of him. Alas! I too well remember being told that he had afterward written to her to come to him in some remoter West, and that she had gone.

It is unpleasant to have to allude to myself, especially in such company, but this I must add. A few moments after Isagger left, I mounted my horse and rode homeward by the same road. Moving at more rapid pace, in a mile or two I came in sight of the man, in the dusky twilight. As soon as he heard me coming he halted, turned in his saddle to see what I wanted. When I had got so near as to be recognized he gave an exclamation expressive of a contempt most hearty for me and my entire class, and rode off at a gallop. The last I heard of him, as he disappeared in the darkness, was a yell followed up by a peal of peculiar laughter; of which I was singularly reminded lately in a bar or two of the scoff of the demons in Schubert's *Manfred*.

I am given to understand — I think John Keats is my informant — that "a thing of beauty is a joy forever." Certainly such an object as Isagger has been to me a sorrow from the moment I was introduced to him, just before I married him that day, when his inherent ugliness was made preposterous by an enormous collar of white "domestic," the half on one side of his face turned down, the other half standing up.

"You see, I made a compromise," his "best man" said to me after the ceremony, as we rode "a piece" together homeward. "Isagger, you see, he said the fashion was for first-class gentlemen to wear their collars turned down. Now, you see, I'd only just got back from sellin' my cotton at New Orleans, an' I *knew* the fashion was to have the collar stand up. No arguin' with him, you see, an' of course I could n't give in; so in givin' him, you see, the last touch before he stood up,

I just com-pro-mised, as they say in Congress, — left one side turned down, turned t' other up!" And my friend almost rolled off his horse as he told the joke. I would have laughed with him more heartily, if I had not begun to fear that the same sense of humor would cause him to keep a certain fee for marrying the couple, which I happened to see Isagger give him on the front porch, at mounting, for that purpose. I was correct in the end, but am sincerely glad now that no money was paid me in connection with that transaction.

But I recall the words of John Keats, to say what a solid joy and satisfaction to me, that evening Isagger rode away from me after the murder into the gathering night, was a certain painting which I had seen somewhere, and which then rose vividly to mind. In the background thereof lay a murdered man, dead, face upward to the stars. In the foreground the murderer fleeing for his life, his right hand still holding the dripping knife, his left held over his eyes, peering eagerly, as he ran, into the distance. Immediately over his head, bent forward as he fled, hovered in the air, erect, calm, forever just above his unconscious head, the Angel of Vengeance, the right hand holding the sword, the left free to seize upon the miserable man at the appointed time. Then, but not before; the serene repose and divine certainty expressed in face and attitude, — that was the charm and inexpressible consolation of the whole. In no gods did even the heathen believe more thoroughly than in Nemesis and the Eumenides; and I saw this cold-blooded slayer escape that evening into the darkness, deriving my only, yet sufficient, satisfaction from knowing, so much more certainly than did any poet of them all, who it was accompanied Isagger in his flight.

Even had I not known this then, I would have been dull indeed not to have learned the same from my experiences of General Bernard. No Isagger Clumb in this instance. If Darwin

dared plead Isagger in proof of an ancestral gorilla, you could have silenced him on the spot with the exclamation, "But General Bernard!"

I ask myself in vain, What did the General lack? Family? None in all the South of better family. Person? My own knowledge supplies me with no one of more perfect beauty, even of the Greek conception of symmetrical and agile form, regular features, clustering locks, alert and soulful eyes. Certainly, no man had higher reputation for talent, the General having graduated at his college with an *éclat* remembered there still.

"Genius!" the Professor of Mathematics of this institution remarked to certain of us students in conversation in the library one Saturday, — "genius! I have had plenty of talent in my classes, but, so far, I have known but two instances of genius. One is, as you all know, that poor fellow Delavan, who rolls and shrieks half his time upon the floor of his room, with spinal disease, like Robert Hall of England; the other was —" He paused on purpose for us to say for him, and in chorus, "General Bernard!" And every student there, in saying it, had the same absurd pain deep down, "And so, I am not a genius!"

No man was more popular in all his region than the General, when the disaster of his life took place. He had easily stepped from the Legislature into Congress. As to the Presidency, that, in the opinion of many, was purely a question of time. Because, — and it was very remarkable, — the General, although so talented and popular, neither drank nor gambled.

Both memory, time, and space are lacking to record in detail his duel with young St. Clair. I recall, however, that it was the general remark, "St. Clair was so very young; the only child, too, of his widowed mother!" There was something, also, of the General having taken unintended offence, pressing the matter to a duel, when friends could easily have made it up demanding still more shots after sev-

eral had already been had. The result was, that the General persisted until he had shot St. Clair through the heart; and he must have known that day, as almost the entire city rolled under his window in the funeral procession, that he was as thoroughly ruined for life as a man could possibly be.

Who can say how much his ruin, social, political, pecuniary, had to do with his after-wretchedness? Nothing was left but for him to remove with his family — his wife blighted to the soul, yet clinging to him with woman's love — to that farthest West, in which I was then at work. It must have been a terrible fall for them, from the culture and excess, even, of refinement of their former lives to their new home, beyond the Mississippi, where, as a lawyer and editor of a political paper of intense partisan spirit, he spent the rest of his life.

For many months, unknown to the General, he was to me a study of singular interest. Though still young, his head was whitened and bowed like that of an old man, his face wrinkled, and his form shrunken past all recognition. Everybody knew that, when away from home upon his circuits, he never slept in a room alone; even then the light must burn all night, which, on account of drawing the mosquitoes, made the nights with him a martyrdom to his friends, not to be endured without a good deal of after-comment. I never knew whether there was any ground for the many reports of his talking in his sleep and leaping out of the soundest slumber with a yell. One summer night, in crossing the Gulf of Mexico, a man sleeping upon the crowded deck of the steamer beside me sprang at midnight, and from profound sleep, to his feet with a scream which brought to their feet every other sleeper on board; but of *his* history I know nothing.

But what struck every one most in reference to the General was his unceasing, almost frantic activity. From morning till night he so ordered it as

to be in company always. Even while reading the exchanges in his very dirty office, or writing his editorials or law papers, he continued a conversation with those around which seemed never to know a pause. On the streets, beside the hotel bar, riding in stage or on horseback, before breakfast, during the sleepy heats of the day, so long as he could induce any one to remain with him, he was talking, talking, unceasingly talking. No one ever knew him to drink or gamble. All were specially careful of their conduct in his presence, or of remark in regard to him behind his back, it being so well known how gladly he would welcome an opportunity of losing his life. But that was his peculiarity, his unwillingness to be alone, or to cease from that incessant conversation which kept him from himself. The topic of conversation was perfectly indifferent to him, he allowing it to be turned in any direction any one pleased, so only he continued to absorb it himself, — politics, poetry, planting, love, theology, finance, adventure, anecdote, anything, everything. And his sense of humor rose even into the domain of wit, with this singular fact, that he never laughed nor even smiled himself. I have stood aside and watched him closely as, the centre of a delighted crowd, the conversation having taken that direction, he was relating anecdote after anecdote, real or imaginary, of the most amusing nature; no smile upon his face; through all the bursts of laughter his sole purpose seemed to be to keep steadily on; going, still talking, to dinner at the sound of the hotel bell, talking during all the meal, coming back from the table still talking.

There are many who read these lines who will recall to mind the man I mean. Some of them will know better than myself the circumstances of his death, during an absence from home attending court. I only remember that his brilliant conversation, which even a Dr. Johnson or a Coleridge might have envied, continued to the last to delight, amaze, and exhaust his hearers. From

sources of observation, reading, experience, imagination, ever fresh and inexhaustible, came the same fast, almost fierce flow, people being drawn to, yet wondering at, him as at a mountain torrent, — with all respect, too, for everybody echoed the sentiment that the General was a perfect gentleman. All I know of his death is, that after keeping up that day till long after midnight an hotel crowd, he went to his bed to be seen no more alive on earth. Who was his room companion that night, if any, whether traces of poison were indeed found, as was stated in the papers, I do not know. This I do know, from closest observation of his case for months, that he passed out of this life, his wonderful powers in a full career of unceasing and apparently exhaustless activity, his most intense activity being directed to keeping as completely and continuously away from himself as possible, this one set effort of the man becoming but the more frenzied as the perishable part crumbled from about him. What are his opportunities for the same across the line is a pressing question worth, surely, the soberest study. This I assert from knowledge as certain as a man can have in reference to any object lying immediately before him: up to the moment of his death there was nothing, in either world which General Bernard dreaded as much as he did — General Bernard.

It may be said that there is singular similarity of result herein between Dr. Harrington and General Bernard: the first named being a sincere and consistent believer, the last an avowed and sarcastic unbeliever as was never denied. Certainly, there was this unlikeness between the two men, that the lawyer was a man of faculties larger and more vigorous by far than those of the physician. Whatever power lay therein for the grappling with his sorrow, which was himself, differentiated the former from the latter. But just here lay the radical unlikeness of case between these men. The entire thought of General Bernard before, during, af-

ter his killing of St. Clair had been, and exclusively, in reference to himself; himself as affected thereby in politics, property, friends, and in conscience worst of all. The exact reverse was the case with Dr. Harrington. His entire religion, at home and abroad, lay largely in subordinating himself to others. To others whom he respected and loved alone? By no means. The entire history and meaning of his affray during and after the killing of his antagonist consisted in his having main reference, not to himself, but to that worthless foe. General Bernard's consuming distress was in the one unceasing thought, "How my foe has damaged me!" No other thought preyed upon the vitals of Dr. Harrington but this, "How I have ruined him, my assailant, body and soul, and forever." Even that assailant could see that Dr. Harrington has the centre of his orbit without himself; while no one would deny but that General Bernard has within himself the centre of all his movement. The General is herein like all other men, like the Doctor himself previous to the piety which so characterized him; but the Christ finds for himself a Bethlehem in the heart of this last, and, with omnipotent hands, shifts the centre of the man back to its original point, — God! Accepting and gladly yielding himself to this new force, the Doctor subordinates himself to men, too, even to the man who kills him in the end, as the Christ before him did to men and to his foes.

With my own eyes I studied for many months the unrest of General Bernard. Surely it is impossible to imagine an unrest more thoroughly identified with the man himself than his; in the same moment loving and loathing himself supremely; in the same act and with all his energies seeking and shunning himself. I add only this in regard to Dr. Harrington, loving and beloved of all men; he fell asleep at last resting his wearied self upon the unmoving centre of his soul. In the case of General Bernard, we

cover our eyes from the rending of himself, as with his own hands, asunder. And it is no more in my power to imagine an unrest more absolute than that of General Bernard up to the instant of leaving us, than it is to conceive of a peace more perfect than that of Dr. Harrington when, on a midnight hour made midday to me forever, he reached out to me a trembling hand and, with a serene smile upon his face, bade me a happy good by.

You may think it strange, but I do not consider it the descent you would suppose to pass from the instance of Dr. Harrington to that of black Tom, the negro who killed the Dutchman. Doubtless I could group these several cases more artistically, so as better to harmonize their shades of color, but I prefer mentioning them in their actual order of occurrence; and then, in the order in which the details of each come to my mind.

I very well knew, when I went to see Tom in jail, that I had already somewhat impaired my standing in the community by that public prayer of mine for Judge Jones's Bob. I do not remember how it was, but Bob, a negro man belonging to the Judge, had killed somebody, and was being borne by the church door that Sunday morning just as my congregation arose for prayer. As the mob hurried by to a convenient tree whereat to obey the mandate of Judge Lynch in reference to Bob, I could not forbear a petition, brief but earnest, that the departing wretch might, somehow, be fitted for his change of worlds. More liberal and warm-hearted people exist nowhere than those who shook their heads not wholly satisfied in their own minds as to the right or the wrong of such an act.

Now, the Tom of whom I am speaking had heard that a certain Dutchman had money laid up from the produce of his garden. As the Dutchman lived alone in a cabin on the edge of his garden, which was in the outskirts of the town, nothing could be easier than his murder.

"As I came to town," Tom himself told me, "one evenin', from cuttin' wood, I jest went into his cabin to get his money. He was settin' by the fire smokin' his pipe, an' I asked him for a coal to light mine. I had my axe, an' when he stooped down over the harth to get a coal, I hit him on the head an' killed him. Never got but thirty-seven an' a half cents at last."

Very speedily was Tom in the hands of Judge Lynch. His owner, however, was on a dry-goods box under the tree before the crowd got there with their criminal. His appeal to them was brief but conclusive:—

"If you hang him, gentlemen, it's my loss, dead loss. If you let him alone a few days till the law tries and hangs him, the State pays me by statute his appraised value. You all see he's a likely boy, twelve hundred dollars at the lowest, and I am a poor man and can't afford to lose it. That's the only objection I've got to your hanging him right away."

During all my visits to Tom lying in jail, after being duly tried by law and condemned to death, there was that which interested me in Paul Smith, his jailer, almost as much as in Tom. An honest, vigorous, good-natured ex-stage-driver was Paul, whose one purpose in life just then it was to hold Tom in safety till the appointed moment came when he should hang him. It was with the utmost difficulty Paul could be persuaded, on my first visit to the jail, that I intended to visit Tom with a hope of preparing him for death. Perplexity and amusement at such an idea, vague respect and downright contempt for the man attempting such a thing, struggled for mastery among the tangles of Paul's hair and beard then and upon every after-visit,

"And so you want to talk to Tom? Boy, you mean, that killed that Dutchman? To *Tom!* What earthly good can you do *him?* Killed that Dutchman with his *axe.* O, of course," Paul Smith always added, going before me with the keys, "but—*Tom!* Most redickerlous thing I ever heard of in

my life. Tom!" And it looked as if the good-humored jailer was right, when, after unlocking several tremendous doors, he remarked, as he left me in the innermost dungeon, locking the door after me as he withdrew, "Wait till your eyes get used to the dark and you 'll see him. He 's chained to that far corner. If you keep here by the door, he can't hurt you! I 'll be back in half an hour. Do *him* any good. *Tom!*" in a tone expressing the extreme reverse of possibility.

Now, I have no intention of recording my efforts toward the sullen lump of what might be styled, in reference to the surrounding gloom from which it slowly emerged in dim outline, the organic darkness there. Save that Tom understood English, the difference was very small between him and his great-grandfather, years before, in Africa. It came out from our after-conversation, too, that this Caliban had thrown his lariat about a German girl out upon the prairie, who had, however, been mercifully and promptly rescued from his power; and this may give some hint of the nature of the meditations from which, as he himself afterward told me, he found it so hard to separate himself, even in view of immediate death! A more thoroughly degraded and hopeless creature, who could imagine! "And so you've come *again!*" Paul would say to me upon each visit, perfectly good-natured and greatly amused. "To see Tom, — *Tom!*" If I had been visiting Tom to give him lessons in Syriac, my absurd course would not have seemed more useless! Yet here were the undeniable facts which I kept repeating over to myself like statements of the multiplication-table: "Tom is, in spite of all, a human being. Tom leaves us in a few days to live somewhere else for ever and ever. Christ came into the world and died to save even the worst. In the very agony of his own death, Christ made an amazing assurance to a felon dying beside him, in virtue of a singular change effected by him then and

there in that felon! My religion is all a sham, hollow, and despicable, which I had better renounce and be done with, if it is not just this hearty belief: That same Christ is equally in this cell to save Tom, too!"

Let but this be added here: so far as all outer evidence could testify to it, before he died this brutal savage arose from where he had lain in his filth, darkness, chains, and stood erect, an humble and sincere Christian. I dare assert nothing beyond this: Tom *seemed* to be! What I demand is, philosophical explanation as to what produced that seeming, so wholly unlike all in the man going before! At any rate, I noticed that the amused look on the face of the jailer, whenever Tom and myself were together, had turned into one of wonder at the bearing of Tom, and at the very few words he spoke that day on the gallows.

This also I remember. An excellent friend, who accompanied me to the place of execution, through the rush and roar and dust of the vast crowd, heartily agreed with me in disgust at the eagerness of the people to look upon the killing of the criminal. He only went to go and return with me.

"To feast your eyes upon the death-struggles of a human being!" he said with indignation of the hurrying throng: "it is loathsome, it is horrible!"

We stood beside each other on the ground, the murderer standing upon his coffin in a wagon, the rope securely fastened to a beam overhead and adjusted to his neck. With the Amen which closed my prayer, I turned upon my heel and walked rapidly away, never looking back to see the end! I recall this instant the eager eyes, especially of the women present, strained, as I shouldered my way through the multitude, upon the spectacle I was hurrying from! It never occurred to me, until I was quite away from the press and speeding along the deserted streets homeward, that my friend, also, had remained where I had left him, himself as eager to see as any!

*Wm. M. Baker.*