Literature, &c.

THE TWO FRONTIERSMEN; OR, LYNCH LAW.

By Charles Hooton.

THE DICE.

Six years have now passed since two young and enterprising citizens of one of the Southern American States, left their homes together, for the purpose of settling in the then newly declared republic of Texas. Their names, respectively, were Rivers and Savidge. They were born neighbours—they had been friends from their childhood—not one solitary disagreemant had ever occurred between them up to that time; and now were they banded together for the purpose of carrying out a speculative enterprise, in a new land, of the highest worldly importance to each. They purchased lands on the banks of the beautiful Guadaloupe—each paying an equal share of all expenses; built a log-house thereon, cultivated their wild domain, and dwelt together in all respects as brothers. The only agreement made between them was, that if, at any future period, either should desire to separate from the other, and go elsewhere, he should either *accept* such a reasonable sum for his half of the location as might be offered by the remaining party, or *give* as much himself for his companion's share.

The burning suns of three seasons had scarcely travelled over their heads, before a flourishing homestead and a fertile plantation rewarded their industry; and by the contrast they afforded to the wild vast tracts around, seemed to mark with a degree of emphasis not to be mistaken, the beautiful triumphs of man over nature, and to point with unerring finger the delights which, in a land of liberty, where man toils for himself and not for others, well-directed industry and perseverance, aided by a capital, are capable of placing within the reach of those who properly exercise them.

Assuredly there was one *dark* feature amidst all this outward brightness. Slavery was there. Ten coloured people called up the productions of that soil. For though slavery is virtually repudiated by the laws of the country, practically it is as common as in the native State which our friends had left behind. With them, however, slavery was little other than a name. The chains were metaphorical; the lash a mere pedagogue's cane, and as seldom used; the labour lighter than that which is borne by millions in the very land where sensitive blood turns chill, and whose face grows pale with ire, only at the name of slave. The life of these coloured people was one of absolute liberty and independence, when put in opposition to that dreary mass of misery called life, which is passed by thousands in our own coal-pits; and which can scarcely be exceeded in horror by the existence of the banished in the mines of Siberia. Happily, or unhappily, however—whichever the reader pleases—the English are a *long sighted* people. Their telescopic eyes can reach across an ocean, and pick out every detail of wretchedness that the opposite land may present, while the same organs, or instruments, applied to objects within arm's length, very naturally fail to define a single limb of the same monster that is worthy of being crippled by a national exertion. As a nation we preach long and loudly against slavery under the open heavens—slavery beneath the bright material eye of the universe—while at the very moment our lips are hurling this indignation against the farthest parts of the earth, our own feet are standing upon that hollow ground beneath which, in darkness, and suffering, and sorrow, the children of our own land are slaving like gnomes or unhappy genii, unblessed with a vision of God's light, or a breath of his pure air, more frequently than once a week.

But this is not exactly telling my story.

So far, nothing had happened to actually disturb the tranquility of our two friends; though a difference of some standing had, during a considerable period, seemed to threaten it.

About noon one day in the month of August, 1831, when the almost perpendicular rays of the sun made every vegetative beauty of that sweltering world droop its fevered leaves and flowers beneath their power, and when the slaves had left for a couple of hours the spade in the ground, and the hoe in the furrow, to seek a shelter within doors from the heat, Mr Rivers and Mr Savidge might have been seen sitting in a large room of their habitation, every aperture of which was thrown wide open, engaged in earnest though not unfriendly conversation. Both were clad as lightly as possible in the ordinary cotton or printed calico garments of the country; and on the floor, against each one's chair, lay two immensely broad-brimmed grass hats—the produce of Carthagena or Panama—which had been thrown off when they entered the apartment.

On the table before them stood decanters of the finest wines, a magnum of the famous old Monongahela whisky of the States, and various kinds of that indescribable fruit, the cold delicious melon, which Providence seems to have especially designed for the health and pleasure of all such of his creatures whose fate it is to dwell within the terrible influence of a tropical sun.

"Well, Savidge," remarked Mr Rivers, as he replenished his glass with claret; "I don't see, after all, what way we can fix it. We are both equal—we are both free and independent—we both want to marry the same women, and neither can stand aside, because one has just a good a title to her as the other. If gals were'nt so remarkably scarce as they are just now in Texas, why a chance might open up, and something of a clearin' be seen through; but as it is, we are come to a stand still, and that's all about it—anyhow!"

"Suppose we agree to go on as we have done," observed Savidge, in reply; each man make the best sea-way he can, and the question to be decided by the lady herself, when we both pop the question to her together; because, old hoss, you know she must be judge and jury at last."

"I had rather bowl her down at nine pins," answered Rivers. The truth is, have her I must——"

"If you can get her."

"Right! If I can get her: well put in. But if not, Savidge, I'll jest tell you what I shall do. I shall set out here, stalk and stump, and clear off again for old Kentucky."

"Nay, nay, don't do that, man! We shall go to war with Santa Anna again before you die; and when we march on Mexico, you can get a Spanish countess as easily as a doubloon, —come back, take lands adjoining these, and live comfortable neighbours with myself and Isabella, after we are married."

"I shall never give her up except on her own refusal," rejoined Rivers, somewhat sternly.

"Nor I either!" said the other in a similar tone. And then for a while the two friends sat mute, slicing melons and sipping wine by way of proving to each other that they were not exactly automatons

Savidge was the first to renew the conversation.

"What fools we both are!" he exclaimed.

"Do you think so?" carelessly observed Rivers.

"I do—I'd swear it. Here we sit, a couple of young trees run up together—never had a difficulty before in our lives, and now at six or seven and twenty, we are to split about a woman!"

"A woman," answered Rivers, "may be to a man a more important consideration than any other in the world; more vital to him than the very means of his existence, so as at least *I* think, and therefore a woman is no trifling source of difference. For myself, I would give a thousand dollars that the difficulty were about *anything else* but that."

"Is it not worse than useless, continued Savidge, "to stand in one another's way! Whatever shall we come to think of each other? What is it all likely to end in?"

"That's beyond my calculation," coolly rejoined Rivers.

"But not beyond mine," added the other; "I have seen—you have seen—many a man before now has seen, blood as good as his own spilled on the ground like water, for a difference ninety-nine cents in a dollar less in the beginning than is this now between us. I do not fear what is at the present time, but what may be in the future. Let us stop in time—let the difficulty be settled now and for ever."

"How?" demanded Rivers. "Who can settle it?"

"You and I."

"In what manner?"

"Will you agree to my proposition?"

"Name it; but no lead—no knife!"

"Rather than that, Rivers, I will at once give up to you frankly—though you are the younger of the two—and make a willing sacrifice of my love, such as it is, before the God of that everlasting friendship which—may no bloody finger ever divide!"

"No!" exclaimed Rivers, you shall not do it. I won't accept the offer, if you make it. What I cannot give I shall not accept."

"Then my proposition is simply this:—That now, before we quit this table, the difference between us shall be finally settled by THE DICE. Each having pledged his honor previously that, in the event of his proving the loser, he shall resign all pretensions to the hand of Isabel for ever, and so leave the other free, UNLESS—mark this—unless she shall herself afterwards positively reject him: in which case upon his own admission of the fact, the other shall be again liberated from this agreement."

"Very well;—done!" answered Rivers "I'll agree, anyhow you can fix it."

The dice-box was placed upon the table.

"Three throws each, double dies, and the highest number is the winner,' said Mr Savidge.

"Agreed!" answered his companion; "but before we proceed to business, jest let us also agree to make a complete work of it. If I lose I shall clear out of this country, as I said before. In that case, this location must be parted: my half falls to you. When we have settled about the lady, one throw shall decide the ownership of the whole estate? Shall it be so?"

"As you please. *Yes*, decidedly."

They drew lots, and the first throw fell to Mr Savidge. Two sixes came up. He threw again. Two sixes again.

"The lady is mine!" he exclaimed triumphantly; only one more like these, and there's a tie at least."

Mr Rivers sudddenly turned deathly pale, and had recourse to half a tumbler of pure Monongahela, which he swallowed neat, and followed with a draught of ice water.

"Go on!" said he; "I am tired of it already."

Savidge threw his last—"Two blank."

Rivers smiled grimly, if not bitterly; but there was hope still visible in his intensely and unnaturally piercing eyes.

He seized the box with the avidity of a wild beast when pouncing on his prey, cast his eyes upwards during a few seconds, as though in an agony of thought, and then made his cast.

"Five and four!" Again, and two sixes appeared.

"Twenty-one to twenty-six, and another hrow!"

He wiped the perspiration from his temples and face, which now glowed as though they had sweated through three hours' labour in the sun. He swallowed another half glass of whisky, while Savidge sat as silent as a corpse unconsciously biting at a melon as though it had been a piece of flesh, and with his eyes fixed upon the spot where the dice had fallen, as though they might never be withdrawn again.

The rattle was again heard;—the unseen *fate* fell.

"Six and three—I HAVE WON! And as Rivers literally shrieked these words, he sunk upon his chair, and hurled the dice-box wildly on the table.

A painful period of silence of some minutes duration followed, during which the two friends sat like statues, neither even so much as throwing a glance upon the other. It might seem as though both were inly endeavouring to resolve the selfsame question—"Are we any the more *friends* now than we were before? or than we should have been without all this?

At length Savidge mechanically rose to recommence the play, and decide the next question—Which of the two should become entire possessor of that property?

Had we not better forego it just at present? mildly suggested Rivers.

"What! and your own proposition! I suppose you are satisfied now, and want to remain where you are. No, no, my friend; fair play is a jewel, as they say in the Old Country."

As either the good or the evil spirit of chance—I cannot tell which—would have it, Savidge threw five, and Rivers two.

"Quits!" exclaimed the former, as his countenance brightened up; "you have the lady, and I the land. But I say, Rivers, what if she should refuse you after all, because you have nothing left! My turn will come again after that, according to agreement; and then, my boy, you know I may succeed with the lady as well as the location, and live to call them both my own!"

The natural jealousy of the young lover made him redden deeply on hearing these speculative suggestions, although he replied with a forced assumption of confidence, in which he really did not feel sufficiently warranted

"I have too much faith in woman to believe that for a moment possible"

"Faith can believe in miracles," responded Savidge; "but it often gets pretty considerably deceived."

Here the conversation ended.

But it is perhaps time we ascertained who was

THE LADY.

concerning whom these events had taken place.

Some two or three miles lower down the River Guadaloupe, and upon the opposite side of the river, stood a house of considerablo size, formerly the residence of Nicholas Damar,—a descendant of one of the ancient Spanish families who settled in the Mexican territory before th t country's independance of Old Spain was achieved But at the time of which this story treats, Lamar had been several years dead; and, save in the hearts of his widow and her daughter Isabella, "the beautiful creole," as she was commonly termed, nothing remained to mark that he had ever been, except a rude tomb of wood erected in his own garden, where, according to the custom of the frontier settlers, his body had been buried. Numerous China trees, the mournful boughs of which hang down like those of our weeping willows, were planted around that sacred though unconsecrated spot; and near the head of the tomb stood a rustic seat composed of crockes roots and branches, upon which the widow and daughter of the buried husband and father spent many of the sultry idle hours of noon, though more of those silent holy ones which bid the day's to the departing sun, or accompany in her nightly course of glory that magnificent moon whose face in such a climate seldom wears even the slightest veil of cloud.

This spot was commonly known under the name of "The Ferry;" Lamar having, during his lifetime, established and maintained there a boat of passage for the convenience of such travellers as had occasion to cross the river. Indeed, it was during a journey into the western prairies together, that our two friends had called at the Ferry, seen the handsome Spanish creole, and conceived an affection for her at the same time.

From the use of the term "creole," it must not be supposed that Isabella was of mixed blood. The word is truly and properly applied only to the descendants of foreigners born in the country.

After this first interview, neither Rivers nor Savidge were very unfrequent visitors at the Ferry. Either business or something else—chance, perhaps—led one or the other much more frequently across the Guadouloupe than heretofore; and singular enough, those occasions always happened to each when alone Madame Lamar early suspected the motive of these visits, although up to the very day on which the strange scene between the friends above described took place, not a sentence which could have been construed into an open expression of attachment to her daughter had ever been uttered by either. But love soon knows its own without a name; and pretty Isabella felt far wiser in the matter than her mother. To her it seemed that she heard the unspoken, saw the invisible, and that the dreams of the heart are the sternest realities of life.

That same evening, Mr Rivers rode down to the Ferry, and spent several hours under that roof which he loved far better than the one which yesterday he could; as it were, call his own, but was now his own no longer. Still he said nothing concerning the change that had taken place; he thought and cared nothing about it The world was before him yet, and the best the world contained might now become his own.

Months passed by, and he was the accepted lover of the handsome creole. But though his friend Savidge so far strictly observed his pledge of honour, that he had never even crossed the river since that decisive day, it was no difficult matter for Mr. Rivers to perceive that his heart was ill at ease, and that disappointment was making him an altered man. He grew morose, jealous, solitary, and silent. was evident that he had really cherished the idea formerly expressed by him—that Miss Lamar might reject the attentions of his friend and thus leave the field again open to himself—until circumstances daily and more strongly proved its complete and most unquestionable fallacy. The truth had fallen upon him like a weight—strange thoughts flitted across his brain which he dared not harbour for an instant, but which came again and again in a thousand different guises, though all bearing upon the same remote and undefined point upon the mental horizen! For the first time in his life, the question arose with him, what is this talked-of *honour*, after all? Is it a law of man's own conscience, or a mere arbitrary fiction of the brain, set up by one class of men the better to impose upon another? At first he shrank from these and similar considerations and his own lingering consciousness, of right recoiled upon himself with double stings But time and familiarity softened down their features of greatest horror, and the demon of deception obtained a firm footing in his soul.

To see as much of all this as might be seen from outward signs, was also, on the part of young Rivers, to determine promptly to get out of the way of either open collision or secret danger. True, he knew his friend; but he knew also the half wild nature of a frontiersman's character; and, more than either, he was no stranger to the depths of human passion, or to the extremes of virtue or of vice to which it often leads. Nothing, perhaps, could have convinced him more strongly of the immediate necessity of adopting some decisive and final step in the matter, than a slight incident which occurred to him one morning when he went out alone for a few hours' shooting on the prairie. As luck would have it, he sounded the barrel of his piece with the ramrod before discharging it although he had loaded it himself only the night before. It was at least *trebly* charged! No eye saw him there, but that of Him who watches in the desert as well as the crowded city, or the features of as brave a man as ever trod the earth might have been seen to quiver and turn pale with momentary horror. Who had done this? His heart leaped as it almost unconsciously gave back the fearful answer—"It is my friend!"

Nevertheless, he pursued his sport, and returned home as usual, without noticing the circumstance to any one.

"Have you killed anything this morning?" inquired Savidge, as the two sat down to breakfast.

"*I might have done*," replied Rivers, "had I not missed the *first* shot."

"It will happen so sometimes," ejaculated the other, as though half out of breath, and at the same moment turning white as ashes. Rivers marked this, but made no further observation.

That day he spent at the Ferry. On the way thither, he firmly resolved no longer to keep Isabella in ignorance (as he has hitherto done) of the events which had led to Mr. Savidge's continued and unusual absence, to his own more frequent visits, and of the imperative duty, now as he believed pressing upon him, to to demand her final decision with respect to himself. But when he arrived, he found the young lady so light hearted, so happy, so unsuspicious of any coming anxiety—such a living joy, as it were, within herself, that he could not do otherwise than procrastinate from hour to hour, until he verily began to feel the possibility of returning without having achieved the most important part of his errand.

Evening came at length, and the tale was yet untold. The two lovers walked out into the garden, and when the flowers and fruits and leaves could be no longer seen, sat down upon the rustic seat beneath the China trees.

"Isabel!", said Rivers mournfully, "I have something serious to say to you before we part to night."

"Do so then, sir," replied she; "and remember that we are upon solemn ground."

Her gentle hand was extended towards the rude tomb of her father, which stood like a tangible mass of darkness beside them.

"I must very soon quit this country. I am going back to my native place," continued he.

"Indeed, sir! This must be a new thought, as you have never mentioned it before."

"Not very, Isabel; but I have striven to make and keep you happy until it is no longer possible; the truth must come at last"

"Do not regard me," answered she hesitatingly. "I have been too happy of late, considering that my mother is alone, and my father buried. It is fitting that we should be awakened from our dreams sometimes"

Rivers could easily tell, from the failing voice and the downcast features, that by those few words he had called into life the worm of bitterness and sorrow at a heart which only one short hour ago, looked upon the world as a place of peace, and linked the days of life into one bright chain of happiness, whose termination was only in the adamant of the tomb.