

## Literature, &amp;c.

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THE GRAY BEARD'S WAIL:  
OR, MANUSCRIPTS OF THE DESOLATED.

By M. Hardin Andrews.

Truly mine has been an eventful existence! I am old; very old now. This poor, aching head is hoary with the frosts of many rude winters. My eyes see dimly, for they swim in the tears of bitterest sorrow. My frame is weak, and my palsied limbs sink beneath the burden of this attenuated body. Yes, yes! the life-streams already freeze in these shrunken veins, and soon will the ice of death choke up the vital currents forever.

Well, well! 'Tis fitting that life's wild dream were over. I have played my part—great heaven! thou knowest *chival well*—in the fearful drama of human instability. Soon the curtain of time will descend, and all will be eternally forgotten. Forgotten? Ah, no! Oblivion may not cover up my deeds, and history will carry down my name to generations yet unborn! My name can never die!

I am descended of proud Anglo-Saxon blood. My ancestors were among the earliest colonists of Great Britain to the new world. My father was opulent and influential. His plantations were unbounded, his mansions princely, and he provided with every luxury which wealth could procure. His countrymen, too, thought him wise and good, and heaped on him multiplied honors and distinctions.

At the age of three years I was an orphan, and a good and venerable uncle then became the guardian of my tender years. He promised my father much in regard to my well-being and really strove to do all and more than he had promised. Poor man! His heart overflowed with the wise of genuine benevolence, but he was too gentle to govern well. He was blinded to my foibles—they gradually became grievous faults, and speedily eventuated in cruelty and crime! He would have led me over the flower-strewn fields of life, but I was headstrong and reckless, and sought out a path of mine own amid the wild brambles, and by the slippery steps where basked the serpents and their brood.

Before ten summers' suns had embrowned my cheeks and darkened my flowing locks, I deserted the peaceful asylum of my guardian relative, and went forth and commingled with the rude and daring of my kind, far away on the ocean wave. Oh, I was in my glory then. I loved the deep, dark waters, and rejoiced when the storm-god scattered around his icy diamonds; when he spoke in hoarse thunder; when he wreathed the sky in flames; when he whistled clear, shrill music amid the shrouds of our hoary bark.

But my spirit was a restless one, and soon the excitement and scenes of ocean palled upon my senses, and afforded no pleasure. Old Neptune could no longer supply diversion to my ardent fancy, and the element-eries could but dance and sing in the ballet and opera of eternal ages. I wanted something new. Novelty was the food upon which my spirit feasted. I was miserable without it. Change, change, I would have. Hence my imagination returned once more to the green fields and purling streams, and every refreshing association of mother earth: I could not be satisfied without their enjoyment.

At length the voyage was consummated. We returned to the great mart, full freighted with the costly and beautiful fabrics of a people whose home was toward the rising sun. Our homely craft finally rested upon the clear waters of the wide-spread bay, seemingly as a thing of bosh, or as the gentle eyegel, when there was a shout to disturb the tranquillity of her bosom. My aged uncle hastened on board to welcome and back the truant boy, nor did he chide my waywardness. He was too glad to greet me, and forgot every anguish I had caused him, when I consented once again to return to his abode and share his hospitality and abiding affection.

Oh, the wretchedness of an unstable disposition! It was not long before I repented having quitted the whilom dull ocean for the no less irksome monotony of a country life. A feeling of sadness came over my soul, mysterious and unaccountable. My relatives strove by every means to dispel my despondency—in vain. I was wretched and unhappy still. They caressed me—indulged me—made a fool of me! I had no wish ungratified—and it seemed for that very reason my spirit became the more vexed. My soul fluttered my bosom, like the imprisoned bird which disdained narrow limits and longed to wing its way into the free air and circumscribe all etherial space. My temperament was that of the mettled steed galloping to madness by the bit and spur. The blood coursed burning hot through my veins and fired my brain to frenzy with the impetuosity of its circulation.

Ere long, however, this fever was subdued. Passions had spent its force and there was a reaction of the mental and corporeal functions. I now roamed the green woods, clambered the hill sides and descended into the lonesome valleys. Then I hunted in the wild glen, or angled in the trout stream, or pulled the rapid gear through the broader waters. And yet again, in my calmer moods, I sought the luscious berry, the brown nut, or the delicate wild fruit, as caprice directed my erratic wanderings.

Even this pleasing day-dream did not last. I awoke to a new world of gratification—with

\* A person acquainted with American history, will have no difficulty in detecting the character alluded to.

new impulses, new motives and new resolves. The boy verged to the borders of manhood. He became ambitious to scale the Parnassian mount—to rove the amaranthine fields and explore the wells of living truth. I was no longer the wild—then the dreaming boy—but the sedate and attentive student. I entered college—sought the prizes—easily won them. Others had the advantage of me in the academic race—in the *stert*, I mean—but they lacked energy, and fire, and soul, and ambition. Study was a drudgery with them. Not so with me. I had perseverance, quick perception, and devoured literary food with keen avidity. It was homely at first—then savory, and finally delicious to the intellectual palate. It was no marvel, then, that I thwarted my competitors and came forth victor. Yet I was called a rare genius! What is *genius*? 'Tis a term to catch fools! The phrase may import something—but to me the word was cabalistic beyond my divination. I say I came forth the victor in the academic race. The professors predicted great things in my destiny. I was still a mere boy. Sixteen summers had not taken the primordial down from my face; and these sages presumed to read my path of life. Simple men! What knew they of the decrees of fate? Can man circumvent his stars and rough-hew his way to immortality without their glimmering light? Jupiter and Mars, Mercury and Venus, heralded by the blazing meteors, ruled my nativity; and as they have since rushed through the heavens, so have I been whirled round in the wild waltz of this terrestrial existence!

Again there was a revolution in my wheel of fortune. The cry of war was heard thro' the land, and the shrill clarion and rolling drum called the inhabitants to arms! I rushed forth from the academic haunts to the fields of blood and fame! I enlisted under the banner of the great General—that chivalric leader from the far famed "Emerald Isle"—and soon was promoted to a high rank by his side. Our army was small in number but invincible in daring. We swept through the trackless desert and reached the walls of the enemy's city. The conflict was terrible. Blood flowed like water. Our leader was cut down in the thick fight, and dismay followed the disaster.

Those who were spared of our gallant little band returned to their homes and were disbanded. I had become attached to the soldier's life. The solemn tramp of armed men—the neighing of the war horse—the terrible roar of artillery, and the spirit-stirring music of the drum and bugle, with the clash of arms and the black smoke of deadly battle—oh, these thrilled on every nerve, electrified the soul, and kindled the fires of sublimest patriotism. I loved my country more than life, and resolved to spill the rich crimson of my veins were it necessary, in defence of my native land from foreign and murderous oppression!

I entered the family of him whose home was by the broad waters of the Potomac—even in the tent of the mighty chieftain, whom men loved to reverence as the "wisest and best." That good man, hugged a viper to his bosom! It would have have struck the eye-nerved fang to the heart that warmed it to glorious vitality. His bosom was shielded by the breast plate of imperishable virtues. The poison of calumny produced no mischief. No mortal death could result to him! I was the heartless ingrate—likewise the fool!

For a time I was galled by my banishment from the presence of the great hero; but at length I went forth and sought the home of the Wolf Hunter of the north. He received me warmly, with true nobleness of soul. I told him my story of fabricated wrongs. He listened attentively, but regarded with caution my burning words of slander! He was a man of sterling integrity, of truth and justice. He despised the traitor, and abhorred the liar! I was both! I could not long remain beneath the veteran's roof. Truth and falsehood—honor and dishonor have no abiding fellowship. I went forth in shame.

From the time I quitted college I ever worshipped in the temples of Bacchus and Priapus. I gave myself up freely to lust and wine. I roamed the gardens of innocence and purity, and rudely seized the flowers of virtue to cast them down despoiled at my feet! Oh, oh! have I returned to my home from a night of debauch, with soul maddened by the fires of infernal passion—with brain distempered by the strong red juice of perdition? Body and soul were rapidly consuming before the fierce flame of unholy desire, yet I returned again and again to those haunts of moral desolation. I gloried in my profligacies! What to me was the world's censure? What cared I for the scorn of good and Christian men? Heaven gave me fine limbs, pleasing looks, great wealth, and many accomplishments. Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, was highly gifted. He fell! So did I!

Again there came a change upon my being. I dreamed a sweet dream of bliss. In my wild wanderings through the gay parterre of female loveliness, I found a blossom which dazzled my fancy and gave forth the purest fragrance. It flourished high beyond my reach. I sought to pluck it, but could not! It instinctively shrank back from the spoiler's pollution, and immaculate chastity shielded it from dishonor! But I was not to be baffled. At length I assumed the garb of gray-beard sanctity—came forth again to the Eden of love to tempt and destroy—but returned with purposes changed—for purity and honor triumphed over the baser attributes of my breast. I had secured the prize of my heart!

That beautiful woman became my wife! We were one in holiest, truthful affection. She was a divinity sent to reclaim my wandering feet back to the Elysian fields of joy and peace. I then I was blessed. But brief was that hour of bliss. Two annual suns had only revolved since our nuptials, when Heaven sent

a swift messenger to bring back that seraph to those bright "mansions eternal on high." Oh, that was a bitter bereavement! I was stricken to the earth, and long mourned and sorrowed. Nor was I utterly alone! God took the mother and left the child! Beautiful, fair thing, in her I had hope. She was the miniature of the loved original, and I wore her nearest, my widowed heart. I resolved to rear that infant daughter as fond parent never reared a lovely child before. The mother was the queen that ruled the empire of my heart; the daughter was the princess to succeed to the throne! I endowed the little cherub with a multitude of riches and provided liberally for her future care and education.

I betook to the law. I explored the arcana of profound wisdom and soon became familiar with all the principles of the abstruse science. My mind was not sufficiently analytical to take in every subtlety, but my imagination supplied all lack of reasoning power; and cunning—fluency of speech and tact, soon opened the way to high promise among my competitors of the bar and bench. I acquired distinction rapidly. Clients crowded around me, and business multiplied exceedingly upon my hands. I was generally successful at the courts. The connexion of my name as advocate to any cause was ever regarded as a guarantee of triumph to the party by whom I was retained. At length, however, my popularity was viewed with envy, and many of my rivals in the profession hated me for my fame. They lost influence while I steadily gained in popular favor!

But with all my success and honor I was unsatisfied! I longed for other triumphs—for additional renown. I became ambitious of political preferment, and entered the arena of bitter party strife. The times were propitious to my purpose. Two great factions convulsed the country. The one advocated a strong government, which should be administered by a privileged few. The other a government based on the suffrages of the people, with its functionaries obedient to the popular sovereignty. The respective parties were nicely balanced, and it was difficult to determine the preponderant feeling. The Federalists were powerful, but the Republicans were determined. The former hated and feared the people, and disputed their ability to govern themselves under a democracy. They sneered at them—called them "Rabble," "Jacobins," and thought of the bloody days of Paris! The Republicans had felt the lash of the British king. They vowed never again to be scourged like dogs! They shouted "Down with kings and exclusive rule! Long life to Republican democracy!"

Oh, these were thrilling times! It warmed the life blood and fanned the fires of patriotism. I saw the road to distinction before me. I entered the broad way. I had great gift of speech. I harangued the people, and by burning eloquence increased the fervor of their shouts of liberty! I scattered around my wealth—declaimed with the bitterest tongue, and won over converts after convert to the cause of equal freedom. I was denounced as a reckless demagogue by the opposition. They dreaded me as the Robespierre of the New World, while by my friends I was ranked as a Mirabeau in oratory, and second only to the "Apostle of Liberty" himself in patriotic sentiment.

The Republicans triumphed and rejoiced in their signal success. Now I had office and emolument, yet I had not reached the goal of my ambition. I ascended rapidly the ladder of fame, and reached the topmost round, save one! God! it was a dizzy elevation! I could not look below. The bauble of empire was within my grasp. It shone glitteringly above my head. I reached forward to possess it. My brain became bewildered—the round of the latter turned beneath my feet; they slipped from their position; I felt like the fiend of darkness to the vile earth beneath! "Oh, my countrymen what a fall was there!"

My spirit was still unsubdued. I rose from the dust—maddened but not subdued. I resolved again to secure what I had lost, and was determined to make any sacrifice to gratify my unholy passion and ambition. There was one who had repeatedly thwarted my purposes—at least, I fancied he had. He was a great statesman—a high-souled, honorable man! He had crossed my path at the bar of the courts, and circumscribed me in my political designs. I made provocation for a quarrel with him. He was ready to explain, but was no politician. I was determined on a meeting, and waved all explanation. We met. He fell! I sent his soul uncalled to the bar of the dread Eternal!

My thirst for blood was appeased, but the laws were outraged and my country sorely wronged. I cared not for that. I despised all laws, and defied man and Heaven. I was proclaimed the outlaw and murderer. The authorities set a price on my head, and had I been taken my body would have made food for the vultures on the scaffold. I fled from the haunts of men, and for many weary months shut myself out from the world. I was a coward and a fiend. Blood was on my soul and remorse conjured up continually the phantom of my guilt. Yet soon that fearful tragedy was forgotten. No—not forgotten! Men ceased not to remember it, but the Argos of the laws slept.

But my eventful destiny was yet unfinished. My dream of ambition was not over! There came new visions of conquest and fame, of regal honors, and triumphs, and splendours! Far away, in the clime of the burning sun, there was a magnificent empire which might be possessed by the strong arm of daring and ambition. It was the land of silver and gold and glittering jewels. It was the land where the fig-tree flourished, and where the orange blossoms sweetened the breath of the zephyrs.

The city was great and the streets crowded with palaces and temples, adorned with statues and paintings of costly device, and execution. The people were luxuriated and enfeebled by the excess of their pleasures. They fancied themselves secure in their riches, and did not dream of the invader coming with burning sword to destroy their fair land. Such was my purpose. I longed to sit upon the throne of the Montezumas, and to wield the sceptre of an empire such as the world never saw for grandeur and glory of power! I breathed the grand scheme of conquest to a select few and speedily gathered to my side a band of choice spirits, who were eager at once to enter upon an expedition which was to prove the El Dorado of our hopes. The rendezvous was appointed; it was on the borders of the fair land we sought to conquer and possess. Thither we were to repair with all secrecy and dispatch. Each individual took the oath of confederation—each pursued his own route for the ultimate destination, the better to keep our design concealed.

I travelled in disguise and alone. I went the circuitous way of the great valley—by the route of the fresh waters. I embarked on that bright clear river whose springs rise in the mountains, and which rolls gracefully onward to kiss the Father of Waters! Far away my little craft was at length anchored by the peaceful shores of an earthly paradise. It was at an island in the midst of the beautiful stream that I was induced to sojourn and refresh my spirits and physical frame. It was the green spot in the desert of the wearied traveler. It was the abode of beauty and hospitality. There luxury reigned, and nature was profuse of her bounties. In that secluded sylvan retreat I found a friend—a warm-hearted, generous, devoted friend. I imparted to him the secret of my scheme of empire; he caught at it with enthusiasm. His whole soul and great wealth were placed at my disposal. Unsuspecting man! He invited me to sojourn under his roof till he could arrange his affairs and accompany me in my career of anticipated glory. I was easily persuaded! There was one—

She was like  
Written or told—exceeding beautiful!  
That fair spot was another Eden! It had its Eve—and there was the serpent. I had my plans craftily—slowly and surely; I played the flatterer. My voice was soft and musical. My words were like sweet drops of honey—and cunning craft covered up the blackness of my soul. The prize fell in my grasp, I stole the jewel of honor; shame and desolation followed.

I was a monster in sin. There had been greater. Nero fiddled while the city burned. Where struck the hoof of Attila's steed no spear of grass ever grew. Both desolated the earth. I was but an humble imitator of them, and went on to the world to pollute and destroy.

The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. I was suddenly checked in my mad career of desolation. The throne of the still blazed affair off, yet I was not the conqueror and ruler of that proud realm which wild ambition spread out to my enraptured vision.

Among there came an indistinct murmur on the breeze. It soon increased to audible sound. Treason was repeated on every hand. My name was coupled with that ominous word. Men knew not my purpose—but they suspected my motives. They thought I wished to play the usurper. They knew my spirit was daring and reaching. They believed me capable of "stratagem—treason—spoils." They pursued. I was taken—bound in chains, and dragged to the vile dungeon, to be tried as a traitor. My name became a by-word of scorn in the land; my crimes—great as they were—were exaggerated to greater enormity. I was the abhorred of my race. There was none to say "Be of good cheer." I was alone in that darksome dungeon; the bonds of friendship were broken—the ties of consanguinity were neglected. No! There was one that did not forsake the stricken wretch in that hour of fear and doubt. That fair being upon whom I had lavished my treasure and love many years before, did not forget her poor heart-broken father! She came on the wings of abiding affection to pour in the balm of consolation upon the wounded spirit. She supplied the sweet cordial of hope that refreshed my soul. Oh, she was indeed an angel of peace, and I found joy and comfort in her pure truthful devotion. She was my only child. Her sweet voice and bright countenance brought back the memory of that sainted woman—her mother—my wife!

The hour of trial arrived. I was arraigned at the bar of my country to answer for a charge of crime which would result in life or death, as found innocent or guilty. The proofs were produced; they were plausible but unsubstantially grounded. The lion was enveloped in a net as flimsy as a spider's web! I directed my counsel how to proceed. His burning eloquence won the admiration of my enemies, and his sober reasoning brought conviction of innocence to the minds of a sage and intelligent jury. I was acquitted and went forth unfettered—free! The stain of treason was wiped from my brow—yet many would not yield their prejudiced opinions of my guilt!

I was without the confidence of my countrymen, and subject to scorn and contempt, because of the foul associations connected with my name. I thought to retrieve myself from shame in a land of strangers; I went abroad over the ocean's waste. I fancied that an exile might be happy far away from the scenes of his birthplace. I was mistaken! Conscience may not be quieted! Memory will bring up from the vault of time the frightful ghosts of the past! The spectres that haunted me in my wanderings had pollution on their virgin skirts—the stain