Written for the Loyalist.

THE PREDESTINED;

A TALE OF BRENTOR.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER IV.

"What is title? what is treasure?
What is reputation's care?
If we lead a life of pleasure,
'Tis no matter *how or where*."—BURNS.

"You see this scar in the temple, sir? Well that is all the injury I received from the pistol shot—besides being stunned—for the bullet struck me in a slanting direction, and glanced off. How long I lay in a state of unconsciousness I know not, but it must have been at least two or three hours, for the rain was over, and the first thing I saw, as I laid on my back, were the stars shining bright in the heavens. I felt extremely cold, and no wonder, for I lay in a rivulet of water, and my clothes were perfectly drenched through. After some ineffectual efforts to rise I got up, when I found that with the exception of being bruised and benumbed, I had sustained no serious injury, although my face was covered with clotted gore from my wound. I approached the edge of the precipice, where I found the abutment of a bridge which had formerly stood there, and gazing over saw my poor steed a lifeless mass, at the depth of a hundred feet below. "And the villains cheered when they supposed this to have been *my* fate!" was the first burning thought which arose to my brain, "and thus to be the dupe of that ci-devant factory girl, who first informed me of the *danger*, then led me here into the clutches of the infernal gang to be robbed and murdered!—curses on my stupidity for following her advice."

I now set out for the rock under whose shelter I had left my niece and daughter, and after following the path until I emerged from among the rocks I found no difficulty in finding it, for the light was now sufficient to distinguish objects at a considerable distance, and this rock was remarkable for its great height, standing as it did at a distance from any other of the same magnitude. I set forth towards it with eager steps, feeling deeply solicitous for the girls, whose fears I had no doubt had been aroused by my long absence. I turned the angle of the rock with a light heart, but they were gone! I searched for them, but in vain; I would have called, but feared my voice would bring to my side the villains from whom I had once so miraculously escaped. While musing anxiously on the subject the sounds of mirth once more came floating on the air, and the idea struck me, "where can they have been carried"—for I could not imagine they would leave their shelter voluntarily during my absence—"but to the robber's den!" I immediately set out in the direction from which the sounds proceeded, but was some time before I found a spot where I could descend in safety, and the cliff was so precipitous that I might have sought long enough without success, did I not at last find a rope fastened to one of the projecting angles of a rock, which had evidently been used for the purpose of communication with the valley below. Without a moment's reflection I laid hold of it and began to descend. Once or twice I stopped and looked down to see how much further I had to go, and was again proceeding at my leisure, conscious that I must be near terra firma, when, exactly as my feet touched the ground, I found myself unexpectedly in the grasp of a strong athletic person, who, standing behind my back and clasping me around the waist, held me immoveable.

"Now," thought I, "I have ventured into the precincts of the robber's territory, and this no doubt is an outpost—I have descended into their jaws, and am caught nicely." My soliloquy was brought to a close by a clear musical voice—rather that of a boy than what might have been expected from a brigand sentinel—exclaiming, "That's right! Hold the villain fast until I get a glimpse at his features, and then—by Heaven! if I have reason to think he's a spy this night shall witness the last of his amusements!"

As he spoke he turned the light of a lantern upon me, and immediately started back, saying, "God be praised—let him go girl—it is Mr. Hicks!"

"Tresilian! and *here?*—Good God, is it possible?" Then turning abruptly about—for the word "girl" sounded strange when applied to the possessor of such a pair of stalwart arms as lately squeezed my waist—I beheld the prophetess of the factory!

"Poor Lucy," I muttered, "how wilt thou bear this news?"

"For what do you take us?" enquired Tresilian quickly, "for highwaymen, robbers and murderers!"

"Thou hast bravely guessed! Let the adventures of this night—two helpless girls stolen from their place of shelter—let this wound—let yonder carcase of my horse reply!"

Tresilian was about to speak, but Miriam interrupted him, saying, "it is useless to endeavour to convince him, sir,—that can only be done when our work is finished—at present we must bear the stigma as patiently as possible."

"Yes! vile impostor, it would be useless indeed to say that a knowledge of the persons of travellers sureptitiously obtained—and now I can easily imagine from what source," and I glanced at Tresilian—"and made use of to iveigle them into a snare—a prophetical character assumed, and a *warning* given with a view to the same ends—then to waylay and attempt to murder them!—it were useless indeed to frame excuse for conduct like this."

"I gave you warning, it is true, and that it was *timely* you would have found to your cost had you neglected it and taken the other road. I put you *in* your road sir, nor did I conjecture that you would have left it."

"Yes, miscreant, thou didst endeavour to put me *in the road*—to destruction!—the *road* my horse took; and thou didst cheer loudly when thou didst suppose I had taken that road."

"You see sir, it is in vain!" said Miriam, addressing herself to Tresilian in a sorrowful tone, with lips tremulous with what I supposed to be well-feigned hypocrisy.

They stood silent a few moments, when Tresilian accosted me with, "will you have the goodness, sir, to inform me what or whom you sought when you thought proper to take this novel method of reaching the valley? By Heaven he cut a queer figure, dangling in the air like a scarecrow!"

"Of course I shall answer your question, most noble knight," said I with a sneer, "for you *command* here; I descended by the only means I could discover, to seek in the robber's den some intelligence of my neice and daughter. Besides, I must confess I had some curiosity to see how men could enjoy themselves in their midnight revels after having—as they supposed—committed murder; but oh, Tresilian! believe me, I did not expect to find you among them!"

"Yonder house from which the sounds of revelry arises is no place for you. Think you can you ascend by this cord as easily as you descended? No! then must we cross the valley, though at some risk."

"Go on, sir, I follow; *you* command here."

My guided proceeded to cross the valley at a stealthy pace, I followed, and Miriam brought up the rear; near the centre we came to a small stream, which we crossed by a single plank thrown across. On reaching the cliff at the other side I found it of much the same character as that I had descended, but a winding and difficult path, with which my guide seemed perfectly familiar, led us, though with considerable toil, to the top. We were then about an hundred rods from the robber's den, the sparks emitted from the chimney of which we could now plainly discern, and the sounds of revelry rose loud and clear—breaking the silence of the night. Although our route lay in the direction of the hut we took a circle further to the left, in order, as I conjectured, to avoid it. After about ten minutes walk we came to a road. Here my conductors stopped, and Tresilian seizing me by the hand said, "Now Mr. Hicks you are on the road from which you must have strayed last night—follow it, and if you do not mind walking a few miles, it will lead you to Moreton, and—if you find Lucy there, tell her—nay—tell her nothing—but do not let her know you saw me here." Without giving me time to reply he sprung across the ditch, followed by Miriam, and I found myself alone.

After having been left in this manner, I communed with myself whether I had better proceed or return. Prudence said "onward," but curiosity said "no, do not proceed until you have ascertained something more about the lawless spirits near you." You may blame me, but curiosity's argument seemed to be the strongest, and I went back. I found the winding path by which we had ascended, without difficulty, and in a few minutes more I was in the valley, crawling on my hands and knees towards the turf-tavern. I proceeded with caution, but it was unnecessary, for so secure did they consider themselves in their retreat, that not a sentry guarded the approach. When I reached the house I found it to consist of a long low building, the walls of which were built of turf, and the interior divided into three or four apartments, while the thatched roof was so low that I could touch the eaves. There seemed to be but one window in each apartment, and but two of them were lighted up. I should have mentioned that the house seemed to have been built at different periods, and the front, instead of one straight wall extending from end to end, contained three or four projecting angles. At first I crept to the door, and peeping through the key-hole, saw a slaternly-looking girl busily engaged at a table flaying and dissecting a couple of hares, evidently intended for a stew. From the narrowness of the aperture this was all I could see, but accidentally leaning my hand against the door it yielded to the touch and stood slightly ajar, but wide enough open to allow me to take a full view of the apartment. There stood the girl dissecting the hares and placing the pieces in a pot. The table before her was covered with culinary utensils, and the refuse of the animals she was preparing for the feast. Just before her on the wall hung the skin of a buck, evidently but lately stripped off, while other parts were graced by pairs of geese, ducks, partridge, pheasants, woodcocks, &c., and on the beams of the rude ceiling hung two or three fowling pieces, bright and highly burnished, showing that they were not kept merely for ornament, but for frequent use. Over a huge turf fire hung several vessels of an enormous size, boiling and seething, while the scent from the savoury viands filled the air, and almost tempted me to brave the danger and enter, in hopes to share the dainties preparing. On one side of the hearth lay two pointers and a beautiful greyhound, but, fortunately perhaps for me, they happened to be jaded with a night's work and were all fast asleep. A woman sat with her back towards me in front of the fire, who appeared to be dozing. She would turn occasionally and glance on the girl, and then rest her head on her hands with her elbows on her knees. At last she roused herself up and turning to the girl said, "Will'ee not haste, you lazy slut? there hath her been a good half an hour with them little pussy's, and not got 'em on the fire yet!" As she said this I caught a view of her profile—it was Mother Grimp!

This then was the turf-tavern of which the peasant spoke, and Mother Grimp had got here before me,—not a very wonderful occurrence neither, seeing that I had been three or four hours on the road. While I stood gazing on this scene, which I did with intense interest, the noise from the inner room was continued, often rising into such a din as became really deafening. Ribald jests, oaths, blasphemies, toasts, swaggering, and fag ends of songs being all mingled together. But my attention was soon withdrawn from them by a man entering the room evidently in a state of intoxication; he staggered across the floor towards Mother Grimp, who still sat dozing in her chair. As the light fell upon his countenance I got a full view of his face, and a more hideous looking monster I never beheld. He was short, thick-set, bony and muscular, round shouldered, with long bony arms, and a tremendous fist dangling on his knee; his head was grizzled and partly bald, his face covered with red and purple blossoms, the effect of copious libations to the jolly God Bacchus; his eye—for he had but one—sparkled like a carbuncle. The clothing of this strange being was as uncouth as his person: a coarse flannel shirt, looking as though it had never been washed, open at the collar—with no neckerchief—displaying a breast of black shaggy hair,—a fustian hunting-jacket of immense dimensions, with pockets large enough apparently to contain a dozen pheasents with ease; his breeches were probably of the same material, but of this I could not be certain, for they were literally covered with grease. The knees of his breeches were unbottoned, and his sheep's-black stockings, not being supported with garters, hung in rolls upon his thick un-polished half-boots, leaving the upper part of his bony legs with no other covering than that which nature had given them, namely, a thick coat of hair, the counterpart of that on his breast. As he staggered along in a kind of drunken rage he muttered, "drunk again—hiccup—as I'm alive! Dammed but I'll——" he left the sentence unfinished, and lifting his huge fist as though it were a blacksmith's sledge he struck at Mother Grimp a blow which might have felled an ox, but as it descended he staggered, and the blow intended for her head came in a slanting direction on the chair, but with such force as to topple it over, the landlady and all together. The girl had fled at his approach, and ascended the ladder to the loft; it appeared as though he had not seen her, for he exclaimed:—

"Lie thou there, drunken trollop! dost think I work hard and venture my loife every day to harbour thou sleeping off thy—hiccup—thy—hic—thy drunkenness, while all my—hiccup—all my best customers be a-waiting vor their suppers! Why, here be the Captain, muttering and swearing in French this half an hour, and more too, with his "sacree's" and his "mousheers," and be d——d to him, as tho' we Hinglishmen be'nt as good as he is—a d——d frog-eating puppy!—bl—t me but I'd fix *him* only vor one thing—ha, ha, ha!—he's the *goose* that lays the golden egg every day!—an' there's master Tresilian too—he'll be here directly—he's a cock of another feather; he's the lad for a midnight "Stand and deliver!"—a run over to *Garnsay* for a cargo of *blue lightning*—or a fine *drive* of a moonlight night—he has a keen eye and steady hand I reckon—can shoot—damme—almost as well as mezelf!"

Here his soliloquy was interrupted, for Mother Grimp having recovered her senses—for she appeared to have been stunned a little at first by her fall—made at him with the spite of a fury. At first the contest was nearly equal, she having closed with him and with a woman's tact fastened her nails in his ugly face; the blood poured down his hairy breast, but rallying he freed one arm, and fetching a tremenduous swing struck her in the breast a blow which nearly doubled her, and she fell with a groan upon a bench which was fastened against the wall. She was now entirely at his mercy,—a feeling probably the wretch never felt—for he again drew his fist to strike her; in this, however, he was suddenly prevented, for a stalwart figure of a woman glided across the room, from some recess in which she had hitherto been concealed, and pronouncing the single word "coward!" felled him with one blow at her feet. Here I thought another conflict was about to take place; for the dogs—which had merely lifted their heads at the fight between Mother Grimp and her husband—for such I now conjectured him to be—and winked, as though it was a matter of no consequence, now arose and bristled up, uttering deep growls, and seemed in the act of springing upon the intruder. But a single though peculiar chirp produced a magical effect upon them, and each fawningly approaching seemed as anxious to receive her caresses as they were eager a moment before to fasten on her with their fangs. "Down, Rally—behave yourself Tartar!" she said, addressing the dogs, and at the same moment I caught a glimpse of her face it was Miriam! Driving the dogs from her she passed out of the door—almost touching me as I slunk back into the shade—and disappeared.

Having again taken up my position at the door from whence I had been driven by Miriam's egress. I perceived Boniface sitting on the floor rubbing his head. "By George" said he, "here's a precious go! knocked down and beaten, and kicked, and trodden to a mummy a'most, and in my own house too!"

"Thy house!" exclaimed his better half, who had recovered and resumed her seat by the fire. "Thy house, dost say? Who paid for the building of it I should like to know, and who furnished it with seats, and tables, and cooking things, and crockery, and every thing in it?"

"And what if thou dost, grumbler! Who ran the risk of his life to stock it with choice liquors—hiccup—as good as ever was tossed over tongue! But who was it beat me in this manner; answer me that?"

"Who was it!" said the beldam, who dexterously began to turn the affair to her own credit, "dost thou ask who it was when there is none but us two present? Ha, ha, ha! thou hadst ee'n-amost gotten the better of me, when I gave thee a kick, and a blow at the same time which knocked thee reeling, it did, zo another blow done the job. An' I'll do 't again, I will, if ever thou offer'st to lift thy hand to me again."

"Well, well dame; 'od rot it; but thou be'st too severe. Coom, coom now, let's shake hands and be good friends—thou be'st a pretty good wench arter all; but odds' life, I've gotten summat for to tell 'ee—hush—not now though—no, no,—not now."

"And dost thou think," said the wife, affecting an air of great importance, "that thou hast any thing to tell me which *others at my command* would not tell me whenever I ask them? Keep thy secret if thou likest; I shall know all before morning."

"Then I'll tell'ee, Dorothy—but draw nearer—coom and sit by my side—there, that'll do. I've found out at last what bro't that Frenchman, Mousheer Gawveau, into the band of good fellows; it was summat I promise'ee bezides smuggling and poaching, and eating and drinking; neither does he care a pin for the pickings we get off travellers on the Moors—he's too rich for that. Not that I'd be saying any thing against his cheating our revenue, plundering our gentry's preserves, or taking the purse