

Written for the Loyalist.

## THE PREDESTINED ; A TALE OF BRENTOR.

(Continued.)

## CHAPTER VI.

"And so have I a noble father lost ;  
A sister driven into desperate terms ;  
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,  
Stood challenger on mount of all the age  
For her perfections.—But my revenge will come."

O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth."

SHAKESPEARE.

The night on which the interview took place between Lucy and Tresilian, as related in the last chapter, a prisoner lay ruminating on his miserable pallet in a cold damp dungeon of Exeter Castle, an ancient fortress now occupied as the county gaol.—The prisoner had been but a few hours committed, but because he was charged with a heinous crime, and had attempted to escape on his way to "durance vile," he was strongly ironed. He wore greaves on his ancles, which were chained to either side of an iron bedstead, so as to prevent his getting out of bed ; he also wore a pair of hand-cuffs. "Curses on them !" said he, "for a pack of cowards, to allow the sharks to catch me in this way, and not interfere ! Why, if only half-a-dozen stout fellows had attacked the police on the road to-day they would all have fled, leaving me behind them ; but not one of them showed his face. There's Dick too, for whom I have done so much, to allow me to be brought here and chained like a dog, without striking a blow for me ! Curse them all, I say, and curse my own cupidity also, to hunt for the money—which I intended to appropriate to my own use—before making away with the body. And to be chained thus !—but softly—let me feel the size of these irons—ha ! fools, they know not my strength—thus I burst them !" and as he spoke he gave a twitch with his hands and snapped the chain as though it had been but pack-thread. He then commenced kicking furiously, and soon liberated himself from his chains.—He next tore the iron bedstead from its sockets where it was imbedded in the wall, and lifting a piece of it demolished two or three of the iron bars of the window at a blow. A click of a musket was heard, as the sentinel on the outside demanded, "Who's there ?" but nothing daunted, the hardened villain was about to spring out, when he was interrupted by the entrance of a turnkey, accompanied by a tall figure enveloped in the folds of a riding-cloak. The turnkey seized the prisoner, but he shook him off and lifted a fragment of the broken bedstead to strike him, when the voice of the stranger commanded him in stern tones to desist. He shrunk before the cool self-possession of the intruder like one accustomed to obey, and muttering some unintelligible jargon, suffered himself to be seized and removed to the black-hole. The visitor entered the cell with the prisoner—who you will have already guessed was Bill Jones—and suffered himself to be locked up ; and when the turnkey had retired the following conversation took place :—

"Well, devilskin ; so it was not enough for you to mislead my infancy with your hellish plots, and then to inveigle me in the meshes of this accursed crew, but you must come here to prevent my escape !"

"By my faith, Bill, but thou art a modest fellow ! Thou shalt regain thy liberty in proper season, I warrant thee, although thou wast more likely just now to have gotten a musket ball in thy carcase ; but when thou art free we'll make a canting parson of thee, thy hypocrisy would so well become thy calling. Ha, ha, ha ! but the idea of me misleading thy infancy—poor innocent !—is a rich one, when thou wast continually upbraiding me with cowardice, for not daring to perpetrate the villainies thy foul heart suggested."

"And thou wast a coward—thou knowest it—but what is the object of thy present visit, after allowing me to be brought here, when half-a-dozen of those under thy command might have liberated me—dost thou think it will be easier to effect my rescue now ?"

"Thy rescue ! no, we have no idea of it ; thou must stop here until the trial takes place, and—"

The sentence was left unfinished, for at the instant he made the avowal that the gang had no intention of liberating him, the prisoner sprung upon him like a tiger upon his prey, and fiercely struggling with each other they rolled upon the iron floor. At first Bill was underneath, but the other, although a tall athletic person, could not contend against his great strength, and was soon rolled under ; Bill then grasped him by the throat, exclaiming, "now, lieutenant, thou shalt die ! so if thou hast any thing to say do it quickly."

"Bill, Bill, what ails thee, to use thy old friend and companion in this manner ? Loosen thy grip and I will tell thee what will assuage thy wrath ; loosen I say, for thou art choking me—fool, if thou takest my life nothing can then save thee from the gallows."

"I care not for life, although it shall never be forfeited on the gallows—I have the means of destroying it in my own hands, aye, and will use it too rather than be shut up here four or five months."

"And what would become of the little factory girl, she with the sparkling eyes and sunny locks I mean ; would'st thou like to die and leave her behind ?"

"What matter ? she can never be mine while I lead this wild life ; but art thou not afraid to mention her, lest thou shouldst increase my rage ten fold ; I never think of her being lost to me but I feel ready to war with the whole human race ; aye, I could tear the flesh from my own bones."

"That is silly, and unmanly ; be enraged as much as thou wilt, but direct thy vengeance to a proper quarter. But thou art nothing better than a poltron if thou thinkest to die and leave Alice Bland to the undisputed possession of Joe Brown thy hated rival."

"There, get up ; thou hast saved thy own life at all events, and brought me back to the world again. I would rather live a thousand years in misery than suffer Brown to marry the sweet Alice ; but how am I to escape unless I break my prison ? if thou knowest the charge they have brought against me, thou must also know it is next to impossibility that I can escape."

"I know all—I know that Jim Brigley shot the steward, and that he was murdered a short time after by the girl Miriam—this Mother Eyres told me, but how thou wert caught I can scarcely conjecture, unless in thy double villainy thou dost endeavour to obtain possession of the purse, and thus appropriate to thine own use what belonged to our fraternity, seeing that the game was felled by one of our band."

"No, matter—I am taken, and here I am likely to remain, without the assistance of the brotherhood, amongst whom thou holdest the office of Lieutenant. Now tell me thy plan, for I know thou hast one."

"True, I have a plan, and one which will not only ensure thine own safety, but bring destruction on the heads of our enemies. Thou knowest that I also have a rival—a favoured one—but I would ruin myself in this life, and pledge my soul to perdition, rather than allow him to triumph over me. Thou knowest whom I mean. Now this is my plan : thou art innocent, and it is therefore right that thou should'st escape, at the same time a man should always take advantage of fortuitous circumstances to hasten the downfall of his enemies. Now as it is impossible thou canst escape without implicating some one, thou art better turn King's evidence and charge the murder upon my rival and his paramour, the girl Miriam ; thus thou wilt gratify me and avenge the death of poor Jim. I know thou wilt have no compunctions respecting the former, and as to the latter thou mayest reason this with thyself, that as Jim murdered the steward and she murdered Jim, ergo she is the murderess."

"I must confess Lieutenant there is an appearance of feasibility in thy plan, and nothing could give more delight than to punish that coxcomb ; and as to the girl, I have no tenderness for her, for she is intimate with Alice, and if I am not mistaken favours by her counsels the pretensions of Brown. However, I am not fully persuaded to adopt your plan, for as the whole case would rest upon my evidence I might hardly obtain credence with the jury."

"We will take care of that by a host of corroboratory evidence. I will arrange the details more fully, and visit thee again—the turnkey is bought over and we have nothing to fear in that quarter. I must leave thee now, so just promise to behave thyself and thou shall be placed in a better cell. Meantime offer in the morning to turn King's evidence, and without any hesitation swear the murder on the other two ; we will furnish thee with the plan to-morrow night."

The conversation then broke off, and after a few whispers the visitor took his leave. Early next morning the turnkey entered the black-hole and removed the prisoner to another cell—one of the best in the gaol—saying he did so in compliance with the wishes of his friends. Bill then intimated that if he could see a magistrate he had some disclosures to make ; accordingly, one was sent for, and the prisoner declaring himself to be innocent of the murder, although accessory after the fact, was allowed to give such evidence as would bring the murderer to justice. The nature of this evidence will transpire in the sequel, and may be guessed from the interview we have just described between the prisoner and an officer of the gang, but immediately after the deposition was taken, a party of armed police were seen leaving Exeter by the road which leads to Moretonhampstead and Tavistock. The success of the expedition will be described at the close of this chapter ; meantime I must take you with me once more to a scene we have visited before :—

It was night. The interior of the witch's cave at Brentor was lighted up by one solitary lamp suspended from the rock overhead, and filled with fish-oil of the coarsest and most nauseous quality, casting its flickering glare over the apartment, and filling the air with an intolerable stench. The curtain which I had drawn aside a few hours before was now removed, and the witch sat beside the corpse, upon whom she gazed, alternately laughing and crying. Now she would look upon the marble-like forehead wistfully, with more feeling than it could have been supposed one of her character would possess, then she would burst out into a fit of hysterical laughter, so wild and unearthly that one would suppose the sound came from a maniac's cell.

"And here am I alone with death ! Ha, ha ! what need I care for death ? I have seen him in a thousand shapes ; I have seen him come stealthily along, amusing his victim with false hopes—aye, even bestowing the rose of health on his cheek—until the hour was come. I have seen him come like a thief in the night, selecting the robust youth, or one in the full vigour of manhood, for his prey, and sparing the puny and sickly. I have seen him in all manner of ghastly shapes ; swollen with stagnant waters, half-eaten by the finny tribes—beaten into an indistinguishable mass by fiends in human shape—infants destroyed by their own parents—ha ! the conscience pricks again ; will it never be seared ? Ah, no ! I can never forget the day when I stood on a rock which overhangs the Tamar and committed my infant to the flood, to avenge myself on his scoundrel father. Poor thing, how it smiled in my face when I was about to cast it from me ! and yet I did not relent : I knew it would torture its father, and it did torture him, but although the revenge was sweet it brought with it a poisoned barb which can never be extracted from my bosom. And yet perhaps it was best—better for him to die as he did than to live and suffer the death which sooner or later awaits his brother. But this poor fellow now before me ; my poor brother's child, whom on his death-bed he delivered to my safe-keeping ; oh ! how have I fulfilled the sacred trust ! I allowed him to run wild, totally uneducated : I taught him to rob the hen-roosts and yards of the neighbouring farmers because they called me a witch—a title I am now proud of ; I allowed him to poach

upon the preserves of the gentry, because I hated them : I suffered him to smuggle, because strong liquors became necessary to drown my trouble. At last he broke the slender bands by which I held him, and, in company with my son, took to the highway. And this is the end on't ! Killed by that Miriam, Tresilian no doubt an accomplice ! Vengeance ! Vengeance ! I swear by every thing eternal that I will have vengeance ; yes, I have already laid the train, which in due time will explode, but if it fails still will I have vengeance, even if I am obliged to take it by my own hand !"

As she said this she arose, her form dilated to its utmost height, and drawing a dagger from her bosom she struck with frantic energy against the rude door, so as to drive the point of the weapon nearly through the board. Then finding her rage useless she again sat down, muttering in a low tone as follows :—

"Ah ! vain and foolish that I am, to waste my strength against imaginary forms. No, no ; I will hoard my strength until the time arrives, but thou poor corpse shalt be avenged—I have said it ! Ah, it seems to me but yesterday that I heard of the crew of the cutter's boat beaten off by the smugglers at Polcarras, and that one of the latter was mortally wounded. Something told me it was my brother ; I went and found it so. Thou poor boy wast with him, and he gave thee to me, with a strict charge to take care of thee, and find out what had become of thy infant sister, for thy mother had disowned thy father, and gone he knew not whither. In both of these duties I have failed. How I have taken care of thee let thy murdered corpse answer, and thy sister's retreat I have never been able to discover. But it is part and parcel of our family's fate ! How can the children and grandchildren of a murderer expect to prosper !"

"Woe ! woe ! to the children of crime ;

All futile their struggles—in vain they contend

'Gainst the fiat of heaven—for the author of time

Holds a curse o'er their heads which shall surely descend

"Woe ! woe ! to the children of earth,

Whose ancestors revelled in unhallowed joys ;

The star of affliction presides at their birth :

No placid intervals their mis'ry alloys.

"Woe ! woe ! to the children of crime,

—No riches can ward off the fruits of a sin—

They may bask 'neath the shades of the poplar or lime,

But the curse of their destiny rageth within.

"Woe ! woe ! to the parents who quit the straight path ;

Their guilt shall subdue them, till blighted each heart.

The scourge of the heav'ns shall be lifted in wrath,

Till the fourth generation shall shrink from its smart !

"Yes, yes, it is even so. 'The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children, even to the third and fourth generation.' Here is my family : how are we wrecked ! My mother was a bad woman, and my father committed murder. The first died raving mad, and the other was drowned in a turf-pit.—And then their children : one shot while contending against the servants of his country, in the exercise of their duty ; another married to a drunken, brutish, thievish sot, who abuses her daily, and the other the celebrated but miserable Witch of Brentor ! Then let us look at their grandchildren : here lies the murdered corpse of one, while his sister is lost ; one was thrown into the Tamar by these withered hands, and the fourth lies in Exeter gaol charged with the crime of murder ! Thus are three generations punished, and as for the fourth there is but little probability there will ever be one."

Here she was interrupted by a knocking underneath, when having bidden the visitor to walk up, the grave-digger entered, accompanied by Mother Grimpe. The latter broke silence, saying :—

"Well Nancy, this is a strange freak certainly ! Why didn't ye leave 'nn lie—where others are lying—in the pond ? What though he was our brother's son, surely he was a graceless vagabond, and cared no more for me than a stranger,—I'd a let 'un lie long enough afore I'd a touch'd 'un !"

"I know that Dorothy, and if I were to die you would leave me here to rot in this cave I suppose ? Thank'ee for nothing, for when I die I'll give no one the trouble to bury me. But you never knew what it was to have a child, or you would pity this poor youth."

"If I never had a child I am lawfully married, at all events, and if report speaks true it had been better some other person never had a child—unless she had a right to bring children into the world."

"Say another word hussy, and I'll hurl the out of that hole yonder, and down the precipice. And as she spoke thus the witch arose and seized her sister in her arms. The other, although the stoutest woman of the two, shrunk from the contact, betraying much fear, but the grave-digger interfered, saying that it was no time then to be quarrelling, for he must be up and doing, as daylight was fast approaching. The witch then produced a bottle of smuggled brandy, and after drinking a bumper each, the corpse was put into a sack and by means of a cord lowered down the face of the rock ; the grave-digger then took the burden on his back and followed by the women clambered up the hill, proceeded to the burying ground and deposited it in the grave. The women knelt and muttered some unintelligible jargon, and the witch cast some articles into the grave, muttering charms as she did so ; the grave was then filled up, but before leaving the spot she stretched forth her arms towards the east, where the morning beams gave a ruddy tint to the sky, and exclaimed in a fit of enthusiasm, "Oh ! spirit of nature, I perceive the charms I made use of yesterday has already taken effect ; the dead is already half-avenged." Then turning to her companions she exclaimed "he is arrested." "Who is arrested ?"