

BOOK XIII.

THEY DEPART THE MEADOWS.

I.

It was just dusk when Pierre approached the Ulver farm-house, in a wagon belonging to the Black Swan Inn. He met his sister shawled and bonneted in the porch.

"Now then, Isabel, is all ready? Where is Delly? I see two most small and inconsiderable portmanteaux. Wee is the chest that holds the goods of the disowned! The wagon waits, Isabel. Now is all ready? and nothing left?"

"Nothing, Pierre; unless in going hence--but I'll not think of that; all's fated."

"Delly! where is she? Let us go in for her," said Pierre, catching the hand of Isabel, and turning rapidly. As he thus half dragged her into the little lighted entry, and then dropping her hand, placed his touch on the catch of the inner door, Isabel stayed his arm, as if to keep him back, till she should forewarn him against something concerning Delly; but suddenly she started herself; and for one instant, eagerly pointing at his right hand, seemed almost to half shrink from Pierre.

"'Tis nothing. I am not hurt; a slight burn--the merest accidental scorch this morning. But what's this?" he added, lifting his hand higher; "smoke! soot! this comes of going in the dark; sunlight, and I had seen it. But I have not touched thee, Isabel?"

Isabel lifted her hand and showed the marks.--"But it came from thee, my brother; and I would catch the plague from thee, so that it should make me share thee. Do thou clean thy hand; let mine alone."

"Delly! Delly!"--cried Pierre--"why may I not go to her, to bring her forth?"

Placing her finger upon her lip, Isabel softly opened the door, and showed the object of his inquiry avertedly seated, muffled, on a chair.

"Do not speak to her, my brother," whispered Isabel, "and do not seek to behold her face, as yet. It will pass over now, ere long, I trust. Come, shall we go now? Take Delly forth, but do not speak to her. I have bidden all good-by; the old people are in yonder room in the rear; I am glad that they chose not to come out, to attend our going forth. Come now, be very quick, Pierre; this is an hour I like not; be it swiftly past."

Soon all three alighted at the inn. Ordering lights, Pierre led the way above-stairs, and ushered his two companions into one of the two

outermost rooms of the three adjoining chambers prepared for all.

"See," said he, to the mute and still self-averting figure of Delly;--"see, this is thy room, Miss Ulver; Isabel has told thee all; thou know'st our till now secret marriage; she will stay with thee now, till I return from a little business down the street. To-morrow, thou know'st, very early, we take the stage. I may not see thee again till then, so, be steadfast, and cheer up a very little, Miss Ulver, and good-night. All will be well."

II.

Next morning, by break of day, at four o'clock, the four swift hours were personified in four impatient horses, which shook their trappings beneath the windows of the inn. Three figures emerged into the cool dim air and took their places in the coach.

The old landlord had silently and despondently shaken Pierre by the hand; the vainglorious driver was on his box, threadingly adjusting the four reins among the fingers of his buck-skin gloves; the usual thin company of admiring ostlers and other early on-lookers were gathered about the porch; when--on his companions' account--all eager to cut short any vain delay, at such a painful crisis, Pierre impetuously shouted for the coach to move. In a moment, the four meadow-fed young horses leaped forward their own generous lengths, and the four

responsive wheels rolled their complete circles; while making vast rearward flourishes with his whip, the elated driver seemed as a bravado-hero signing his ostentatious farewell signature in the empty air. And so, in the dim of the dawn--and to the defiant crackings of that long and sharp-resounding whip, the three forever fled the sweet fields of Saddle Meadows.

The short old landlord gazed after the coach awhile, and then re-entering the inn, stroked his gray beard and muttered to himself:--"I have kept this house, now, three-and-thirty years, and have had plenty of bridal-parties come and go; in their long train of wagons, break-downs, buggies, gigs--a gay and giggling train--Ha!--there's a pun! popt out like a cork--ay, and once in ox-carts, all garlanded; ay, and once, the merry bride was bedded on a load of sweet-scented new-cut clover. But such a bridal-party as this morning's--why, it's as sad as funerals. And brave Master Pierre Glendinning is the groom! Well, well, wonders is all the go. I thought I had done with wondering when I passed fifty; but I keep wondering still. Ah, somehow, now, I feel as though I had just come from lowering some old friend beneath the sod, and yet felt the grating cord-marks in my palms.--'Tis early, but I'll drink. Let's see; cider,--a mug of cider;--'tis sharp, and pricks like a game-cock's spur,--cider's the drink for grief. Oh, Lord! that fat men should be so thin-skinned, and suffer in pure sympathy on others' account. A thin-skinned, thin man, he don't suffer so, because there ain't so much stuff in him for his thin skin to cover. Well, well, well, well, well; of all colics, save me from the melloncholics; green melons

is the greenest thing!"