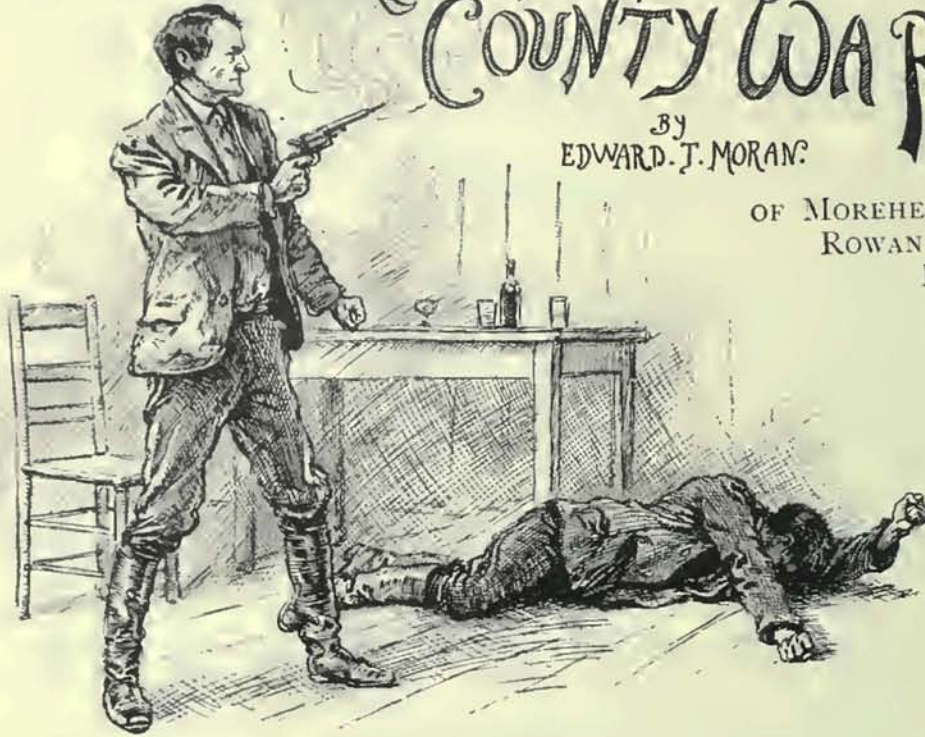


THE ROWAN COUNTY WAR.

By
EDWARD J. MORAN.

OF MOREHEAD,
ROWAN COUNTY,
KENTUCKY.



THE INNER HISTORY OF A FAMOUS KENTUCKY FEUD.

This impressive narrative throws a lurid light on the conditions which prevail, even at the present day, in Kentucky. This account of the terrible Nemesis which overtook the seven conspirators, striking them down one by one on the very anniversary of their victim's death, will come as a revelation even to many Kentuckians who are conversant with the general details of the famous "Rowan County War."



KENTUCKY feuds have long been celebrated in song and story,* but no feud has ever been so expensive to the State, so demoralizing to the people, and so disastrous to life and property as the terrible "Rowan County War," which had its beginning and its end in the little town of Morehead. Blood flowed almost as freely as water, and both the county and State officials were powerless to prevent the great loss of life. Many are the thrilling narratives that have been written concerning this feud, but the greatest tragedy of the conflict, and doubtless the most mysterious ever enacted on Kentucky soil, has for years been locked securely in the bosom of the writer. All the participants having now gone to their rest, however, and secrecy being no longer necessary, I have decided to give it to the public in all its strange and terrible detail.

On the 10th day of August, 1882, the county election was held in Rowan County. At Morehead, the county seat, were gathered some of the most desperate men in the district. Excitement ran high, for everybody realized that the election meant more than the triumph of one section over the other and a division of party spoils, but that to the winning party it would mean great loss of life. While the more law-abiding citizens were discussing the best means of averting trouble a pistol-shot rang out, and answering ones promptly resounded through the air, proclaiming to the anxious throng who had collected to discuss measures of peace and compromise that their plans were thwarted and that the threatened trouble had actually begun. Police-officers hurried to the spot, where they found two men lying dead and one wounded. All were of the Republican party—two prominent partisans, while the other was an innocent bystander, who had committed no offence save to cast his vote for the party of his choice

* See "A Kentucky Feud, and My Part In It," by Miss Jessie Trimble, which appears in THE WIDE WORLD for March, 1902.

While the excitement over the shooting was at its height the result of the election was announced, giving victory to the Democratic party. This infuriated the Republican leaders still more. They were certain that their murdered men had been the victims of partisan feeling, and they clamoured for the detection and punishment of the guilty parties.

The entire county was soon in a commotion. The women and children trembled with fear and apprehension, while the men - folk collected in crowds in every place throughout the county and discussed the result of the election, the crime, and the possible apprehension of the murderer. Suspicion pointed to Floyd Tolliver, an hotel proprietor in the town of Farmers, eight miles from the county seat, but this suspicion was based solely upon his well-known party prejudices and the fact that he was close to the scene of the murder when the officers arrived. He was a man of prepossessing appearance, tall and well-built, and of a jovial temperament. It seemed preposterous to his friends to think that he was capable of such a crime.

For months nothing happened, and one day in the February following Floyd Tolliver went to Morehead to purchase supplies for his hostelry. It being the regular county court day many citizens were there, some to attend to their claims and business and others for pleasure. Conspicuous among the latter class was John Martin, a champion of the Republican party and a well-known bully and desperado of Eastern Kentucky. Meeting Tolliver in the street that day about noon he greeted him pleasantly and invited



JOHN MARTIN, THE MAN WHO SHOT FLOYD TOLLIVER. [Photo. From a]

him to step across to the saloon at the opposite corner and join him in a social glass. Though there had been some bitter feeling between them, Tolliver, being a good-natured man, forgot all past differences and accepted the invitation, with no thought of impending danger. While drinking and talking together the shooting incident was mentioned, and a hot dispute ensued, whereupon Martin, true to a premeditated plan, shot Tolliver dead. The muffled sound of the pistol reached the officers at the court-house, and they were on the spot almost before the smoke had cleared away. Martin was discovered standing in the middle of the floor with his pistol in his hand, complacently marking on it the notch which chronicled

his ninth victim. The officers secured the doors and windows, and, seeing that escape was impossible, Martin surrendered without resistance. He was hurried to the county gaol a few yards distant, and in less than half an hour a strong guard had been placed around the building by a Republican marshal—ostensibly for the purpose of preventing the prisoner's escape, but believed by the Democrats to be for his protection against mob violence. Next day Martin was hastened to Winchester, a "bluegrass" town beyond the border of the feudal section. None too soon was this precaution taken, however, for in a dark and lonely ravine, known as "Gloomy Hollow," two miles from the town, were gathered twenty men who had determined to break into the gaol and kill the murderer of their friend Tolliver.

Although temporarily baffled, these self-consti-



MR. FLOYD TOLLIVER. From a Photo, by C. H. Bryan, Mt. Sterling, Ky

tuted avengers were not beaten, and their leader—one Shephard—arranged another meeting in the Hollow for the following Thursday. Mean-

ruin and untimely death to each of the participants. Shephard's plan was as follows: An order was to be forged, purporting to be from



From a]

"GLOOMY HOLLOW," WHERE THE AVENGERS OF FLOYD TOLLIVER MET.

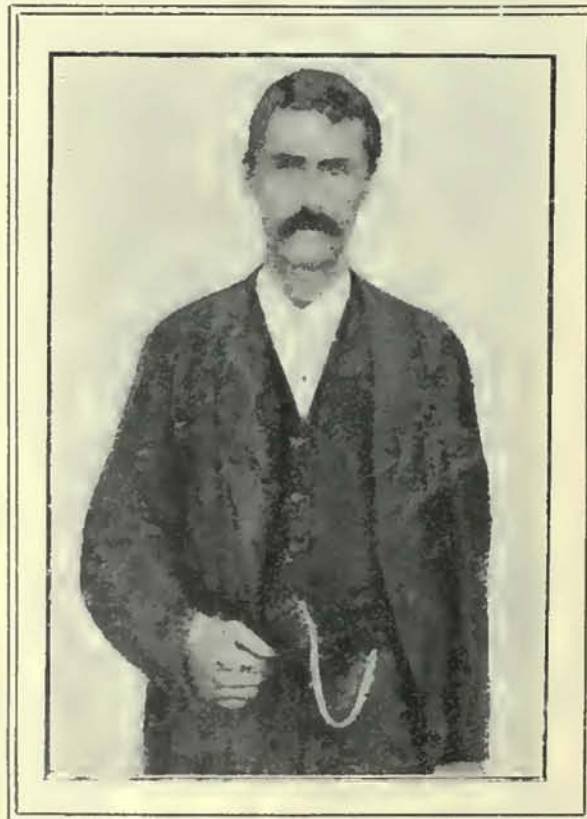
[Photo.

while Martin, in the custody of the sheriff, and accompanied by a devoted and sorrowful wife, was speeding away toward the peaceful town of Winchester. His friends now busied themselves with schemes for his escape. They met, and plotted how they might secure his freedom. The other faction, however, were occupied with a plot, intricate and dreadful, for the immediate execution of the guilty man.

The crowd of avengers met, as arranged, on the Thursday night. All were dismissed save seven of the shrewdest and most trusty, the others being conciliated by the assurance that they would be called together again when the plot was complete. Plans were then submitted and discussed, but none found universal favour until Shephard unfolded his scheme. It was a simple idea and one easily executed, but was ultimately to bring

the county judge to the gaoler at Winchester, ordering him to deliver up Martin to the bearer of the order. Shephard—who was then marshal of the town of Farmers—would present this order and take the prisoner. Once in his custody Martin would never escape. The other six conspirators were to board the train at Farmers and "hold up" the train while the others shot Martin.

Shephard duly presented himself at the Winchester Gaol on the Saturday night following and delivered the forged order to the gaoler, who had no suspicion of the real state of affairs. Shephard waited for his prisoner at the entrance. Not a word of greeting was exchanged between them, and after parting from the gaoler Shephard, accompanied by the prisoner, walked rapidly to the railway depôt, reaching it just as the east-



JOHN SHEPHARD, WHO PRESENTED THE FORGED ORDER
From a] FOR MARTIN'S REMOVAL. [Photo.

bound train came puffing in. They boarded the train and were whirled away through the fair "blue-grass" country. Darkness enveloped everything, and an occasional twinkling light from a distant farm-house was the only thing to be seen. Shephard was taciturn, and seemed wrapped in gloomy meditation; he was apparently very careless of his prisoner, but as a matter of fact his eye never once wandered or relaxed its vigilance. When they reached the town of Mount Sterling, some twenty miles from Farmers, he rose with a nonchalant air, and with a voice of studied carelessness said, "Come, Martin, let us go into the smoker and take a puff." It was at the hour of eleven that Shephard and his prisoner entered the smoking-car and seated themselves, Shephard placing himself on the side next the aisle.

and alarmed me, for I was aware of the great excitement that prevailed. Accordingly, as a measure of precaution, I jumped behind the stump of a gigantic tree to await the passing of the horsemen. As they drew near they slackened their speed and finally stopped and dismounted within 10ft. of me. I was almost paralyzed with fear, thinking that my presence would be discovered, but I soon found that they had only stopped to review some plan. I recognised each voice, and in a few moments was made acquainted with all the details of the terrible deed to be committed that night. They discussed the location of Shephard and his prisoner in the car. There were six of them, and I gathered that three would "hold up" the engineer while the others would locate the prisoner, shoot the lights out, and then attack him.



"MARTIN DROPPED MORTALLY WOUNDED."

Just at this hour I was hastening from my home in Farmers to the bedside of a dying friend. In order to reach the place quickly I took an old deserted road, and when hurrying along about a mile from the village I had just left sounds of galloping horses' feet arrested me

Shephard was to dodge beneath the seat to avoid injury to himself. After repeated instructions and careful cautions they remounted, and, hearing the whistle of the train in the distance, put spurs to their horses and galloped on.

I was rooted to the spot with horror. There

was no time to save Martin from his fate, for the train was almost due. I saw that I was powerless to do anything, and, too frightened to think coherently, I hurried on as fast as my trembling limbs would carry me to the bedside of my friend. No minister being present, I prayed with him and soothed him in his dying hours. I was in a state of great agitation and dread, and spent a night of indescribable horror.

Next morning the country rang with the news of John Martin's death: how six masked men had held up the train at Farmers; how three appeared in the doorway of the smoking-car, and, extinguishing the lights as if by magic, fired with one accord at the manacled man. Their aim was excellent—Martin dropped mortally wounded. Meanwhile the frightened

but their plans could avail him nothing now. The bearer of evil tidings broke the news as best he could. Grief and consternation were depicted on every countenance, and with one accord Martin's supporters hurried to the inn, to find the dying man breathing his last. He was able to utter but one word—"Revenge"; but these wild children of the feud country understood, and swore vengeance in his dying ears.

Martin was buried two days later. But what of his murderers? There was not the slightest clue to their identity. I dared not reveal my knowledge of the crime, for it only meant certain death to me and more bloodshed in the county. Besides, how could I substantiate my story against seven men's denial? So the crime and



THE OLD MARTIN HOMESTEAD—JOHN MARTIN LIES BURIED IN THE ENCLOSURE TO THE RIGHT.
From a Photo.

occupants of the carriage scrambled wildly for the door. Others from the next carriage rushed up, and a scene of wild confusion ensued. The lamps were again lighted, but there was no trace of the masked men; they had disappeared as suddenly and as silently as they came. The terrified passengers assisted in trying to minister to Martin, who was still living, and when the train reached Morehead he was carried to the nearest inn and a messenger dispatched to carry the sad tidings to his father and mother. The messenger found a band of desperate men assembled at the Martins' house planning the release of their leader on the morrow,

its perpetrators have always remained a mystery. Thereafter terrible tragedies followed each other in quick succession, and, although I noted them all with increasing horror, my lips perforce remained sealed.

I will now proceed to set forth the strange fate which befell the seven conspirators.

Julian Welch, a man of unusual brilliancy of mind and nobility of character, a much-respected citizen of Farmers, had been persuaded to join the guilty seven through a misrepresentation of their purpose. They convinced him that the killing of Martin was the only way of ending hostilities without many years of bloodshed and

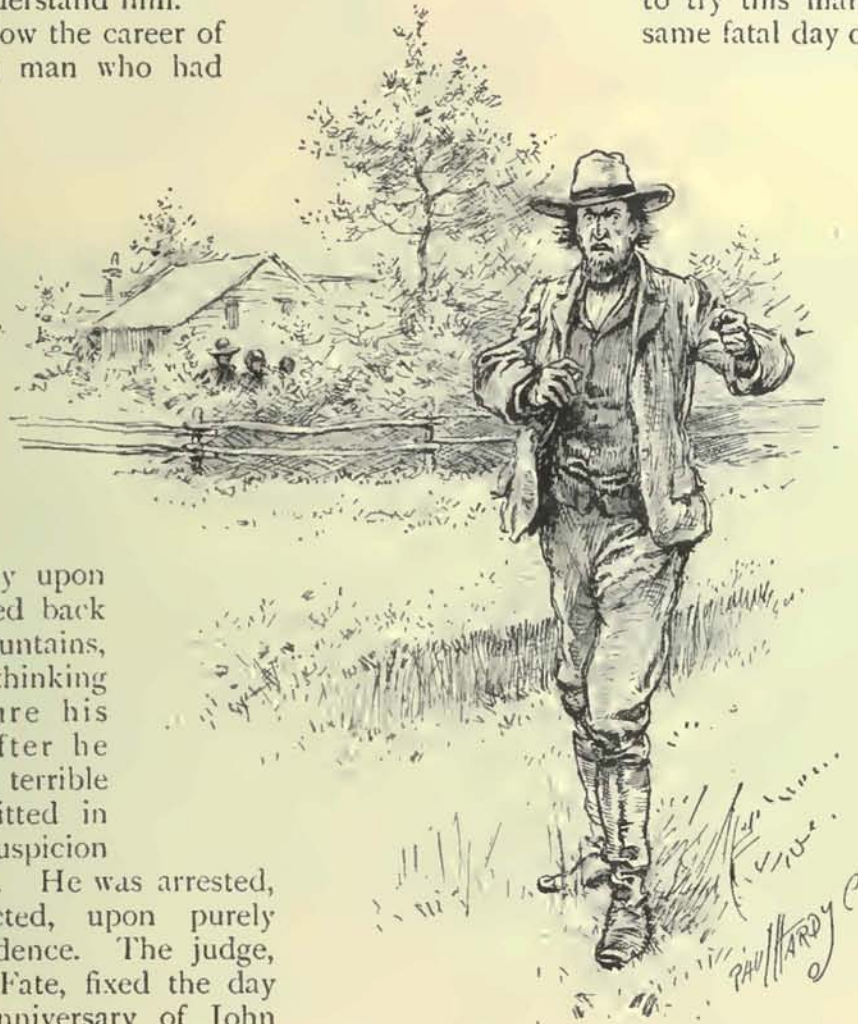
strife. He was drawn into the plot believing the act to be one of patriotism and of justice. He forged the fatal order, and a short time afterwards realized that he was a murderer, guilty of a dastardly crime. Being a man of tender conscience, he brooded until life became unbearable, and finally sought to drown his remorse in head-long dissipation. He finally came to an untimely end on the first anniversary of the night when he aided and abetted in the murder of John Martin. He died raving in delirium, beseeching the watchers again and again to "burn the order; burn the order." They, of course, did not understand him.

We will now follow the career of William Colton, a man who had served for year as one of the county's best officials. He continued to live in Morehead for some months after the Martin tragedy, and quietly pursued his avocation, which was the practice of law. But the fear of discovery lay heavy upon him, and he moved back farther into the mountains, to Martinsburg, thinking thereby to ensure his safety. Soon after he settled there a terrible crime was committed in the locality, and suspicion pointed to Colton. He was arrested, tried, and convicted, upon purely circumstantial evidence. The judge, as if inspired by Fate, fixed the day of the second anniversary of John Martin's death as the date of his execution! The convicted man was duly hung on the appointed day, although loudly protesting his innocence to the last moment. Three weeks later the real murderer, being no longer able to bear the weight of a guilty conscience, confessed to the murder and thus declared Colton's innocence. But it was too late! William Colton had gone to answer for his share in the tragedy at Farmers.

Some months later it was whispered that one of Morehead's most prominent citizens had become mentally unbalanced. For days he would walk and talk incessantly, and when unable to secure a companion in his rambles

would hold conversations with some imaginary person. This mood was followed by days of strictest seclusion. He was gloomy and taciturn, and would see none of his friends or acquaintances. His family kept the matter suppressed for weeks, until finally he conceived a maniacal hatred for one of his grown sons, addressing him always as "John Martin," and attempting to murder him whenever he came in sight. Family pride and filial love finally succumbed to fear, and his family had his sanity tested in court. Imagine, if you can, the feelings of the writer when summoned on the jury to try this man for lunacy on the same fatal day of the year that John

Martin was shot! It was the third anniversary. The man was sent to the Lexington Insane Asylum, and there he remained until the day of his death some few months later. I have since heard the officials who accompanied him relate that when the train reached the town of Farmers he became so violent that it required the assistance of four passengers to hold him down. No one could account for the agitating effect of that quiet, peaceable little village upon the diseased



"HE WOULD WALK AND TALK INCESSANTLY."

mind; but to one acquainted with the case, as I was, it seemed perfectly clear.

Three years had now passed, each bringing its terrible result to some one of the guilty band. I had in the meantime lost trace of John Wheeling, one of the chief plotters in the gang, and one whom I remembered as most noisy when discussing their plans on that fateful night. I chanced one day to pick up an Ohio paper, and was stricken speechless with astonishment to find the picture of John Wheeling—a prisoner awaiting trial for the murder of his father-in-law! I followed the

proceedings of the trial very carefully. No motive could be assigned for the deed, but John Wheeling was given a life-sentence, and on the fourth anniversary of his midnight ride to Farmers he donned a convict's garb and gave up home and freedom for a crime of which he stoutly declared his innocence and for which no just cause or reason has ever yet been found!

Hitherto I had not connected the catastrophes which befell these men with the murder of John Martin, but now I began to note the mystery of it all, and found myself looking forward to the 3rd day of March with excitement and dread. The fifth anniversary, a beautiful day for the season of the year, passed off without any evil occurrence, and I felt greatly relieved. But night came with another misfortune wrapped in its gloomy curtains.

a cheery greeting and passing jokes with all. "Andrew seems lively this morning," remarked one; "he must have had a good sale this year."

Tolliver lingered in town beyond his wonted stay, chatting with different friends. At dusk, however, he bade them "good-bye" and galloped out of the town towards home. But he was destined never to reach his home alive. He lingered so long in the town that his family, becoming alarmed at his prolonged stay, sent a boy of fifteen in search of him. The night was one of inky blackness. The boy rode on until he almost collided with a riderless horse standing still in the road. He held his lantern higher so that he could see the animal, and with a start recognised his father's saddle-horse! His father was hanging from the stirrup covered with blood, and quite dead.

The boy's pitiful cries aroused several persons,



"HIS FATHER WAS HANGING FROM THE STIRRUP."

Andrew Tolliver was a prosperous farmer living some five miles distant from the county seat. He had sold the products of his farm a few days before, and came on the 3rd of March to deposit his year's earnings in the safe of a merchant friend in town, there being no bank nearer than thirty miles at that time. He seemed unusually cheerful and jolly that day, meeting his fellow-farmers along the road with

and soon a large crowd gathered and conveyed the body home. Morning had dawned by this time, and the coroner was soon upon the ground making investigation. By bits of clothing and traces of blood they traced the victim back to the old homestead of John Martin, but what occurred at that spot still remains a mystery. The coroner's verdict was that Andrew Tolliver came to his death by being thrown from his

horse and dragged along the road, the horse's fright being occasioned by something or someone just in front of the old, deserted Martin homestead.

Meanwhile John Shephard was sojourning in the Kentucky Penitentiary, having been sentenced to imprisonment there for a term of twenty-one years for killing an officer in Mount Sterling, who attempted to arrest him for some misdemeanour. While he was in the penitentiary he conducted himself so meritoriously as to get into the good graces of the warden, and to secure greater liberty than other criminals of his class. He pretended to become converted, and was a devout worshipper at the prison chapel. His good conduct, together with the untiring efforts of his friends, secured his release after an imprisonment of only five years. He returned

The day passed and he came not. Night came on and the woman watched anxiously, and still he did not make his appearance. The next day passed and the next night, and the poor wife was frantic. She had made but few friends, and could appeal to no one. The next morning, however, just as she had succeeded in interesting the police-officials and had got them to start in search of him, the news came that he was found. The man who found him was, according to his story, out hunting stray hogs, and when he reached the darkest part of "Gloomy Hollow," hearing the swine moving, he turned out of the path and proceeded in that direction. After going about 30ft. he was horrified to see the dead body of a man. It proved to be no other than Shephard—stone-dead, murdered!



"HE WAS HORRIFIED TO SEE THE DEAD BODY OF A MAN."

to his native county apparently a changed man. While in prison he met a beautiful woman who visited the prison Sabbath school and taught the Bible. They were associated much together, and she was one of the most untiring in the effort to secure his release, and ultimately married him.

Shephard took a contract to oversee a timber job in "Gloomy Hollow," and one day parted fondly from his wife to go and assign the work to the labourers, assuring her that he would return in a few hours. But he never came back.

When the officers set to work to find the assassin, they found only the spot where beaten-down bushes had afforded him a place of concealment. The underbrush was broken and the earth trampled hard, showing that the murderer had been in ambush for several days, and that he knew the route travelled daily by his victim. It was evident to me that some of John Martin's avengers had been at work, although years had passed and the "Rowan County War" was supposed to have ceased and all the old enmity to have been buried. It was but

another mystery that baffled those who would have made it clear, while fear kept silent those who could have explained it. They moved the body of Shephard into the old court-house at Morehead. While the watchers sat and discussed the terrible crime in whispers someone mentioned another crime in years gone by, and one of them said: "Do you remember the night when John Martin was murdered?" "Yes," answered another. "But why?" "I was trying to think of the date, that is all," he said. "It was the 3rd day of March in the year 1883," said his companion. "Good heavens!" returned the first speaker. "If Jack was killed three days ago, as the doctors testify, he must have been murdered on the 3rd of March!" They talked long on the subject and all agreed that it was a strange coincidence, for Shephard was known to have delivered the forged order which secured the handing over of Martin. A strange coincidence, indeed, but still none saw in this strange crime, as I did, the hand of the avenger.

No one was ever indicted for the murder of Jack Shephard. The murderer has not been apprehended to this day, and no one ever dared to advance so much as a theory concerning who the person might be, lest they should themselves share Shephard's fate.

Only one of the conspirators was now living. He was a man of wealth and influence, and Providence seemed to smile upon him and bless him beyond the lot of his neighbours. He was a model citizen, and enjoyed a happy home and success in his every undertaking. "Surely," I thought, "this man will escape the Nemesis?" Still, during the last days of February, I found myself looking forward to the 3rd day of March with nervous dread. The nearer that day approached, the more apprehensive I became. My nights were troubled and filled with nightmares, and the days with gloomy retrospective thought and still gloomier anticipation. I had stood silent and powerless, watching these many tragedies growing out of one, until, under the burden of the awful secret, I felt almost as

guilty as the original seven conspirators. Could I not in some way warn Gerald Walsh, or could I not, by keeping a silent watch over him, save him from the hand of this invisible and inexorable Nemesis? I could not dispel the gloomy thoughts that filled my mind, and sometimes imagined that the succession of tragedies had almost turned my brain. When I looked at the calendar the date March 3rd seemed magnified to my distorted vision, and sometimes I seemed to see a red circle around the date. When the 2nd day of March closed and night came on I could no longer bear the suspense, but resolved to go on the morrow, whatever the cost, and warn Gerald Walsh. The night passed slowly, every moment seeming an hour, and when morning dawned I arose, looking worn and haggard. Without waiting to partake of our morning meal, I caught my horse and galloped to Morehead. When I reached the village I met two men, and, seeing that they were excited, stopped to inquire the cause. "Gerald Walsh is dead," answered one. "He committed suicide last night!" "What for?" I asked, horrified beyond expression at the news. "No one knows," he answered. "He seemed as cheerful as usual until yesterday, when his wife noticed that he appeared depressed." "Did he leave no message?" I inquired, anxiously. "Yes; he left a note pinned to his pillow, saying, 'It is better to go out and meet your fate than run from it and be overtaken,' but no one understands what he meant."

But I understood—and like a flood of light the explanation broke in upon me. There had been another silent spectator to this ghastly series of catastrophes—one who was more vitally interested than myself. Reviewing the dread and horror I had suffered for days past I shuddered at the thought of the ordeal of apprehension through which this wretched man must have passed. My life-long regret is, and ever will be, that my lips remained sealed until this long-drawn-out tragedy had reached its bitter culmination.