

# ROBERT BIRD

SHEPPARD LEE,  
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.  
VOL. I (OF 2)

Robert Bird

**Sheppard Lee, Written  
by Himself. Vol. I (of 2)**

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# **Robert Montgomery Bird Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself. Vol. I (of 2)**

**"Let these shine now that never shone before,**

**And those that always shone now shine the more."**

**Advertisement to Hunt's Blacking**

# **BOOK I.**

## **CONTAINING INSTRUCTIONS HOW TO SPEND AND HOW TO RETRIEVE A FORTUNE**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE, – WHICH THE READER, IF IN A GREAT HURRY, OR IF IT BE HIS PRACTICE TO READ AGAINST TIME, CAN SKIP**

I have often debated in my mind whether I should give to the world, or for ever lock up within the secrecy of my own breast, the history of the adventures which it has been my lot in life to experience. The importance of any single individual in society, especially one so isolated as myself, is so little, that it can scarcely be supposed that the community at large can be affected by his fortunes, either good or evil, or interested in any way in his fate. Yet it sometimes happens that circumstances conspire to elevate the humblest person from obscurity, and to give the whole world an interest in his affairs; and that man may safely consider himself of some value in his generation, whose history is of a character to instruct the ignorant and inexperienced. Such a man I consider myself to be; and the more I reflect upon my past life, the more I am convinced it contains a lesson which may be studied with profit; while, at the same time, if I am not greatly mistaken, the lesson will be found neither dry nor repulsive, but here and there, on the contrary, quite diverting. The psychologist (I hate big words, but one cannot do without them) and the metaphysician will discover in my relation some new subjects for reflection; and so perhaps will the doctor of medicine and the physiologist: but while I leave these learned gentlemen to discuss what may appear most wonderful in my revelations, I am most anxious that the common reader may weigh the value of what is, at least in appearance, more natural, simple, and comprehensible.

It will be perceived that many of the following adventures are of a truly extraordinary character. There are some men – and to such my story will seem incredible enough – who pride themselves on believing nothing that they do not know, and who endeavour, very absurdly, to restrict the objects of belief to those that admit of personal cognizance. There are others again who boast the same maxim, but have a more liberal understanding of the subjects of knowledge, and permit themselves to believe many things which are susceptible of satisfactory proof, but not of direct cognition. Now I must declare beforehand, in order to avoid all trouble, that, from the very nature of the life I have led, consisting of the strangest transitions and vicissitudes, it is impossible I should have laid up proofs to satisfy any one of the truth of my relation who is disposed to be incredulous. If any one should say, "I doubt," all the answer I could make would be, "Doubt, and be hanged," – not, however, meaning any offence to anybody; though it is natural one should be displeased at having his veracity questioned. I write for the world at large, which is neither philosophic nor skeptical; and the world will believe me: otherwise it is a less sensible world than I have all along supposed it to be.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **THE BIRTH AND FAMILY OF SHEPPARD LEE, WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS TEMPER AND COMPLEXION OF MIND**

I was born somewhere towards the close of the last century, – but, the register-leaf having been torn from the family Bible, and no one remaining who can give me information on the point, I am not certain as to the exact year, – in the State of New-Jersey, in one of the oldest counties that border upon the Delaware river. My father was a farmer in very good circumstances, respectable in his degree, but perhaps more famous for the excellent sausages he used to manufacture for the Philadelphia market, than for any quality of mind or body that can distinguish one man from his fellows. Taking the hint from his success in this article of produce, he gradually converted his whole estate into a market-farm, raising fine fruits and vegetables, and such other articles as are most in demand in a city; in which enterprise he succeeded beyond his highest expectations, and bade fair to be, as in the end he became, a rich man. The only obstacle to a speedy accumulation of riches was a disproportionate increase in the agents of consumption, – his children multiplying on his hands almost as fast as his acres, until he could count eleven in all; a number that filled him at one time with consternation. He used to declare no apple could be expected to ripen on a farm where there were eleven children; and as for watermelons and sugar-corn, it was folly to think of raising them longer. But fate sent my father relief sooner and more effectually than he either expected or desired: nine of the eleven being removed by death in a space of time short of six years. Three (two of whom were twin sisters) were translated in the natural way, falling victims to an epidemic, and were buried in the same grave. A fourth was soon after killed by falling out of an apple-tree. My eldest brother, then a boy of fourteen years old, upon some freak, ran away from home (for he was of a wild, madcap turn), and, getting into an oyster-boat, made a voyage into the bay, where he was lost; for, having fallen overboard, and not being able to swim, a clumsy fellow, who thought to save him in that way, clutched him round the neck with a pair of oyster-tongs, and thereby strangled him. Two others were drowned in a millpond, where they were scraping for snapping-turtles. Another, who was the wag of the family, was killed by attempting to ride a pig, which, running in great alarm through a broken fence into the orchard, dashed his brains out against a white-oak rail; and the ninth died of a sort of hysterical affection, caused by this unlucky exploit of his brother; for he could not cease laughing at it, notwithstanding its melancholy termination, and he died of the fit within twenty-four hours.

Thus, in a few years, there remained but two of all the eleven children, – to wit, my oldest sister Prudence and myself. My mother (from whom I had my Christian name Sheppard, that being her maiden name) died several years before this last catastrophe, her mind having been affected, and indeed distracted, by so many mournful losses occurring in such rapid succession. She fell into a deep melancholy, and died insane.

Being one of the youngest children, I grieved but little for the loss of my brothers and sisters; nor was I able to appreciate the advantage which, in a worldly point of view, their death must prove to me. My father, however, perceived the difference; for, having now so few to look after and be chargeable to him, he could with great propriety consider himself a rich man. He immediately resolved, as I was now his only son, that I should have a good education; and it was not his fault if, in this particular, I fell short of his expectations. I was sent to good schools, and, in course of time, was removed to the college at Nassau Hall, in Princeton, where I remained during three years; that is, until my father's decease; when I yielded to the natural indolence of my temper, and left the college, or rather (for I had formed no resolution on the subject) procrastinated my return from day to day, until it was too late to return.

My natural disposition was placid and easy, – I believe I may say sluggish. I was not wanting in parts, but had as little energy or activity of mind as ever fell to the share of a Jerseyman; and how my father ever came to believe I should make a figure in the world, I cannot conceive, unless it was because he knew he had a fortune to leave me, and saw me safely lodged in a college. It is very certain he encouraged a strong belief that I should one day be a great man; and, I fancy, it was for this reason he showed himself so favourable to me in his will. He left me the bulk of his property, bestowing upon my sister, who had recently married, little beyond a farm which he had purchased in a neighbouring county, but which was a valuable one, and quite satisfied her husband.

But my father was a better judge of sausages than of human character. Besides being deficient, as I humbly confess, in all those qualities that are necessary to the formation of a great man, I had not the slightest desire to be one. Ambition was a passion that never afflicted my mind; and I was so indifferent to the game of greatness which was playing around me, that, I seriously declare, there was a President of the United States elected to office, and turned out again, after having served his regular term, without my knowing any thing about it. I had not even the desire, so common to young men who find themselves in possession of a fortune, to launch out into elegant expenses, to dash about the country with fine horses, servants, and clothes, and to play the spendthrift in cities. On the contrary, I no sooner found myself arrived at my majority, which was a few months after my father's death, than I sat down very quietly on the farm, resolved to take the world easily; which I supposed I might easily do. I had some idea of continuing to conduct the estate, as my father had done before me; but it was a very vague one; and having made one or two efforts to bear myself like a man of business, I soon found the effort was too tiresome for one of my disposition; and I accordingly hired an overseer to manage the property for me.



### CHAPTER III.

## THE PLEASURES OF HAVING NOTHING TO DO. – SOME THOUGHTS ON MATRIMONY

Having thus shuffled the cares of business from my shoulders to another's, my time began to weigh a little heavily on my hands, and I cast about for some amusement that might enable me to get rid of it. As there was great abundance of small game, such as quails, partridges, and rabbits, in the neighbourhood, I resolved to turn sportman; and, in consequence, I bought me a dog and gun, and began to harry the country with some spirit. But having the misfortune to shoot my dog the first day, and, soon after, a very valuable imported cow, belonging to a neighbour, for which I was obliged to pay him enormous damages, and meeting besides with but little luck, I grew disgusted with the diversion. My last shot was soon fired; for, having forgotten the provisions of our game-laws, I killed a woodcock too early in the summer, for which, on the information of a fellow who owed me a grudge, I was prosecuted, although it was the only bird I ever killed in all my life, and soundly fined; and this incensed me so much, that I resolved to have nothing more to do with an amusement that cost so much money, and threw me into so many difficulties.

I was then at a loss how to pass my time, until a neighbour, who bred fine horses, persuaded me to buy a pair of blooded colts, and try my luck on the turf; and this employment, though rather too full of cares and troubles to suit me exactly, I followed with no little spirit, and became more proud of my horses than I can well express, until I came to try them on the race-course, where it was my luck, what with stakes and betting together, to lose more money in a single day, than my father had ever made in two years together. I then saw very clearly that horse-racing was nothing better than gambling, and therefore both disreputable and demoralizing; for which reason I instantly gave it up, heartily sick of the losses it had occasioned me.

My overseer, or steward, – for such he may be considered, – whom I always esteemed a very sensible fellow, for he was shrewd and energetic, and at least ten years my senior, then advised me, as I was a young man, with money enough, to travel a little, and see the world: and accordingly I went to New-York, where I was robbed of my luggage and money by a villain whose acquaintance I made in the steamboat, and whom I thought a highly intelligent, gentlemanly personage; though, as it afterward appeared, he was a professor from Sing-Sing, where he had been sawing stone for two years, the governor of New-York having forgiven him, as is the custom, the five other years for which he was committed for, I believe, a fraud committed on his own father.

This loss drove me home again; but being re-encouraged by my overseer, I filled my purse and set out a second time, passing up the Hudson river, with which I was prodigiously pleased, though not with the Overslaugh, where we stuck fast during six hours. I then proceeded to Saratoga, where I remained for two weeks, on account of its being fashionable; but, I declare to Heaven, I was never so tired of any place in my life. I then went to Niagara, which, in spite of the great noise it made, I thought the finest place in the world; and there, I think, I should have continued all summer, had it not been for the crowds of tiresome people that were eternally coming and going, and the great labour of climbing up and down the stairs. However, I was so greatly pleased with what I saw, both at Niagara and along the way, that I should have repeated my travels in after years, as the most agreeable way of passing time, had it not been for the dangers and miseries of such enterprises; for, first, the coaches were perpetually falling over, or sticking in the mud, or jolting over stones, so that one had no security of life or limb; and, secondly, the accommodations at the inns along the road were not to my liking, the food being cooked after the primitive systems of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and the beds stuck together in the rooms as if for boys at a boarding-school. It is possible that these things are better ordered now; but, from what I have since seen and heard, I am of opinion there is a fine field for

cooks, carpenters, and chamber-maids, in the agricultural regions of America. In those days I loved ease and comfort too well to submit to such evils as could be avoided; and, accordingly, after a little experience in the matter, I ceased travelling altogether, the pleasures bearing no sort of proportion to the discomforts.

My time still weighing upon my hands, I was possessed with a sudden idea (which my steward, however, endeavoured to combat), namely, that the tedium of my existence might be dispelled by matrimony; and I resolved to look around me for a wife. After much casting about, I fixed my eyes upon a young lady of the village (for I must inform the reader that my farm was on the skirts of a village, and a very respectable one too, although there were many lazy people in it), who, I thought, was well fitted to make me comfortable; and as she did not seem averse to my first advances, I began to be quite particular, until all the old women in the country declared it was a match, and all the young fellows of my own age, as well as all the girls I knew, became extremely witty at my expense. These things, however, rather encouraged me than otherwise; I believed I was advancing my happiness by the change I contemplated in my condition; and I was just on the point of making formal proposals to the young lady, when an accident set me to considering the enterprise entirely in a new light.

My charmer lived in the house of a married sister, who had a large family of children, – a pack of the most ill-bred imps, I verily believe, that were ever gathered together in any one man's house; but, for politeness' sake, during the first weeks of my courtship, the young sinners were kept out of my way, and, what with cuffing and feeding with sugarplums, were preserved in some sort of order, so that I was not annoyed by them. After a while, however, and when matters had proceeded some length, it was thought unnecessary to treat me longer as a stranger; the children were suffered to take care of themselves; and the consequence was, that, in a short time, I found myself in a kind of Pandemonium whenever I entered the house, with such a whining, and squeaking, and tumbling, and bawling, and fighting among the young ones, as greatly discomposed my nerves; and, to make the matter worse, the mother made no difficulty at times, when the squabbling grew to a height, of taking a switch to one, and boxing the ears of another, and scolding roundly at a third, to reduce them to order; and all this in my presence, and under the nose of my charmer.

I began to fancy the married life could not be altogether so agreeable as I had pictured it to my imagination; and in this belief I was confirmed by a visit to my sister, who had three children of her own, all of whom, as I now perceived (for I had not noticed it before, having no particular inducement to make me observant), were given to squabbling and bawling, just like other children, while my sister did her share of boxing and scolding. I thought to myself, "What should *I* do with a dozen children squeaking all day and night in my house, and a scolding wife dragooning them into submission?"

The thought disconcerted me, and the fear of such a consummation greatly chilled the ardour of my affection; so that the young lady, observing my backwardness, and taking offence at it, cast her eyes upon another wooer who had made her an offer, and, to my great satisfaction, married him on the spot.

I was never more relieved in my life, and I resolved to reflect longer upon the subject before making advances of that nature a second time. My overseer, who had from the first (for I made him my confidant) been opposed to the match, on the ground that I ought to enjoy my liberty, at least until I was thirty, was greatly rejoiced at the rupture, and swore that I had made a lucky escape; for he had always thought, in his own mind, that the lady was at bottom, though she concealed it from me, a Tartar and fire-eater. In this, however, he was mistaken; for, from all I have heard of her since, she has proved a most amiable and sweet-tempered woman, and her husband is said to be very happy with her.

## CHAPTER IV. HOW TO CONDUCT A FARM TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE, AND STEER CLEAR OF THE LAWYERS

It is not my intention to dwell longer upon the history of this period of my life, nor to recount in detail how my easy and indolent temper at last proved the ruin of me. I gave myself up to laziness, neglecting my affairs to such a degree that they soon became seriously entangled; and, to make a long story short, I found myself, before I had completed my twenty-eighth year, reduced from independence, and almost affluence, to a condition bordering upon actual poverty. My farm, under the management of Mr. Aikin Jones (for that was my steward's name), went gradually to ruin; my orchards rotted away, without being replanted; my meadows were converted into swamps; my corn-fields filled with gullies; my improvements fell into decay; and my receipts began to run short of my expenses. Then came borrowing and mortgaging, and, by-and-by, the sale of *this* piece of land to remove the encumbrance upon *that*; until I suddenly found myself in the condition of my father when he began the world; that is to say, the master of a little farm of forty acres, – the centre and nucleus of the fifteen hundred which he had got possession of and bequeathed to me, but which had so soon slipped through my fingers. There was this difference, however, between us; the land, when my father obtained it, was in good condition; it was now (so well had it prospered under Jones's hands) entirely worn out and impoverished, and not worth a fourth part of its original value.

To add to my chagrin, I discovered that Mr. Aikin Jones, whom I had treated rather as a friend than servant, had abused my confidence; in other words, that he was a rogue and villain, who had taken advantage of my disinclination to business, and my ignorance, as I believe I must call it, to swindle me out of my property, which he had the best opportunities to do. Whether he effected his purpose by employing my own funds or not, I cannot say; but, it is very certain, all the different mortgages in which I was entangled came, some how or other, by hook and by crook, into his hands, and he took care to make the best use of them. In a word, Mr. Jones became a rich man, and I a poor one; and I had the satisfaction, every day when I took a walk over my forty-acre farm, as the place was familiarly called, though the true name was Watermelon Hill, to find myself stopped, which way soever I directed my steps, by the possessions of Mr. Aikin Jones, my old friend and overseer, whom I often saw roll by in his carriage, while I was trudging along through the mud.

At the same time that I met with this heavy misfortune, I had to endure others that were vexatious enough. My brother-in-law and sister had their suspicions of Mr. Jones, and often cautioned me against him, though in vain, – not that I had any very superstitious reliance on the gentleman's integrity, but because I could not endure the trouble of examining into his proceedings and accounts, and chose therefore to believe him honest. This, and my general indolence and indifference to my affairs, incensed them both to that degree, that my sister did not scruple to tell me to my face that I had lost all the little sense I ever possessed; while my brother-in-law took the freedom of saying of me in public, "that I was *wrong* in the upper story," – in other words, that I was mad; and he had the insolence to hint "that it ran in my blood, – that I had inherited it from my mother," she, as I mentioned before, having lost her mind before her decease. I was so much irritated by these insults on their part, that I quarrelled with them both, though by no means of a testy or choleric disposition; and it was many years before we were reconciled. Having therefore neither friends nor family, I was left to bear my misfortunes alone; which was a great aggravation of them all.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE AUTHOR FINDS HIMSELF IN TROUBLE. – SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS SERVANT, HONEST JAMES JUMBLE

I have always described myself as of an easy, contented disposition; and such I was born. But misfortune produces sad changes in our tempers, as it was soon my lot to experience. Before, however, I describe the change that took place in mine, it is fit I should let the reader understand to what condition I was reduced by the perfidy of Jones, – or, as I should rather say, by my own culpable neglect of my affairs.

My whole landed possessions consisted of a farm of forty acres, which I had, after the fashion of some of my richer neighbours in other states, suffered to fall into the most wretched condition imaginable. My meadow-lands, being broken in upon by the river, and neglected, were converted into quagmires, reed-brakes, and cat-tail patches, the only use of which was to shelter wild-fowl and mire cattle. However, my live-stock was scanty enough, and the only sufferers were my neighbours, whose cows easily made their way through my fences, and stuck fast in the mud at their pleasure. My fields were overgrown here with mullein and St. John's-wort, and there with sand-burs and poke-berries. My orchards were in an equally miserable condition, – the trees being old, rotten, or worm-eaten, half of them torn down by the winds, and the remainder fit for nothing but fire-wood. My barn was almost roofless; and as for a stable, I had so little occasion for one, that my old negro-man Jim, of whom I shall have more to say hereafter, or his wife Dinah, or both together, thinking they could do nothing better with it, helped the winds to tear it to pieces, especially in the winter, when it formed a very convenient wood-pile. My dwelling-house was also suffering from decay. It was originally a small frame building; but my father had added to it one portion after another, until it became spacious; and the large porches in front and on the rear, gave it quite a genteel, janty air. But this it could not long keep; the sun and rain gradually drove the white paint from the exterior, and the damp getting inside, the fine paper-hangings, pied and spotted, peeled from the walls. The window-frames rotted, and the glasses left them one after another; and one day in a storm one half the front porch tumbled down, and the remainder, which I propped up as well as I could, had a mighty mean and poverty-stricken appearance. The same high wind carried away one of my chimneys, which, falling on a corner of the roof, crushed that into the garret, and left one whole gable-end in ruins.

It must not be supposed that my property presented altogether this wretched appearance at the moment of my losses. It was in truth bad enough then; but I am now describing it as it appeared some few years after, when my miseries were accumulated in the greatest number, and I was just as poor as I could be.

In all this period of trouble and vexation I had but one friend, if I dare call him such; though I should have been glad half the time to be rid of him. This was my negro-man Jim, or Jim Jumble, as he was called, of whom I spoke before, – an old fellow that had been a slave of my father, and was left to me in his will. He was a crabbed, self-willed old fellow, whom I could never manage, but who would have all things his own way, in spite of me. As I had some scruples of conscience about holding a slave, and thought him of no value whatever, but, on the contrary, a great trouble, I resolved to set him free, and accordingly mentioned my design to him; when, to my surprise, he burst into a passion, swore he would *not* be free, and told me flatly I was his master, and I should take care of him: and the absurd old fool ended by declaring, if I made him a free man he would have the law of me, "he would, by ge-hosh!"

I never could well understand the cause of his extreme aversion to being made free; but I suppose, having got the upper hand of me, and being wise enough to perceive the difference between living, on the one hand, a lazy life, without any care whatever, as my slave, and, on the other, labouring

hard to obtain a precarious subsistence as a free man, he was determined to stick by me to the last, whether I would or not. Some little affection for me, as I had grown up from a boy, as it were, under his own eye, was perhaps at the bottom of his resolution; but if there were, it was of a strange quality, as he did nothing but scold and grumble at me all day long. I remember, in particular, that, when the match I spoke of before was broken off, and he had heard of it, he came to me in a great passion, and insolently asked "what I meant by courting a wife, who would be a good mistress to him, and not marrying her?" and, on my condescending to explain the reasons of my change of mind, he told me plumply, "I had no more sense than a nigger; for women was women, and children children; and he was tired living so long in a house with none but me and Massa Jones for company."

I suppose it was old Jim's despair of my ever marrying, that put him upon taking a wife himself; for one day, not long after I was reduced to the forty-acre farm, he brought home a great ugly free negro-woman, named Dinah, whom he installed into the kitchen without the least ceremony, and without so much as even informing me of his intention. Having observed her two or three times, and seeing her at last come bouncing into the dinner-room to wait on me, I asked her who she was, and what she wanted; to which she answered, "she was Jim's wife, and Jim had sent her in to take care of me."

It was in this way the old rascal used me. It was in vain to complain; he gave me to understand in his own language, "He knew what was what, and there was no possuming an old nigger like him; and if I had made *him* overseer, instead of Massa Jones, it would have been all the better for me."

And, in truth, I believe it would; for Jim would never have cheated me, except on a small scale; and if he had done no work himself, it is very certain he would have made everybody else work; for he was a hard master when he had anybody under him.

I may here observe, and I will do the old fellow the justice to confess, that I found him exceedingly useful during all my difficulties. What labour was bestowed upon the farm, was bestowed almost altogether by him and his wife Dinah. It is true he did just what he liked, and without consulting me, – planting and harvesting, and even selling what he raised, as if he were the master and owner of all things, and laying out what money he obtained by the sales, just as his own wisdom prompted; and finding I could do nothing better, I even let him have his own way; and it was perhaps to my advantage that I did.

But I grew poorer and poorer, notwithstanding: and at that period, which I shall ever be inclined to consider as the true beginning of my eventful life, I was reduced almost to the point of despair; for my necessities had compelled me to mortgage the few miserable acres I had left, and I saw nothing but utter ruin staring me in the face.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **SHEPPARD LEE EXPERIENCES HIS SHARE OF THE RESPECT THAT IS ACCORDED TO "HONEST POVERTY." – HIS INGENIOUS AND HIGHLY ORIGINAL DEVICES TO AMEND HIS FORTUNE**

It may be asked, why I made no efforts to retrieve my fortunes? I answer to that, that I made many, but was so infatuated that I never once thought of resorting to the most obvious, rational, and only means; that is to say, of cultivating with industry my forty acres, as my father had done before me. This idea, so sluggish was my mind, or so confused by its distresses, never once occurred to me; or if it did, it presented so many dreary images, and so long a prospect of dull and disagreeable labour, that I had not the spirit to pursue it. The little toil I was forced to endure – for my necessities now compelled me at times to work with my own hands – appeared to me intolerably irksome; and I was glad to attempt any thing else that seemed to promise me good luck, and did not require positive labour.

The first plan of bettering my fortune that I conceived, was to buy some chances in a lottery, which I thought an easy way of making money; as indeed it is, when a man can make any. I had my trouble for my pains, with just as many blanks as I had bought tickets; upon which I began to see clearly that adventuring in a lottery was nothing short of gambling, as it really is; and so I quitted it.

I then resolved to imitate the example of a neighbour, who had made a great sum of money by buying and selling to advantage stock in a southern gold-mining company; and being very sanguine of success, I devoted all the money I could scrape together to the purpose, and that so wisely, that a second instalment being suddenly demanded, I had nothing left to discharge it with, and no means of raising any; the consequence of which was, that I was forced to sell at the worst time in the world, and retired from the concern with just one fifth the sum I had invested in it. I saw then that I had no talent for speculating, and I began to have my doubts whether stock-jobbing was not just as clear gambling as horse-racing and lottery speculation.

I tried some ten or a dozen other projects with a view to better my condition; but, as I came off with the same luck from all, I do not think it necessary to mention them. I will, however, state, as a proof how much my difficulties had changed my mind on that subject, that one of them was of a matrimonial character. My horror of squabbling children and scolding wives melted away before the prospect of sheriffs and executions; and there being a rich widow in the neighbourhood, I bought me a new coat, and made her a declaration. But it was too late in the day for me, as I soon discovered; for besides giving me a flat refusal, she made a point of revealing the matter to all her acquaintance, who did nothing but hold me up to ridicule.

I found that my affairs were falling into a desperate condition; and not knowing what else to do, I resolved to turn politician, with the hope of getting some office or other that might afford me a comfortable subsistence.

This was the maddest project that ever possessed my brain; but it was some time before I came to that conclusion. But, in truth, from having been the easiest and calmest tempered man in the world, I was now become the most restless and discontented, and incapable of judging what was wise and what foolish. I reflected one day, that of my old school and college mates who were still alive, there was not one who had not made some advance in the world, while I had done nothing but slip backwards. It was the same thing with dozens of people whom I remembered as poor farmers' boys, with none of the advantages I had possessed, but who had outstripped me in the road to fortune, some being now rich cultivators, some wealthy manufacturers and merchants, while two or three had got into the legislature, and were made much of in the newspapers. One of my old companions had

emigrated to the Mississippi, where he was now a cotton-planter, with a yearly revenue of twenty or thirty thousand dollars; another had become a great lawyer in an adjacent state; and a third, whom I always thought a very shallow, ignorant fellow, and who was as poor as a rat to boot, had turned doctor, settled down in the village, and, besides getting a great practice, had married the richest and finest girl in all the county. There was no end to the number of my old acquaintances who had grown wealthy and distinguished; and the more I thought of them, the more discontented I became.

My dissatisfaction was increased by discovering with what little respect I was held among these happy people. The doctor used to treat me with a jocular sort of familiarity, which I felt to be insulting; the lawyer, who had eaten many a dinner at my table, when I was able to invite him, began to make me low bows, instead of shaking hands with me; and the cotton-planter, who had been my intimate friend at college, coming to the village on a visit to his relations, stared me fiercely in the face when I approached him, and with a lordly "hum – ha!" asked me "Who the devil I might be?" As for the others, they treated me with as little consideration; and I began to perceive very plainly that I had got into the criminal stage of poverty, for all men were resolved to punish me. It is no wonder that poverty is the father of crime, since the poor man sees himself treated on all hands as a culprit.

I had never before envied a man for enjoying more consideration in the world than myself: but the discovery that I was looked upon with contempt filled me with a new subject for discontent. I envied my richer neighbours not only for being rich, but for being what they considered themselves, my superiors in standing. I may truly say, I scarce ever saw, in those days, a man with a good coat on his back, without having a great desire to beat him. But as I was a peaceable man, my anger never betrayed me into violence.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **THE AUTHOR BECOMES A POLITICIAN, AND SEEKS FOR AN OFFICE. – THE RESULT OF THAT PROJECT**

My essay in politics was soon made. I spent a whole week in finding out who were the principal office-holders, candidates, and busybodies, both in the state and the general governments; and which were the principal parties; there being so many, that an honest man might easily make a mistake among them. Being satisfied on these points, I chose the strongest party, on the principle that the majority must always be right, and attended the first public meeting that was held, where I clapped my hands and applauded the speeches with so much spirit, that I was taken notice of and highly commended by several of the principal leaders. In truth, I pleased them so well, that they visited me at my house, and encouraged me to take a more prominent part in the business of politics; and this I did, for at the next meeting, I got up and made a speech; but what it was about I know no more than the man in the moon, otherwise I would inform the reader. My only recollection of it is, that there was great slashing at the banks and aristocrats that ground the faces of the poor; for I was on what our opponents called the hurrah side, and these were the things we talked about. I received uncommon applause; and, in fact, there was such a shouting and clapping of hands, that I was obliged to put an end to my discourse sooner than I intended.

But I found myself in great favour with the party, and being advised by the leaders, who considered I had a talent that way, to set about converting all I knew in the county who were not of our party, and they hinting that I should certainly, in case the county was gained (for our county happened to be a little doubtful at that time), be appointed to the postoffice in the village, I mounted my old horse Julius Cesar, and set out with greater zeal than I had ever shown in my life before. I visited everybody that I knew, and a great many that I did not know; and, wherever I went, I held arguments, and made speeches, with a degree of industry that surprised myself, for certainly I was never industrious before. It is certain, also, that there was never a labourer in the field of politics that better deserved his reward, – never a soldier of the party ranks that had won a better right to a share in the spoils of victory. I do not pretend to say, indeed, that I converted anybody to our belief; for all seemed to have made up their minds beforehand; and I never yet knew or heard of a man that could be argued out of his politics, who had once made up his mind on the subject. I laboured, however, and that with astonishing zeal; and as I paid my own expenses, and treated all thirsty souls that seemed approachable in that way to good liquor, I paid a good round sum, that I could ill spare, for the privilege of electioneering; and was therefore satisfied that my claim to office would hold good.

And so it did, as was universally allowed by all the party; but the conviction of its justice was all I ever gained in reward of my exertions. The battle was fought and won, the party was triumphant, and I was just rejoicing in the successful termination of my hopes, when they were blasted by the sudden appointment of another to the very office which I considered my own. That other was one of the aforesaid leaders, who had been foremost in commending my zeal and talents, and in assuring me that the office should be mine.

I was confounded, petrified, enraged; the duplicity and perfidy of my new friends filled me with indignation. It was evident they must all have joined in recommending my rival to the office; for he was a man of bad character, who must, without such recommendations, have missed his aim. All therefore had recommended him, and all had promised their suffrages to me! "The scoundrels!" said I to myself. I perceived that I had fallen among thieves; it was clear that no party could be in the right, which was led by such unprincipled men; there was corruption at the heart of the whole body; the party consisted of rogues who were gaping after the loaves and fishes; their honesty was a song – their patriotism a farce. In a word, I found I had joined the wrong party, and I resolved



to go over to the other, sincerely repenting the delusion that had made me so long the advocate of wrong and deception.

But fortune willed otherwise. I had arrived at the crisis of my fate; and before I could put my purpose into execution, I was suddenly involved in that tissue of adventure, which, I have no doubt, will be considered the most remarkable that ever befell a human being.

## CHAPTER VIII. A DESCRIPTION OF THE OWL- ROOST, WITH MR. JUMBLE'S IDEAS IN RELATION TO CAPTAIN KID'S MONEY

For five mortal days I remained at home, chewing the bone of reflection; and a hard bone it was. On the sixth there came a villanous constable with a – the reader may suppose what. I struck a bargain with him, and he took his leave, and Julius Cesar also, saddle, bridle, and all; whereby I escaped an introduction to the nearest justice of the peace. The next visit, I had good reason to apprehend, would be from the sheriff; for, having failed to pay up the interest on the mortgage, the mortgagee had discoursed, and that in no very mysterious strain, on the virtues of a writ of *Venditioni Exponas*, or some other absurd and scoundrelly invention of the lawyers. I was at my wits' end, and I wished that I was a dog; in which case I should have gone mad, and bitten the new post-master and all his friends.

"Very well," said I to myself; "the forty-acre is no longer mine." I clapped on my hat, and walked into the open air, resolved to take a look at it before the sheriff came to convince me it belonged to some other person. As I passed from the door, I looked up to the broken porch: "May it fall on the head of my successor," I said.

It was a summer eve, – a day in July; but a raw wind blew from the northeast, and the air was as chill as in November. I buttoned my coat, and as I did so, took a peep at my elbows: I required no second look to convince me that I was a poor man.

The ruined meadows of which I have spoken, lie on a little creek that makes in from the Delaware. Their shape is the worst in the world, being that of a triangle, the longest leg of which lies on the water. Hence the expense of embanking them is formidable, – a circumstance for which the muskrats have no consideration. The apex of the angle is a bog, lying betwixt two low hillocks, or swells of ground, between which crawls a brook, scarce deep enough to swim a tadpole, though an ox may hide in the mud at the bottom. It oozes from a turfy ledge or bar, a few feet higher than the general level of the hollow, which terminates above it in a circular basin of two acres in area. This circular basin is verdant enough to the eye, the whole surface being covered by a thick growth of alders, arrow-wood, water-laurels, and other shrubs that flourish in a swamp, as well as a bountiful sprinkling of cat-tails on the edges. The soil is a vegetable jelly; and how any plant of a pound in weight could ever sustain itself on it, I never was able to comprehend. It is thought to be the nearest road to the heart of the Chinese empire; to find which, all that is necessary to do is, to take a plunge into it head foremost, and keep on until you arrive at daylight among the antipodes.

The whole place has a solitary and mournful appearance, which is to many made still more dreary and even sepulchral by the appearance of a little old church, built by the Swedes many a year ago, but now in ruins, and the graveyard around it, these being but a short distance off, and on the east side of the hollow. The spot is remote from my dwelling, and apparently from all others; nevertheless there is a small farmhouse – it was once mine – on a by-road, not many rods from the old church. A path, not often trodden, leads from my house to the by-road, and crosses the hollow by the grassy ledge spoken of before. It is the shortest path to the village, and I sometimes pursued it when walking thither.

This lonesome spot had a very bad name in our neighbourhood, and was considered to be haunted. Its common name was the Owl-roost, given it in consequence of the vast numbers of these birds that perched, and I believe nested in the centre of the swamp, where was a place comparatively dry, or supposed to be so, for I believe no one ever visited it, and a clump of trees larger than those in other places. Some called the place Captain Kid's Hole, after that famous pirate who was supposed to have buried his money there, as he is supposed to have buried it in a hundred thousand other

dismal spots along the different rivers of America. Old Jim Jumble was a devout believer in the story, and often tried his luck in digging for the money, but without success; which he attributed to the circumstance of his digging in the daytime, whereas midnight was, in his opinion, the only true time to delve for charmed treasure. But midnight was the period when the ghosts came down from the old graveyard to squeak about the swamp; and I never heard of Jim being found in that neighbourhood after nightfall. The truth is, the owls never hear any one go by after dark without saluting him with a horrible chorus of hooting and screeching, that will make a man's hair rise on his head; and I have been sometimes daunted by them myself.

To this place I directed my steps; and being very melancholy, I sat down at the foot of a beech-tree that grew near the path. I thought of the owls, and the ghosts, and of Captain Kid into the bargain, and I marvelled to myself whether there could be any foundation for the belief that converted such nooks into hiding-places for his ill-gotten gold. While I thought over the matter, I began to wish the thing could be true, and that some good spirit might direct me to the spot where the money lay hid; for, sure enough, no one in the world had greater necessity for it than I. I conned over the many stories that old Jim had told me about the matter, as well as all the nonsensical ceremonies that were to be performed, and the divers ridiculous dangers to be encountered by those who sought the treasure; all which were mere notions that had entered his absurd head, but which he had pondered over so often and long, that he believed they had been told him by others.

The great difficulty, according to his belief, and a necessary preliminary to all successful operations, was first to discover exactly the spot where the treasure lay buried; and, indeed, this seemed to be a very needful preliminary. The discovery was to be made only by dreaming of the spot three nights in succession. As to dreaming twice, that was nothing: Jim had twenty times dreamed two nights together that he had fallen upon the spot; but upon digging it discovered nothing. Having been so lucky as to dream of a place three successive nights, then the proper way to secure the treasure, as he told me, would be, to select a night when the moon was at the full, and begin digging precisely at twelve o'clock, saying the Lord's prayer backwards all the time, till the money was found. And here lay the danger; a single blunder in the prayer, and wo betide the devotee! for the devil, who would be standing by all the time, would that moment pounce upon his soul, and carry it away in a flame of brimstone.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SHEPPARD LEE STUMBLES UPON A HAPPY MAN, AND QUARRELS WITH HIM

While I sat pondering over these matters, and wondering whether *I* could say the prayer backwards, and doubting (for, to my shame be it spoken, I had not often, of late years, said it *forward*), I heard a gun go off in the meadow; and rising, and walking that way, I discovered a sportsman who had just shot a woodcock, which his dog carried to him in his mouth. I knew the gunner at first sight to be a gentleman of Philadelphia, by the name of Higginson, a brewer, who was reputed to be very wealthy, and who had several times before visited our neighbourhood, for the purpose of shooting. I knew little of him except his name, having never spoken to him. The neighbours usually addressed him as squire, though I knew not for what reason. He was a man of forty or forty-five years old, somewhat fat and portly, but with a rosy, hearty complexion, looking the very personification of health and content; and, indeed, as I gazed at him, strolling up and down with his dog and gun, I thought I had never before seen such a picture of happiness.

But the sight only filled me with gloom and anger. "Here," said I to myself, "is a man rich and prosperous, who passes his whole life in an amusement that delights him, goes whither he likes, does what he will, eats, drinks, and is merry, and the people call him squire wherever he goes. I wish I were he; for, surely, he is the happiest man in the world!"

While I pondered thus, regarding him with admiration and hatred together, a bird rose at his feet, and he shot it; and the next moment another, which he served in the same way.

I noted the exultation expressed in his countenance, and I was filled with a sudden fury. I strode up to him while he was recharging his piece, and as I approached him, he looked up and gave me a nod of so much complacency and condescension together, that it rendered me ten times madder than ever.

"Sir," said I, looking him full in the face, "before you shoot any more birds here, answer me a question. Who do you go for – the Administration, or the Opposition?"

This was a very absurd way of beginning a conversation with a stranger; but I was in such a fury I scarce knew what I said. He gave me a stare, and then a smile, and nodding his head good-humouredly, replied,

"Oh! for the Administration, to be sure!"

"You do, sir!" I rejoined, shaking my fist at him. "Then, sir, let me tell you, sir, you belong to a scoundrelly party, and are a scoundrel yourself, sir: and so, sir, walk off my place, or I'll prosecute you for a trespass."

"You insolent ragamuffin!" said he.

*Ragamuffin!* Was I sunk so low that a man trespassing on my own property could call me ragamuffin?

"You poor, miserable shote!" —

So degraded that I could be called a pig?

"You half-starved old sand-field Jersey kill-deer!" —

A Jersey kill-deer!

"You vagabond! You beggar! You Dicky Dout!" —

I was struck dumb by the multitude and intensity of his epithets; and before I could recover speech, he shouldered his gun, snapped his fingers in my face, and whistling to his dog, walked off the ground. Before he had gone six steps, however, he turned round, gave me a hard look, and bursting into a laugh, exclaimed, tapping his forehead as he spoke, —

"Poor fellow! you're wrong in your upper story!"

With that he resumed the path, and crossed over to the old church, where I lost sight of him.

"Wrong in my upper story!" It was the very phrase which Tom Alderwood, my brother-in-law, had applied to me, and which had given me such mortal offence that I had never forgiven him, and had refused to be reconciled, even when, as my difficulties began to thicken about me, he came to offer me his assistance. "Wrong in my upper story!" I was so much confounded by the man's insolence, that I remained rooted to the spot until he had got out of sight; and then, not knowing what else to do, I returned home; when I had a visit from old Jim, who entered the apartment, and not knowing I had sold my horse, cried out, "Massa Sheppard, want money to shoe Julius Cesar 'morrow morning. Blacksmith swear no trust no more."

"Go to the devil, you old rascal!" said I, in a rage.

"Guess I will," said Jim, shaking his head: "follow hard after massa."

That insinuation, which struck me as being highly appropriate, was all I got for supper; for it was Jim's way, when I offended him of an afternoon, to sneak off, taking Dinah with him, and thus leave me to shift for myself during the whole night as I could. There was never a more tyrannical old rascal than Jim Jumble.

## **CHAPTER X.**

### **SHEPPARD LEE HAS AN EXTRAORDINARY DREAM, WHICH PROMISES TO BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS THAN ANY OF HIS PREVIOUS ONES**

I went therefore supperless to bed; but I dreamed of Captain Kid's money, and the character of my dream was quite surprising. I thought that my house had fallen down in a high wind, as, indeed, it was like enough to do, and that I was sitting on a broken chair before the ruins, when Squire Higginson made his appearance, looking, however, like a dead man; for his face was pale, and he was swathed about with a winding-sheet. Instead of a gun he carried a spade in his hand; and a great black pig followed at his heels in place of his dog. He came directly towards me, and looking me full in the face, said, "Sheppard Lee, what are you doing here?" but I was struck with fear, and could make no reply. With that, he spoke again, saying, "The sheriff is coming to levy on your property; get up, therefore, and follow me." So saying, he began to walk away, whistling to the pig, which ran at his heels like a dog; and I found myself impelled to follow him. He took the path to the Owl-roost, and, arriving there, came to a pause, saying, "Sheppard Lee, you are a poor man, and eaten up with discontent; but I am your friend, and you shall have all your wishes." He then turned to the pig, which was rooting under a gum-tree, and blowing his whistle, said, "Black Pig, show me some game, or I'll trounce you;" and immediately the pig began to run about snuffing, and snorting, and coursing like a dog, so that it was wonderful to behold him. At last the squire, growing impatient, and finding fault with the animal's ill success, for he discovered nothing, took a whip from under his shroud, and fell to beating him; after which the pig hunted more to his liking; and, having coursed about us for a while, ran up to the beech-tree, under which I had sat the day before, and began with snout and hoof to tear up the earth at its roots. "Oho!" said Squire Higginson, "I never knew Black Pig to deceive me. We shall have fine sport now." Then, putting the spade into my hands, he bade me dig, exhorting me to be of good heart, for I was now to live a new life altogether. But before I struck the spade into the earth he drew a mark on the ground, to guide me, and the figure was precisely that of a human grave. Not daunted by this circumstance, for in my dream it appeared natural enough, I began to dig; and after throwing out the earth to a depth just equal to the length of the spade, I discovered an iron coffin, the lid of which was in three pieces, and, not being fastened in any way, was therefore easily removed. Judge of my transports when, having lifted up the piece in the middle, I found the whole coffin full of gold and silver, some in the form of ancient coins, but the most of it in bars and ingots. I would have lifted up the whole coffin, and carried it away at once, but that was impossible; I therefore began to fill my pockets, my hat, my handkerchief, and even my bosom; until the squire bade me cease, telling me I should visit the treasure at the same hour on the following night. I then replaced the iron cover, and threw the earth again into the grave, as the squire commanded; and then leaving him, and running home as hard as I could, in fear lest some one should see me, I fell into a miry place, where I was weighed down by the mass of gold I had about me, and smothered. In the midst of my dying agonies I awoke, and found that all was a dream.

Ah! how much torment a poor man has dreaming of riches! The dream made me very melancholy; and I went moping about all that day, wishing myself anybody or any thing but that I was, and hiding in the woods at the sight of any one who chanced to pass by, for I thought everybody was the sheriff. I went to bed the following night in great disorder of spirit, and had no sooner closed my eyes than I dreamed the same dream over again. The squire made his appearance as before, led me to the Owl-roost, and set the black pig hunting until the grave was found. In a word, the dream did not vary in a single particular from that I had had the night before; and when I woke up the next day, the surprise of such an occurrence filled me with new and superstitious ideas, and I awaited the

next night with anxious expectations, resolved, if the dream should be repeated again, to go dig at the place, and see what should come of it.

Remembering what old Jim had said in regard to the full of the moon, I went to a neighbour's to look at his almanack (for I had none of my own), and discovered, to my unspeakable surprise and agitation, though I had half known it before, that the moon we then had would be at her full between ten and eleven o'clock on the following morning.

Such a coincidence betwixt the time of my dreams and the proper period for hunting the treasure (since at the full moon was the proper time), was enough of itself to excite my expectations; and the identity between the two visions was so extraordinary, that I began to believe that the treasure did really exist in the Owl-roost, which, being very solitary, and yet conveniently accessible from the river through the medium of the creek, was one of the best hiding-places in the world, and that I was the happy man destined to obtain it.

I went to bed accordingly the third night with a strong persuasion that the vision would be repeated: I was not disappointed. I found myself again digging at the beech-roots, and scraping up great wedges of gold and silver from the iron coffin. What was remarkable in this dream, however, was, that when I had picked up as much as I could carry, the squire nodded to me, and said, "Now, Sheppard Lee, you know the way to Captain Kid's treasure, and you can come to-morrow night by yourself." And what was further observable, I did not dream of falling into a miry place on this occasion, but arrived safely home, and beheld with surprise and delight that my house, which I had left in ruins, was standing up more beautiful than ever it had been, newly painted from top to bottom, and the pillars of the porch were gilded over, and shining like gold.

While enjoying this agreeable prospect I awoke, and such was the influence of the vision on my mind, and the certain belief I now cherished that the vast treasure was mine, – a whole coffinful of gold and silver, – that I fell to shouting and dancing; so that old Jim Jumble, who ran up into my chamber to see what was the matter, was persuaded I had gone mad, and began to blubber and scold, and take on in the most diverting way in the world.

I pacified him as well as I could, but resolved to keep my secret until I could surprise him with the sight of my treasure, all collected together in the house; and I proceeded without delay to make such preparations as were proper for the coming occasion. I took a spade and mattock, and carried them to the hollow, where I hid them among the bushes. But this I found difficult to do as secretly as I wished; for old Jim, either from suspecting what I was after, or believing I had lost my mind, kept dogging me about; so that it was near midday before I succeeded in giving him the slip, and carrying my tools to the hollow.

## CHAPTER XI. IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO A PERSONAGE WHO MAY CLAIM HIS ACQUAINTANCE HEREAFTER

In this place, to my dismay, I stumbled upon a man, who, from the character he had in the neighbourhood, I was afraid was hunting the treasure, as well as myself. He was an old German doctor, called *Feuerteufel*, which extraordinary name, as I had been told, signified, in German, *Fire-devil*. He had come to our village about two weeks before, and nobody knew for what reason. All day long he wandered about among the woods, swamps, and marshes, collecting plants and weeds, stones, animals, and snakes, which he seemed to value very highly. Some thought he was a counterfeiter in disguise, and others called him a conjurer. Many were of opinion he was hunting for gold-mines, or precious stones; while others had their thoughts, and said he was the devil, his appearance being somewhat grim and forbidding. As for myself, having lighted upon him once or twice in the woods, I did not know what to think of him; but I did not like his looks. He was very tall and rawboned, with long arms, and immense big hands; his skin was extremely dark and pock-marked, and he had a mouth that ran from ear to ear, and long, bushy, black hair. His eyes were like saucers, and deep sunk in their sockets, with tremendous big black eyebrows ever frowning above them; and what made him look remarkable was, that although he was ever frowning with his eyes, his mouth was as continually grinning in a sort of laugh, such as you see in a man struck with a palsy in the head. He was the terror of all the children, and it was said the dogs never barked at him.

I found him in the hollow, hard by the beech-tree, and had scarce time to fling my implements among the bushes before he saw me. He was standing looking over towards the old church, where there was a funeral procession; for that morning the neighbours were burying a young man that had taken laudanum for love two days before, but had only expired the previous evening.

As soon as the German beheld me, he started like a guilty man, and made as if he would have run away; but suddenly changing his mind, he stepped towards me, and just as we met he stooped down and pulled a flower that struck his eye. Then rising up, he grinned at me, and nodding, said, "Gooten morrow, mine prudder; it ish gooten dag!" – though what he meant by "*gooten dag*" I know no more than the man in the moon, having never studied German. I did not at all like his appearance in this spot at such a time; but I reflected at last that he was only culling simples, and had paused near the beech-tree to look at the funeral, as would have been extremely natural in any man. But I liked the appearance of the funeral still less at such a particular time, and I thought there was something ominous in it.

But my mind was fixed upon the treasure I was soon to enjoy too firmly to be long drawn off by any such doleful spectacle; and accordingly, having waited impatiently until the attendants on the funeral had all stalked away, as well as the German doctor, I stole towards the beech-tree, and surveyed the ground at its roots. There were some stones lying among them, which I removed, as well as the long grass that waved over their tops; and looking closely, I thought I could see among some of the smaller roots of the tree, that were pleached together on the surface of the earth, a sort of arrangement very much in shape of a grave. This was a new proof to me that the treasure lay below, and I considered that my good angel had platted these roots together, in order to direct me in what spot to dig.

I could scarce avoid beginning on the instant; but, I remembered, that was not the hour. I therefore concealed my spade and mattock, and went home; when the first thing I did was to hunt me up a book that had the Lord's prayer in it (for I feared to trust to my memory alone), and write



this out backwards with the greatest care; and I then spent the remainder of the day in committing the words to memory in that order; but I found it a difficult task.

As the evening drew nigh, I found myself growing into such a pitch of excitement, that, fearing I should betray the secret to Jim Jumble, who was constantly prying in upon me, I resolved to walk to the village, and there remain until the hour for seeking the treasure should draw nigh. I had another reason for this step; for my watch having gone, some month or two before Julius Cesar, to satisfy a hungry fellow to whom I owed money, I knew not how to be certain of the hour, unless by learning it of some one in the village; and to the village I accordingly went soon after sunset.

## CHAPTER XII.

### SHEPPARD LEE VISITS THE VILLAGE, MAKES A PATRIOTIC SPEECH, AND LEAVES THE FENCE

Having arrived at the village, I proceeded to a tavern, which was the chief place of resort, especially after nightfall, for all the idlers and toppers of the town, of whom there were great numbers, the village at that time being a place of but little business.

I found some ten or a dozen already assembled in the bar-room, drinking brandy, smoking, chewing, talking politics, and swearing. I had no sooner entered than some of them, who were discoursing loudly concerning the purity and economy of the government, and the honesty of those who supported it, appealed to me (my electioneering pilgrimage through the country having caused me to be looked upon as quite a knowing politician) to assist them in the argument they were holding.

Remembering the scurvy way in which I had been treated by the party, I felt strongly tempted to give them a piece of my mind on the other side of the question; but I thought of my buried treasure, and conceiving it unwise to begin the quarrel at that time, I made them no answer, but sat down in a corner, where I hoped to escape observation. Here I employed myself conning over the prayer backwards, until I was assured I was perfect in the exercise.

I then – still keeping aloof from the company – gave my mind up to a consideration of what I should do when I had transferred Captain Kid's hoards of gold from the coffin to my house.

The first thing I resolved to do was to pay my debts, which, how greatly soever they oppressed me, were not actually very fearful in amount; after which I was determined to rebuild my house, restore my fields to their original condition, and go to law with Mr. Aikin Jones, who I had no doubt had cheated me out of my property. It did not occur to me that, by such a step, I should get rid of my second fortune as expeditiously as I had the first; all that I thought on was the satisfaction of having my revenge on the villain, whom I should have punished in perhaps a more summary way, had it not been for my respect for the laws, and my being naturally a peaceable man. But I did not think long of Mr. Jones; the idea of the great wealth I was soon to possess filled my mind, and I gave myself up to the most transporting reveries.

From these I was roused by hearing some one near me pronounce the words "*Captain Kid's money*" – the idea that was uppermost in my own mind; and looking round in a kind of perturbation, I saw a knot of people surrounding Feuerteufel, the German doctor, one of whom was discoursing on the subject of the treasure in the Owl-roost, and avowing his belief that he – that is, the German doctor – was conjuring after it; an imputation that gained great credit with the company, there being no other way to account for his visit to our village, and his constant perambulations through the woods and marshes in the neighbourhood of the Owl-roost.

The German doctor, to my great relief, replied to this charge by expanding his jaws as if he would have swallowed the speaker, though he was guilty of nothing beyond a laugh, which was in depth and quality of tone as if an empty hogshead had indulged in the same diversion. His voice was indeed prodigiously deep and hollow, and even his laugh had something in it solemn and lugubrious. "Mine friends," said he, in very bad English, "I fos can do men' creat t'ings; put I can no find no Captain Kitt's money not at all. I toes neffer looks for coldt, except in places fare Gott puts it; t'at iss, in t'a coldt-mines!" With that, he laughed again, and looking upon the people about him with great contempt, he walked up stairs to his chamber – for he lodged in the inn.

Soon after this occurrence, and just when I had sunk again into a revery, a man stepped up to me, and saluted me in a way well suited to startle me.

"Sir," said he, "friend Kill-deer, before you scratch your head any more on this bench, answer me a question. What do you go for, – brandy-toddy or gin-sling?"

It was Squire Higginson, and he looked very good-humoured and waggish; but as I had dreamed of him so often, and always as being in his grave-clothes, I was rather petrified at his appearance, as if it were that of a spectre, rather than a mortal man. As for our quarrel in the meadow, it had slipped my mind altogether, until, having recovered my composure a little, it was recalled to my recollection by the associations arising out of his words.

But I remembered the circumstance at last, and being moreover offended by his present freedom, which was nothing less than sheer impertinence, I told him I desired to have nothing to say to him; on which he fell into a passion, and told me "I might go to the devil for a ragamuffin and a turncoat politician." But, mad as he was, he ended his speech by bursting into a laugh, and then, tapping his forehead as before, and nodding his head and winking, he left the bar-room to seek his chamber – for *he* put up at the tavern, as well as the German doctor.

These insults threw me into some ferment, and being irritated still farther by the remarks of the company, especially when some one asked what the squire meant by calling me a "turncoat politician," I allowed myself to be thrown into a passion; in the course of which I gave such of my old friends as were present to know that I had forsworn their party, and considered it to be composed of a pack of the corruptest scoundrels in the country.

This unexpected denunciation produced a great explosion; my old friends fell upon me tooth and nail, as the saying is, reviling me as a traitor and apostate. But, on the other hand, those of the opposition who happened to be present ranged themselves on my side, applauding my honesty, judgment, and spirit to such a degree, that I was more than ever convinced I had been on the wrong side. I met reproaches with contempt, and threats with defiance; opposed words to words, and assertions to assertions (for, in politics, we do not make use of arguments); and finding myself triumphantly victorious, I mounted into a chair, and made a speech that was received by my new friends with roars of applause. Intoxicated with these marks of approbation, I launched at once into a sea of declamation, in which I might have tossed about during the whole night, had I not by chance, while balking for a word, rolled my eyes upon the clock that stood opposite to me in the bar, and perceived that it wanted just a quarter of an hour to twelve o'clock. In a moment I forgot every thing but the treasure that awaited me in the Owl-roost; I stopped short in the middle of a sentence, took one more look at the clock, and then, leaping down from the chair, rushed from the tavern without saying a word, and, to the amazement of friend and foe, ran at full speed out of the village; and this gait I continued until I had reached the old Swedes' Church; for I had taken the footpath that led in that direction.

## CHAPTER XIII. WHAT BEFELL THE AUTHOR ON HIS WAY TO THE OWL-ROOST

As it was now the full of the moon, there was of course light enough for my purpose; but the sky was dappled with clouds very dense and heavy, some of which crossing the moon every minute or two, there was a constant alternation of light and darkness, so that the trees and all other objects were constantly changing their appearance, now starting up in bold relief, white and silvery from the darkness, and now vanishing again into gloom.

A cloud passed over the moon just as I reached the old church; and the wall of the burial-ground having fallen down at a certain place, where the rubbish obstructed the path, it was my ill luck to break my shin against a fragment; the pain of which caused me to utter a loud groan. To my amazement and horror, this interjection of suffering was echoed from the grave-yard hard by, a voice screaming out in awful tones, "O Lord! O Lord!" and casting my eyes round, I beheld, as I thought, three or four shapes, that I deemed nothing less than devils incarnate, dancing about among the tomb-stones.

I was seized with such terror at this sight, that, forgetting my hurt and the treasure together, I took to my heels, and did not cease running until I had left the church some quarter of a mile behind me; and I am not certain I should have come to a halt then, had it not been my fate to tumble over a cow that lay ruminating on the path; whereby, besides half breaking my neck, and cruelly scratching my nose, I stunned myself to that degree, that it was some two or three minutes before I was able to rise.

I had thus time to recollect myself, and reflect that I was running away from Captain Kid's money, the idea of losing which was not to be tolerated a moment.

But how to get to the Owl-roost without falling into the hands of the devils or spectres at the old church, was what gave me infinite concern. The midnight hour – the only one for attempting the treasure with success – was now close at hand; so that there was no time left me to reach the place by a roundabout course through the woods to the right, or over the meadows to the left. I must pass the old church, or I must perhaps give up the treasure.

There was no time to deliberate; the figures I had seen, and the cries I had heard, might have been coinages of my own brain; nay, the latter were perhaps, after all, only the echoes of my own voice, distorted into something terrible by my fears. I was not naturally superstitious, and had never before believed in ghosts. But I cannot recollect what precise arguments occurred to me at that moment, to cause me to banish my fears. The hope of making my fortune was doubtless the strongest of all; and the moon suddenly shining out with the effulgence almost of day, I became greatly imboldened, and, in a word, set forward again, resolved, if met by a second apparition, and driven to flight, to fly, not backwards, but *forwards*, – that is, in the direction of the Owl-roost.

On this occasion, it was my fortune to be saluted by an owl that sat on the old wall among some bushes, and hooted at me as I went by; and notwithstanding that the sound was extremely familiar to my ears, I was thrown into a panic, and took to my heels as before; though, as I had resolved, I ran onward, pursuing the path to the swamp. It is quite possible there may have been a crew of imps and disimbodyed spirits jumping among the graves as before; but, as I had the good fortune to be frightened before I caught sight of them, I did not stop to look for them; and, for the same reason, I heard no more awful voices shrieking in my ears. I reached the Owl-roost and the memorable beech-tree, where the necessity of acting with all speed helped me to get rid of my terror. I knew that I had not a moment to spare, and running to the bushes where I had hidden my mattock and spade, I fetched them to the tree, and instantly began to dig, not forgetting to pray backwards all the while, as hard as I could.

## **CHAPTER XIV.**

### **SHEPPARD LEE DIGS FOR THE BURIED TREASURE, BUT MAKES A BLOW WITH THE MATTOCK IN THE WRONG PLACE**

I was but an ill hand at labour, and of the use of the spade and mattock I knew nothing. The nature of the ground in which I was digging made the task especially difficult and disagreeable. There were many big stones scattered about in the earth, which jarred my arms horribly whenever I stuck them; so that (all my efforts to the contrary notwithstanding) I was, every minute or two, interrupting my prayer with expressions which were neither wise nor religious, but highly expressive of my torture of body and mind. And then I was digging among the toughest and vilest roots in the world, some of which I thought I should never get through; for I had not remembered to provide myself with an axe, and I was afraid to go home for one, lest some evil accident or discovery might rob me of the expected treasure.

Accordingly, I had to do with a tougher piece of labour than I had ever undertaken before in my whole life; and I reckon I worked a full hour and a half, before I had got the hole I was excavating as deep as I supposed would be necessary. I succeeded at last, however, in throwing out so much earth, that when I measured the depth of the pit with my spade, I found the handle just on a level with the surface of the ground.

But I was not so near the treasure as I supposed; I struck my mattock into the clay, scarce doubting that I should hear the ring of the iron coffin. Instead of reaching that, however, I struck a great stone, and with a force that made the mattock-helve fly out of my hands to my chin, which it saluted with a vigour that set all my teeth to rattling, knocking me down into the bargain.

Having recovered from the effects of this blow, I fell to work again, thumping and delving until I had excavated to the depth of at least five feet. My heart began to fail me, as well as my strength, as I got so deep into the earth without finding the gold; for I began to fear lest my dreams had, after all, deceived me. In my agitation of mind, I handled my tools so blindly, that I succeeded in lodging my mattock, which was aimed furiously at a root, among the toes of my right foot; and the pain was so horribly acute, that I leaped howling out of the pit, and sinking down upon the grass, fell straightway into a trance.

## CHAPTER XV. IN WHICH SHEPPARD LEE FINDS HIMSELF IN A QUANDARY WHICH THE READER WILL ALLOW TO BE THE MOST WONDERFUL AND LAMENTABLE EVER KNOWN TO A HUMAN BEING

When I awoke from this trance, it was almost daybreak.

I recovered in some confusion of mind, and did not for a moment notice that I was moving away from the place of my disaster; but I perceived there was something strange in my feelings and sensations. I felt exceedingly light and buoyant, as if a load had been taken, not merely from my mind, but from my body; it seemed to me as if I had the power of moving whither I would without exertion, and I fancied that I swept along without putting my feet to the ground. Nay, I had a notion that I was passing among shrubs and bushes, without experiencing from them any hinderance to my progress whatever. I felt no pain in my foot, which I had hit such a violent blow, and none in my hands, that had been wofully blistered by my work; nor had I the slightest feeling of weariness or fatigue. On the whole, my sensations were highly novel and agreeable; but before I had time to analyze them, or to wonder at the change, I remembered that I was wandering away from the buried treasure.

I returned to the spot, but only to be riveted to the earth in astonishment. I saw, stretched on the grass, just on the verge of the pit, the dead body of a man; but what was my horror, when, perusing the ashy features in the light of the moon, I perceived my own countenance! It was no illusion; it was *my* face, *my* figure, and dressed in *my* clothes; and the whole presented the appearance of perfect death.

The sight was as bewildering as it was shocking; and the whole state of things was not more terrifying than inexplicable. *There* I lay on the ground, stiff and lifeless; and *here* I stood on my feet, alive, and surveying my own corpse, stretched before me. But I forgot my extraordinary duality in my concern for myself – that is to say, for that part of me, that *eidolon*, or representative, or duplicate of me, that was stretched on the grass, I stooped down to raise the figure from the earth, in an instinctive desire to give myself aid, but in vain; I could not lift the body; it did not seem to me that I could even *touch it*, – my fingers, strive as I might, I could not bring into contact with it.

My condition, or *conditions* (for I was no longer of the singular number) at this time, can be understood only by comparing my confusion of senses and sensations to that which occurs in a dream, when one beholds himself dead, surveys his body, and philosophizes or laments, and is, all the time, to all intents and purposes, without being surprised at it, *two persons*, one of which lives and observes, while the other is wholly defunct. Thus I was, or appeared to be, without bestowing any reflection upon such an extraordinary circumstance, or being even conscious of it, two persons; in one of which I lived, but forgot my existence, while trembling at the death that had overcome me in the other. My true situation I did not yet comprehend, nor even dream of; though it soon turned out to be natural enough, and I understood it.

I was entirely overcome with horror at my unfortunate condition; and seeing that I was myself unable to render myself any assistance, I ran, upon an impulse of instinct, to the nearest quarter where it was to be obtained. This was at the cottage, or little farmhouse, which I spoke of before as standing on the by-road, a little beyond the old church. It was occupied by a man named Turnbuckle, whom I knew very well, and who was a very industrious, honest man, although a tenant of Mr. Aikin Jones.

I arrived at his house in an amazingly short space of time, rather flying, as it seemed to me, through the air, than running over the marsh and up the rugged hill. It was the gray of the morning, when I reached his house, and the family was just stirring within. As I ran towards the door, his dogs, of which he had a goodly number, as is common with poor men, set up a dismal howling, clapped

their tails between their legs, and sneaked off among the bushes; a thing that surprised me much, for they were usually very savage of temper. I called to Turnbuckle by name, and that in a voice so piteous that, in half a minute, he and his eldest son came tumbling out of the house in the greatest haste and wonder. No sooner, however, had they cast eyes on me, than they uttered fearful cries; the old man fell flat on his face, as if in a fit, and the son ran back into the house, as if frightened out of his senses.

"Help me, Thomas Turnbuckle," said I; "I am lying dead under the beech-tree in the hollow: come along and give me help."

But the old man only answered by groaning and crying; and at that moment the door opened, and his eldest son appeared with a gun, which he fired at me, to my inexpressible terror.

But if I was frightened at this, how much more was I horrified when the old man, leaping up at the discharge, roared out, "O Lord! a ghost! a ghost!" and ran into the house.

I perceived it all in a moment: the howling of the dogs, which they still kept up from among the bushes, – the fear of Turnbuckle and his family, all of whom, old and young, male and female, were now squeaking in the house, as if Old Nick had got among them, – my being in two places together, and a thousand other circumstances that now occurred to me, apprized me of the dreadful fact, which I had not before suspected: I was a dead man! – my body lay in the marsh under the beech-tree, and it was my spirit that was wandering about in search of assistance!

As this terrible idea flashed across my mind, and I saw that I was a ghost, I was as much frightened as the Turnbuckles had been, and I took to my heels to fly from myself, until I recollected myself a little, and thought of the absurdity of such a proceeding. But even this fatal conception did not remove my anxiety in relation to my poor body, – or *myself*, as I could not help regarding my body; and I ran back to the beech-tree in a kind of distraction, hoping I might have been revived and resuscitated in my absence.

I reached the pit, and stared wildly about me – my body was gone, – vanished! I looked into the hole I had excavated; there was nothing in it but the spade and mattock, and my hat, which had fallen from my head when I leaped out of it, after hurting my foot. I stared round me again; the print of my body in the grass, where it had lain, was quite perceptible (for it was now almost broad day), but there was no body there, and no other vestige excepting one of my shoes, which was torn and bloody, being the identical one I had worn on the foot hurt by the mattock.

## **CHAPTER XVI.**

### **SHEPPARD LEE FINDS COMFORT WHEN HE LEAST EXPECTS IT. THE EXTRAORDINARY CLOSE OF THE CATASTROPHE**

What had become of me? that is, what had become of my body? Its disappearance threw me into a phrensy; and I was about to run home, and summon old Jim Jumble to help me look for it, when I heard a dog yelping and whining in a peculiarly doleful manner, at some little distance down in the meadow; and I instantly ran in that direction, thinking that perhaps the bloodthirsty beast might be at that very moment dragging it away to devour it, – or hoping, at the least, to light upon some one who could give me an account of it.

I ran to a place in the edge of the marsh where were some willow-trees, and an old worm fence, the latter overgrown with briars and elder-bushes; and there, to my exceeding surprise, I discovered the body of Squire Higginson (for he was stone dead), lying against the fence, which was broken, his head down, and his heels resting against the rails, and looking as if, while climbing it, he had fallen down and broken his neck. His gun was lying at his side, undischarged, and his dog, whose yelping had brought me to the spot, was standing by; but I must add, that, as soon as I approached him, the animal betrayed as much terror as Turnbuckle's dogs had done, and ran howling away in the same manner.

Greatly incensed as I had been with Squire Higginson, I felt some concern to see him lying in this lamentable condition, his face blackened with blood, as if he had perished from suffocation; and stooping down, I endeavoured to take off his neckcloth and raise his head, in the hope that he might yet recover. But I reckoned without my host, – I had forgotten that I was a mere phantom or spirit, possessing no muscular power whatever, because no muscles; for, even in walking and running, as I was now aware, I was impelled by some unknown power within me, and not at all carried by my legs. I could not bring my hand into contact either with his cravat or head, and for a good reason, seeing there was no substance in me whatever, but all spirit.

I therefore ceased my endeavours, and began to moralize, in a mournful mood, upon his condition and mine. He was dead, and so was I; but there seemed to be this difference between us, namely, that I had lost my body, and he his soul, – for after looking hard about me, I could see nothing of it. His body, as it lay there in the bushes, was perfectly useless to him, and to all the world beside; and my spirit, as was clear enough, was in a similar predicament. Why might I not, that is to say, my spirit, – deprived by an unhappy accident of its natural dwelling, – take possession of a tenement which there remained no spirit to claim, and thus, uniting interests together, as two feeble factions unite together in the political world, become a body possessing life, strength, and usefulness?

As soon as this idea entered my mind (or *me*, for I was all mind), I was seized with the envy that possessed me when I first met the squire shooting over my marshes. "How much better it would be," I thought, "to inhabit his body than my own! In my own fleshly casing, I should revive only to poverty and trouble;" (I had forgot all about Captain Kid's money) "whereas, if once in the body of Squire Higginson, I should step out into the world to possess riches, respect, content, and all that man covets. Oh that I might be Squire Higginson!" I cried.

The words were scarce out of my mouth, before I felt myself vanishing, as it were, into the dead man's nostrils, into which I – that is to say, my spirit – rushed like a breeze of air; and the very next moment I found myself kicking the fence to pieces in a lusty effort to rise to my feet, and feeling as if I had just tumbled over it.

"The devil take the fence, and that Jersey kill-deer that keeps it in such bad order!" I cried, as I rose up, snatching at my gun, and whistling for my dog Ponto. *My dog Ponto!* It was even the truth; I was no more Sheppard Lee, the poor and discontented, – no longer a disimbodyed spirit,



wandering about only to frighten dogs out of their senses; but John Hazlewood Higginson, Esq., solid and substantial in purse and flesh, with a rosy face, and a heart as cheerful as the morning, which was now reddening over the whole east. If I had wanted any proof of the transformation beyond that furnished by my own senses and sensations, it would have been provided by my dog Ponto, who now came running up, leaping on and about me with the most extravagant joy.

"God be thanked!" I cried, dancing about as joyously as the dog; "I am now a respectable man, with my pockets full of money. Farewell, then, you poor miserable Sheppard Lee! you ragamuffin! you poor wretched shote! you half-starved old sand-field Jersey kill-deer! you vagabond! you beggar! you Dicky Dout, with the wrong place in your upper story! you are now a gentleman and a man of substance, and a happy dog into the bargain. Ha, ha, ha!" and here I fell a laughing out of pure joy; and giving my dog Ponto a buss, as if that were the most natural act in the world, and a customary way of showing my satisfaction, I began to stalk towards my old ruined house, without exactly knowing for what purpose, but having some vague idea about me, that I would set old Jim Jumble and his wife Dinah to shouting and dancing; an amusement I would willingly have seen the whole world engaged in at that moment.

**CHAPTER XVII.**  
**A NATURAL MISTAKE, WHICH, ALTHOUGH IT**  
**PROCURES THE AUTHOR A ROUGH RECEPTION**  
**AT HIS OWN HOUSE, HAS YET THE GOOD**  
**EFFECT TO TEACH HIM THE PROPRIETY OF**  
**ADAPTING HIS MANNERS TO HIS CONDITION**

I had not walked twenty yards, before a woodcock that was feeding on the edge of the marsh started up from under my nose, when, clapping my gun to my shoulder, I let fly at him, and down he came.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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