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## OLD JOHN RADDLE.

BY COL. J. W. DE FOREST.

(Concluded.)

But this matter could not go on thus, and how should he arrest it? As is usual with ascetic and unworldly persons who interfere in such passionate complications, he blundered. He should have gone straight at Mayfield; he should have said to him, "You are a gentleman, and you abuse your position; you have been educated under worthy influences, and yet you play the tempter and misleader; you are responsible for this folly, and you must end it."

But he was prejudiced against Luce, as not being a church member, and as being the daughter of a Cracker and rascal; he concluded that it was her rustic or frontery which was chiefly responsible for this furtive and indecorous love-making; and, as he did not find in himself the hardness to face her with such a charge, he resolved to report her to her father.

By the way, Mayfield nursed similar notions as to Luce's guilt; he conveniently forgot that he had touched his lips to her cheek before she had ever opened her mouth to speak to him; he maundered and grumbled, after the fashion of coverly lovers, about "a woman throwing herself at a fellow's head." And yet, if Parson Seymour had boldly said to him, "Thou art the criminal," he would have admitted it.

As the minister approached Raddle's he saw a chance of lightening his dreaded task. In that of the tavern, just about to mount his tall and bony bay, stood the father of sickly Mrs. John Raddle, a rather sinewy, round-shouldered farmer of eighty, poplarly styled Old Zeke Jeffris. This man being to some undiscoversable reasons, famous in Somerville, we must not bring him into our narrative without a word of description. As a philosophical artist defined a lion to be "a pair of jaws mounted on four legs, so I may portray Old Zeke Jeffris as a nose on two legs. The protuberance of his bowed shoulders seemed barely sufficient to balance his enormous equine proboscis. Children were terrified at it, and in their manhood never forgot it.

His claim to antiquity was unquestioned; he was not obliged to insist upon it, after the egotistic fashion of John Raddle; time only mind everybody who knew him called him old Zeke Jeffris. To the imaginations of the students of American history in the Methodist Seminary it seemed possible that he might have been clearing a land about Somerville before the advent of Columbus. Men who have measured the monuments of the mound-builders of the West have confessed that they never held anything which had to them such an air of forgotten ages as Old Zeke Jeffris.

It is, however, difficult to account for his reputation as a "character." He was called "a keen old chap," "a dry old chap," "a severe old chap;" and yet he never seemed to do or say anything to justify these epithets. He simply minded his business and held his tongue. If you made a remark to him, his usual comment was a noiseless laugh, a round-shouldered lurch, and two steps to right or left, by way of recovering his equilibrium. But people who knew him felt that the laugh and lurch were very significant, being always on the lookout for keenness, or dryness, or severity, in Old Zeke Jeffris.

When the Seymour family horse ran away with Mrs. Seymour and two children, and the ancient husbandman galloped after the escapee hallooing like a foxhunter, thereby scaring the family horse into twice the speed that he had contemplated, all Somerville was agreeably conscious that he had vindicated his reputation for being something out of the common way. Poynt Hendrix's Chloe, the lame laundress, related from house to house how "Old Mars Jeffris went a poundin' down de holler;" and John Raddle triumphantly observed several times a day for a week afterward, "I told ye the old man had it in him."

To this incarnation of mysterious keenness, dryness, and severity, Mr. Seymour gently broke the information that his grand-daughter was carrying on a flirtation in Oak Grove. Old Zeke received the announcement as he received most communications which did not refer strictly to his farming affairs. He gave one of his laughs and

made one of his lurches; then with a strenuous pinch of his leathery lips, he mounted the bony bay and rode off at a gallop; all this without saying a word to the anxious clergyman, or to anybody else. What he thought of Mr. Seymour's revelation he never told, and no merely human being could guess. Nothing could be inferred from his going off at a gallop, for he was continually departing from people in that fashion. If an angel had come to him with a message, he was capable of going off at a gallop.

Thus the minister found himself obliged, as he clumsily concluded, to report Luce's misdoing directly to her parents. John Raddle had come out of his front door just as his father-in-law thundered away, and now stood looking after the venerable cavalier with a tobacco-stained smile of admiration. He touched his hat as Mr. Seymour approached, for he recognized the fact that the parson was a gentleman, although not of course so chivalrous as the Squire and Col. Thornton. But his reception of the news of Luce's misdeed was as distressingly hardened as that of Old Zeke Jeffris had been mysterious.

"Kissin', hey?" he answered with a broad, easy, and somewhat puzzled laugh. "No great harm in that, Parson, I reckon."

Seeing that plain dealing was necessary, Mr. Seymour said firmly: "I am afraid so, Mr. Raddle. You must take into consideration the fact that this young man never can marry Luce."

"Who wants him to marry her?" returned Old John, hotly; then, gathering pride, "What's to hinder him from marryin' her?"

"He is one of the Mayfields of Oakland District," pursued the clergyman; "and such people as they think a great deal of wealth and blood and position."

Of a sudden John Raddle remembered that he had been born a low-downer, and that, with all his acquired acres and negroes, he was still not a gentleman. The great gulf between the two castes opened wide before him; he saw his daughter on one side and this high-toned youngster on the other; no union between them possible except to her depreciation and injury. In spite of the pint of whisky which he had drunk since "sun-up" he became humble and tractable in a moment.

"Wal, Parson—I'll tend to this," he said. "I'm powerful obliged to ye."

Thus it happened that Luce Raddle came home from an afternoon of rosy-checked happiness to an evening of sorrow.

"What ye been, Luce?" was her father's grim greeting, as she slyly entered the back door of the tavern.

"Out'n the pine woods," she mumbled, telling a little of the truth, after the fashion of people who have much to conceal.

"Come in yere," he said, pushing her into that very front room which he had repeatedly recommended to her as a proper place for sparring. "You've been down to Oak Grove with that student fellow."

"Wal, an' what of I hev?" retorted Luce, who inferred at once that she had been watched, and that it would be useless to deny the meeting.

"You've been thar every day for a long time," continued the father, remembering afternoon absences which had hitherto excited no suspicion.

"I know it. I've been thar to see 'im. I love 'im an' he loves me."

"Now, I jest want ye to quit these caps," he said, drawing a cowhide from his sleeve. "Will ye promise to?"

"I won't! I won't!" answered Luce, a scream of rage and misery in her despair.

John Raddle reasoned in the block about drawing fine distinctions looking at both sides. He did pause to consider whether it was his fault that his daughter had run up a foolish boyden; he said made it clear to his mind that she was one, and that she must be brot of it; then he took her in hand and flogged her unmercifully.

An old bachelor friend of mine often pines himself with declaring that "a good cowhiding will bring any woman to her senses." When the first blow stung through Luce's homespun rock she shouted defiance, but a minute more she was on her knees, holding up her hands and wailing, "Oh, don't, par!"

"Will ye quit it?" repeated John Raddle, his face glowing like a bonfire of anger and exercise.

"Oh, yes," sobbed Luce, willing to do anything that would keep that cowhide away from descending.

and writhing and crouching, to her room, her shoulders in a flame of stings, and her heart, as it seemed to her, broken. To make sure that she should not escape she was forced to go to bed, her shoes were taken away, and the door was fastened on the outside. Her father's last words were "Git yer nose pined to start for Uncle Jim's in the mornin'."

This was the culmination of calamity; this was worse than her fiercest throbbings. Uncle Jim Jeffris lived thirty miles or so "up Saludy," and before she could return to Somerville her hero would be gone. Luce cried, twisted, rubbed her tingling arms, tried to see their discolorations, muttered threats of vengeance, concocted plans of escape, and then went on with her crying, all that evening. They brought her no supper, and she was furious at that, for she had meant to break the plate and upset the jug of milk. But amid all her pain and wrath she remembered Frederic Mayfield with a pluckiness of affection which disposes a man to lift his hat to her memory. Hungry, sore, and shoeless, she was resolved to see him once more. Throughout the evening she watched a chance to escape from the house; and it seemed to her as if the hated world had never sat up so late before. Finally there came an hour when doors ceased slamming, and no more clumsy feet blattered along the creaking passages, and no more laughter or whistling of belated idlers resounded from the street.

After trying vainly to force her lock, she had recourse to the window. Knotting the sheets and blanket together, she made a ladder long enough to take her to the earth, and set off for the clerical residence. Stones, sticks, and burrs wounded her bare feet in the darkness, but she only cringed, and never uttered a cry nor slackened her speed. She threaded the pine grove, ran swiftly by a dooryard or two fit fear of dogs, crept under cover of a fence up a short alley, and was beneath the catalpas which embowered the parsonage.

The little wooden "half house" was as pitilessly quiet as a tomb. Had Frederic Mayfield actually been asleep and never known of the shivering girl who was blubbering her passionate grief under his window because she should see him no more, it would have been a ferocity of destiny which even an austere-minded man might be tempted to grumble at. Things happened better than that, and worse. Luce detected a glimmer behind the boy's curtain; she tossed a pebble or two against a window-pane; in another minute he was beside her. She clung to him, told her woful story, made him touch the welts on her arms, and cried over the approaching separation, hoping that he would somehow prevent it.

Low-down girls, take warning. If unwisdom is not its own reward, it has none. The savior who can not worship cannot love. Although Mayfield was sorry for Luce, although he was indignant at the savage punishment which she had received, although he knew himself to be mainly responsible for her griefs, he still wished that he had never seen her, and he longed to get rid of her. Of course he petted her; of course he tried to quiet her tiresome crying; but, of course too, he urged her to return home. They were whispering a parting when they heard a whistle, followed by a stealthy, menacing rush of approaching footsteps.

### III.

A discovery which transforms this story from a doleful comedy into a downright tragedy, had been made by John Raddle. After whipping Luce, his blood up and his hand in, he sought a new victim. This victim was Luce's confidante, and this confidante was a negro girl of fifteen, John Raddle's purchased property. Holding her in some way responsible for his daughter's boydenisms, he plied her so fiercely with the cowhide that under the torture the chattel made a woful revelation.

The born low-downer, the illegal trader with negroes, the coarse ignorant drunkard and ruffian, had crept so far up toward respectability that when he heard the tale of his child's misconduct he felt injured and dishonored. He dropped his cowhide and drew his revolver; he reeled about the room, threatening the life of the negroess, stamping and swearing. At last he rushed out, called for his horse, and rode at full gallop to Old Zeke Jeffris.

The Jeffris, although plain and illiterate people, had for many years been well-to-do farmers, and were not classed in the district as Crackers. Conscious that his marriage to the family had been his longest stride toward social consideration,

John Raddle was proud of his wife's relatives, sensitive to their criticism, and subservient to their council. A sob or two of shame mingled with his oaths as he now told them what he had to tell, and asked them what should be done. They, too, (Old Zeke, his wife, and his two grown grandsons, Scott and Harris,) were sullenly, if not acutely, conscious of injury and insult.

"I s'pose he thinks 'cause he's a great gentleman's son, he can do what he likes," growled Scott Jeffris, the eldest of the grandsons. "I say let's git after him, an' if he won't do what's right, kill him. By—, that's what I say."

The grandfather, who had not hitherto spoken, now lurched toward the mantle piece, took down his always-loaded rifle, and led the way to the stable, followed in silence by the others. In ten minutes four armed men were riding through the six miles of dim starlight which lay between the farmhouse and Somerville. Reaching the tavern they drank largely of whisky; then they repaired to Luce's room to obtain a confirmation of the negro girl's story; they found it empty, the window open, and the string of blankets hanging.

"She's run away," exclaimed John Raddle bewildered.

The old man, equally perplexed, laughed in his strange, mechanical way, and said nothing.

"She's gone for him," broke out Scott Jeffris; and they started on foot for the parsonage. A stealthy, rapid walk; a glimpse of the couple under the catalpas; a whispered consultation behind a thicket of roses; a gliding of two shadows around the rear of the house; then a whistle, and they were all together.

"Oh, par!" gasped Luce. She sprang away from her lover with instinctive fright and shame; but in the next instant she saw the revolver in her father's hand, and leaping at him, she caught his wrist.

"You git away!" cried John Raddle, flinging her violently aside, while Harris Jeffris seized her arm. "Look yere, Mr. Mayfield, don't you stir. Stand thar whar ye be till I've done talkin'."

A ghostly moon came out at this moment, and showed the young man standing with his back to the house, his face apparently pale in the dim light, but his manner cool and even defiant, and his hand grasping a revolver.

"Now, Mr. Mayfield, you know what this means," continued Old John. "Yes, you know. I want you to marry that gal."

Even as he made this demand it seemed to him absurd presumption, and his voice sank and quavered doubtfully over the last syllables. Never before, to his knowledge, had a man of his class laid such an injunction upon a man of the class of Frederic Mayfield.

"I s'pose you know why you oughter marry her," he continued with a gasp. "I s'pose you know it."

"I suppose I understand you," answered the youth with a frank haughtiness which showed great pride and great courage.

"Well, will do ye it?"

"No."

Both men raised their pistols simultaneously, but Luce prevented them from firing; she broke away from Harris Jeffris, flung herself upon her lover, and covered him with her body. "You shan't go to make him marry me," she screamed. "He needn't marry me."

Her cousin jerked her violently from her hold, and dragged her, struggling, to some distance.

"That's right—take her away," said the hard, resolute, pugnacious boy for whom she had sacrificed her happiness, and would have sacrificed her life. He looked as sternly and imperiously in the faces of the four threatening men who stood around him, as a Roman patrician might have stared at brawling plebeians, or a Polish noble at insolent serfs. "And you, the rest of you, be off!" he went on, gathering anger. "Another word of this bullying, and I'll send some of you to— Those that I miss I'll follow up. I'll hunt you out of the country. I'll teach you to insult and threaten a gentleman."

There were more angry words; another demand, and another refusal; then two detonations in rapid succession. John Raddle, with a ball in his thigh, the shot of a drooping pistol, saw Frederic Mayfield fall forward on his face. The others ran back; there was a ghastly group in the moonlight; a corpse wetting the dark turf with its blood; a girl rolling and shrieking beside it; four men, white and staring.

"He's done for," whispered Scott Jeffris. "Git up and git, uncle. Find yer hoss and travel for the swamp."

As John Raddle and his relatives disappeared, Mr. Seymour came upon the scene. He had been awakened by the altercation; had looked out of the window at the moment when the three Jeffries were retiring before Mayfield; had dressed as rapidly as possible, and arrived too late. All that he could do for his pupil was to carry his body into the house.

Next day there was a prodigious excitement in the district. At first public opinion was somewhat divided as to the guilt of John Raddle, many persons sympathizing with him when they learned the provocation under which he had acted. But when the Judge of the Circuit Court, old Squire Somers, Col. Thornton, and in general the lofty and wealthy citizens, took the ground that murder was murder, the commonality assented to the proposition, and agreed that the fugitive must be brought to trial. His low origin, his generally evil life, and especially his crime of selling whisky to negroes, also worked to his prejudice. Perhaps, too, his pecuniary success was now an injury to him, for envy abounds in backwardish regions, and is a good water.

The feeling against the homicide was heightened by the exertions of Col. Mayfield, who, on receiving news of his son's death, hurried post haste to Somerville, attended by several martial connections, as a Highland chief of the olden time traveled with his dachnewassal. The Colonel was a man of forty-five, swarthy, small, lithe, and graceful; a planter of unusual wealth; a leading politician in the state, and a thorough aristocrat in feeling; but smoothly condescending with the masses, persuasive, fascinating, and eloquent. Full of grief, but full of vindictiveness, he was determined that John Raddle should die; and he labored for that end very much as he would have labored for an election to Congress. It must be admitted, I suppose, that verdicts in South Carolina did not at that period follow strictly in the footsteps of law. To secure a favorable result in court it was often necessary to secure a favorable public opinion.

"My son did perfectly right," declared Col. Mayfield to Col. Thornton, as to other high-toned personages. "He did just what I would have advised him to do, and just what you would have advised him to do. Marry the daughter of a Cracker!—of the keeper of a crossroads grocery! impossible! It was a most insolent demand, and urged with illegal, insulting violence. What will our class come to if such demands can be made on it? The boy did perfectly right—as I might have known he would. As fine a boy—as gentlemanly a boy—here the Colonel's voice quavered a little—"yes, Sir, as noble and honorable a boy as your own."

Thornton grasped his hand in silence, and Mrs. Thornton burst into tears. The sorrows of the degraded Raddles were crowded out of sight by the sorrows of this fine gentleman—their associate and equal.

To commoner spirits the Colonel insinuated that the whole adventure had been a matrimonial plot of the Raddles; that they had put out their girl as a bait, with the hope of thereby deluding or bullying a rich youth into marriage; and that finding their game fruitless, they had murdered him in coarse anger, or mere savagery.

"I'm glad I met up with you, Colonel," said more than one convicted farmer. "I never got at the full rights of the case afore now."

It is a picture of justice in its simpler and more popular stages. One is reminded of Lucius Quintus imploring the Quirites in favor of his son, Cæso; of Virginius declaiming with sobs in the Forum, in preparation for the trial of Appius Claudius; of accused Athenians exhibiting their tears and their mourning garments to their judges.

Old Zeke Jeffris and his two grandsons were committed to jail; but the actual homicide remained hid in unknown fastnesses. There were scores of rumors; he had escaped to Texas; he had been seen in the neighborhood; he was going to give himself up; he had joined a gang of horse-thieves. There is little doubt that he was hid by his negroes, or by some of the low-downers. In some

criminal at the South was rarely considered an outcast by those two classes, the poor whites and the slaves. They were an all-pervading barbarism, surrounding every courthouse with a backwoods.

John Raddle was repeatedly "hunted after" by the Sheriff's posse; Col. Mayfield, armed to the teeth, was always of the party. At last, in a swamp on the Saluda, ten miles from Somerville, the assassin was tracked to the ruinous hovel, once the shelter of a runaway slave, which served him for a lair. Returning from a long expedition after food he had fallen asleep, and when he awoke at the sound of footsteps it was to look in the eyes of his pursuers. Six armed men were ambuscaded in front of the cabin, and as many on its flanks and roof. Planting himself, rifle in hand and revolver in belt, behind the doorpost, he called out "stop whar you be."

"Steady, Old John!" responded Kin Chertain, the Sheriff. "No use quarrelin' about it. We're all round ye."

"Stand right whar ye be, Kin," said Raddle. "I'm not gwine to be taken alive."

There was a pause and a muttered consultation among the besiegers, Col. Mayfield saying, "I can hit him from here," and the Sheriff answering, "No, no! let's coax him."

John Raddle took advantage of the momentary quiet to ask, "How's my daa'ter?"

"She's been mighty sick, but she's better!" replied Chertain, who was himself a father, and felt his heart at that moment stir to meet Raddle. "Come, John, don't let's have any nonsense now. Come out here, and obey the laws."

"See here, Kin, I want you to bar witness of one thing. You've got the Jeffries in jail. They ain't guilty. They was gwine away when it happened; they didn't so much's see it till 'twas done. I want you to let the court know that, Kin."

"I'll do all I can for 'em, Raddle. Come now, come out."

As the homicide made no response further than to glance at the darkening horizon, and as he was evidently revolving the small chance which remained to him of escaping in the approaching night, Col. Mayfield's hate burst forth violently, and he shouted, "Surrender, you scoundrel!"

"Who be you?" demanded Raddle, bringing his rifle to a level, and glancing along the barrel at the strange face, half hidden by the pine tree which served it for an ambuscade.

"I am Col. Mayfield," replied the unflinching planter, coolly watching the eye that was upon him.

At these words the murderer shrank back and slightly raised his weapon.

"Don't come no nearer," he said in a hoarse voice. "I don't want ter hurt ye. What I done to yer boy is enough—an' mo'n enough. But thar's one thing I didn't do—I didn't lay traps to catch him for my daa'ter. You've said so. Meu that's fed me here telled me so. It's a lie. John Raddle never thought of such a thing. He never thought of talkin' marriage till marriage was justice. He knows whar he b'longs, and whar the like of you b'longs. No, I never put my gal in his way. I'm clear of my meanness as that. But whar he—wal, no use talkin'."

"Yes, John, you've talked enough," said the Sheriff. "Now come out an' surrender. If you've done right, leave it to the jury, an' let's see if 'twas right."

"No," was the answer. "I've no use for juries. I know how law goes in this country. A common man don't b'long in court. Thar's no show for a low-down man like me when high-tone gentlemen git after him."

As he said this, Col. Mayfield sprang forward to the shelter of a tree which stood within ten feet of the door, yet not so promptly but that a rifle ball passed through his right arm, causing him to drop his pistol. As quick as lightning he picked it up with his left hand, presented and fired. A shriek resounded in the cabin; the Sheriff and his men rushed through the doorway; there lay John Raddle with a bullet in his brain.

"The beast!" muttered Col. Mayfield, turning the solid and bloody corpse upon its back with his feet, and gazing with disgust upon the upon the corpse, fairly staring, crimson eyes in death with years of drunkenness.

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