

**A FEARFUL NIGHT ON THE OHIO.**

It was in the Fall of 1830 that the writer of this sketch, while detained at Louisville awaiting the rise of the Ohio river to begin his journey to New Orleans, first made the acquaintance of Harris, a wealthy young merchant of the above named city, who had been spending the Summer in Cincinnati where he had gone to settle up some accounts of long standing. He was now on his way home, carrying with him quite a large amount of money which he had collected for the firm of which he was a junior member.

The season had been remarkably dry, and in consequence the river was lower than could be recollected by the oldest settler; but as the autumnal season advanced when the semi-annual rise of water might be confidently expected, many travelers arrived at Louisville to take advantage of the earliest boats for the lower country.

After many disappointments the river began to swell in good earnest, and all hurried on board their respective steamers to secure their passage home.

Harris and I having selected our stateroom and seen to the safety of our baggage, had leisure to look around us and make the acquaintance of our fellow-travelers. We found to our intense disgust it had been our misfortune to take passage with as large and as accomplished a set of gamblers as ever disgraced decent society. They were bound down the river on a "professional tour" through the Southern States.

As soon as we were well under way the implements of their nefarious trade were brought forth. Faro, rouge-et-noir, and various other games were exhibited to tempt the unwary to risk their money. At first many of the gentlemen on board objected to having the cabin turned into a gambling-hell, but the professionals loudly protested that they played only on the square, and furthermore declared that should one of their number be detected in cheating, the stakes should be forfeited and he be put on shore at the nearest landing. After this no more was said, and the numerous games went on without interruption.

For some time Harris, who was known to have a large amount of money in his possession, and who was an object of the gamblers' especial regard, firmly declined all invitations to "try his luck." But one evening, after the supper table had been cleared, he, weary of their importunity, or yielding, as he afterward told me, to a natural love for the excitement of play, consented to make one of a party of four who were about to sit down to a game of cards for small stakes, just to pass away the time.

For a while my interest in the fortunes of Harris induced me to remain at his side and watch the chances of the game; but as the stakes were small, and as the parties seemed evenly matched in point of skill, I soon tired of such uninteresting employment and retired to a distant part of the cabin to amuse myself with a book, in the contents of which I became absorbed. I read on for some time, probably an hour and a half, but while pausing to cut the leaves the book was new one, I became conscious that an unusual stillness pervaded the room. There was no longer to be heard the rattle of dice, the sharp click of the ivory "faro check," or the subdued murmur of the players. Raising my eyes to see what could be the cause of the sudden stillness, I saw that all the "banks" had been deserted, and the players were standing motionless around the table at which I had left Harris and his companion engaged at such.

Wondering what would induce men who were accustomed to risk the largest stakes on the turn of the wheel to take such an interest in so small a game, I threw down my book, and approaching the party soon made my way to the table. I say at once that a great change had taken place since I had been a looker-on. The stakes were largely increased, and two of the party, either unable or too timid to risk such large amounts, had withdrawn from the table. Harris and one of the gamblers, however, still retained their seats, and with eager faces and shaking hands shuffled the cards. Fortune seemed to have favored Harris, for just as I reached the spot he marked the last point in a closely contested game, while the professional, with a fierce oath, dashed down the cards and challenged him to give him his revenge with dice, to which proposition, after a moment's hesitation, Harris assented.

The dice and cups were produced, and the excited gamblers again bet their money, but no longer with the same result—Harris' good luck seemed to have deserted him, and his antagonist won stake after stake. Harris seemed now wild with excitement. He doubled every time until at last no less than ten thousand dollars lay upon the table, to be won or lost at a single throw of the dice. Again the gambler was successful. Harris sprang from his chair, and calling on his antagonist to remain where he was, repaired to his stateroom, and returning in a few minutes, he dashed down upon the table a large roll of bank notes, saying at the same time to the gambler: "You have already won from me over fifteen thousand dollars. The bank bills represent double that amount. I will now risk a like sum, and let the ownership of the whole be decided by a single cast!"

The gambler at once expressed his willingness to do so, but declared he had not so much money in his possession. The deficiency was, however, made up by others of the fraternity, and they prepared to resume the game. There was a large carving-knife lying near Harris, which the waiter had neglected to remove when he had cleared the table that evening. This Harris, with a careless and apparently as he took his seat, decided movement of the arm, drew close to his side.

To be continued.


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