

**DOLORES: A TALE OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND
DISTRESS: COMPILED, ARRANGED AND EDITED
FROM THE JOURNAL, LETTERS AND OTHER
MSS. OF ROLAND VERNON, ESQ.; AND FROM
CONTRIBUTIONS BY AND CONVERSATIONS
WITH THE VERNON FAMILY, OF RUSHBROOK,
IN CAROLINA**

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Dolores: A Tale of Disappointment and Distress: Compiled, Arranged and Edited from the Journal, Letters and Other Mss. Of Roland Vernon, Esq.; And from Contributions by and Conversations with the Vernon Family, of Rushbrook, in Carolina by Benjamin Robinson

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BENJAMIN ROBINSON

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FROM

THE JOURNAL, LETTERS AND OTHER MSS. OF

ROLAND VERNON, Esq.;

AND FROM

CONTRIBUTIONS BY AND CONVERSATIONS WITH

THE VERNON FAMILY,

Of *Washbrook, in Carolina.*

By **BENJAMIN ROBINSON.**

"——— Let us know,
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall: and that should teach us
There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

New York:

E. J. HALE & SONS, 16 MURRAY STREET.

1868.

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PREFACE.

To critics I have nothing to say in extension of aught that appears in the following pages. If they find anything to praise in what I publish therein, I am confident that they will be just to themselves, and give me due credit. If they find anything to ridicule, or to denounce, or to assist them in pointing a moral, I am sure they will make the most of it—they always do!

But to my general readers, I have something to premise; because I think they are entitled to an explanation, and I feel that I have a perfect right to offer one.

It is this: When my friend Mrs. Alice Vernon brought me the manuscripts which I have worked up into a connected narrative, with the request that I would edit them for publication, I appreciated my unworthiness for the labor, but such were my obligations to her that I could claim no right to give her a flat refusal. So I consented to consider the matter.

After some weeks of deliberation I replied, as I thought, in a very positive manner, that I must decline to undertake the work. Whereupon, she demanded my reasons, and I gave them.

I told her that a lack of acquaintance with the parties by whom her husband had been surrounded, and who would be necessary as *dramatis personæ* in the story of his sad life, would forbid my attempting the task; for to give interest to the chronicle, the characters of these persons would have to be portrayed very vividly. Mrs. Vernon overruled this objection by calling the names of each of these parties, and then selecting from our mutual friends others, who, she averred, were in some respects strikingly similar; after which she insisted

that I could take a peculiarity from this, and a peculiarity from that person, and by drawing upon her descriptions and my own imagination, so hit off the personages of the narrative as to preserve a sufficient accuracy and truthfulness to nature.

When I expressed my fear that this suggestion, if acted upon, would give offense, and that persons might be indignant from the supposition that I had caricatured them, Mrs. Vernon ridiculed the idea, and declared her perfect assurance that there is too much good sense in the majority of mankind for any sane person to be so stupidly foolish. I was not satisfied; but then, what is the use of arguing with a woman?

Subsequently, I reminded Mrs. Vernon that it was evident from the MSS. that her husband had been an Infidel, and that to present him fairly, many of his conversations would have to be transcribed, which would reflect, in all probability, great and unnecessary ignominy upon him; while, at the same time, I confessed that the moral of such a book, as that which she wished me to write, might prove hurtful, and would certainly subject me to unkind animadversion from flippant critics. Still Mrs. Vernon was not to be silenced or overcome; but she combated my suggestion, saying that while the superficial reader might condemn, the profound would approve,—that the moral was, instead of being evil, calculated to elevate, expand, and develop Christian virtues. As for her husband, she said that his misfortunes would shield him from ungenerous and unmerited censure. As for my fear that the fact of having edited such a book would subject me to the suspicion of heterodoxy, she laughed at it, and

taunted me with a lack of moral courage. Then I began to yield—who cannot face the fire of a world's abuse more firmly than a pretty woman's half meant, half pretended scorn?

Put to my trumps, at last I gave my best reason: I had no experience in book-writing, could not do the scene shifting, was not an artist—in a word, had no idea as to how a novel should be worked up for the press; and that, if the book was to be printed with any expectation, even of a respectable circulation, that it ought to appear in the form of a novel: all this I frankly said, and more. Yet Mrs. Vernon persisted in her confidence in my capacity to perform the labor, flattered me a little, and I surrendered.

When I got to work and had nearly completed my labor, I stumbled upon an obstacle to further progress. The description of Mrs. Adams' trial balked me—I could not understand the notes of the medical testimony left by Roland Vernon; and I regarded this as very important. I went to Mrs. Vernon with my distress—she is happy in expedients—and communicated information of the difficulty. She immediately proposed a plan of relief—the one which I adopted:—

"I understand," said she, "that the same experiments were made for detecting poison in this case as were made in the celebrated Simpson case. I have a copy of Mr. Haigh's report of that trial. Take it; and, with it, and a little cramming in chemistry, toxicology, and medical jurisprudence, you can understand Mr. Vernon's notes of the evidence of Doctors McPherson and Effingham."

This much of explanation, in advance, I have thought to be absolutely necessary—only a word, or so, more!

If any persons, after reading these Chronicles shall be disposed to condemn poor Roland Vernon for his dearth of Faith, let them recollect that he is yet young, and that his great afflictions may in the end break his stony heart, and direct him, in humiliation, to the fountain of Eternal Truth. When he drinks of the waters thereof, he may emerge from the darkness in which his spirit now dwells, purified and strengthened, and be what he ought to be—a Christian as well as a high-toned Gentleman.

BENJ. ROBINSON

FAYETTEVILLE, N. C.,
October 23, 1868.

P R O E M.

"BACK woman—back! What! Do you come to mock my woe? Do you bring those children here to taunt me with my misfortunes, to make them hate me because I have not provided for their wants?"

"O no! He did not speak thus to you—to you who have loved him so fondly! It cannot be—it cannot be that he reproached you thus—Tell me that you are only in jest!"

"I repeated his very words," sobbed the young woman. "He said more—worse; but I cannot, I must not tell you these things."

"Tell me all, child—tell me all! I cannot bear to hear; but I can no better endure not to hear! I entreat you, I command you to tell me everything!"

"When he spoke so cruelly," continued the younger of the two women, "I fainted; and just as I revived they seized him and started away. He went with them as far as the door; then turned and said in a sad tone that I shall never forget: 'It is not my fault that I have failed, my wife. I have not been unwilling to work for you and for them. But I started wrong—I tried to be honest and at the same time to succeed. I aspired to accomplish an impossibility.' Oh! I cannot go on, mother—I cannot!"

The older of the two, from whose eyes the tears fell rapidly, could only gasp, "Go on! I must hear all!"

"Then they carried him out; he struggled and hurled them from him; and rejoined me. Pointing to the children, he said, shaking his head, 'Don't let them know they have an ancestry! Don't let them be gentlemen! Above all things,

and his voice dropped into a whisper, 'never let them take an oath!' He commenced to say something else, but, I was so excited I could only hear the words, 'TEACH MY CHILDREN TO BE VILLAINS—THEN THEY WILL BE HAPPY!' Oh! mother! mother!"

Saying this, the younger of the ladies, weeping violently, fell into the arms of her companion, who folded her silently to her bosom.

Not very far off were two other women wearing the mourner's garb; while, closer at hand, two sunny-haired boys watched a parent's grief.

The old place, in whose park these women were weeping that afternoon—August 10th, 1868—was the homestead of a Carolina family. It was called RUSHBROOK, and had received its name from its original owner.

Rushbrook was situated on a plateau of thirty acres, which, edged by a forest growth of oak and pine, sloped with a gentle declivity from three sides to the banks of a rapid stream whose transparent waters, flowing through a jagged but glittering bed of sparkling sands and shining pebbles, murmuring a soft melody as they danced over the rugged surface of the uneven channel, rippled on to mingle with the turbulent current of the not distant Cape Fear.

It was reached from C—town, located on the river shore, by a wide turnpike that stretched towards the West and bounded the tract on the South, passing the great gate, from which, through a cedar lined avenue, nestling amid a depth of foliage afforded by the magnolias, oaks, chestnuts and mock orange trees, could be seen a quaint old two and a half story building, once

painted white, and its square sides picturesquely set off with heavy green blinds, but now,—for it had been built nearly three quarters of a century,—beaten and discolored by the peltings of many storms, and shrunken and gnawed by the sharp tooth of Time—the angular roof being covered with moss, and the panes of the odd-fashioned dormer windows, that stood out like grim sentinels above the battlements of a fortress, full of the ugly webs that busy spiders had woven during the long days of many a year.

In rear of this building was a large yard, with stables, barns, and other outhouses, shaded by huge mulberries, behind which was a wide stretch of cornfield, the landscape being relieved here and there by luxuriant vines, running with well trained regularity along the firm supports of stout arbors, which were flanked by fruit trees, heavy laden with the rich abundance of a plenteous yield.

In front, between the house and the road, there was a circular park, fenced by a hedge of osage-orange that followed the outer circumference of a wide gravelled foot and carriage way. This park was bisected by an avenue, the guard of cedars, on either side of it, stretching out their limbs, interlacing their branches, and forming a sombre canopy. The great semicircles, into which the park was thus divided, were full of gigantic trees, whose luxuriant boughs and vine clad crests gave a cool retreat of shade and provided a deep seclusion for the inmates of Rushbrook.

This elegant seat was once the home of happiness, the abode of wealth, the shrine of an unbounded and freely dispensed hospitality. But misfortunes had come upon its occupants; and now, alas! the auctioneer's hammer was to ring where Beauty's laugh had resounded.

Rushbrook was to be sold on the morrow; the mortgagee's advertisement was tacked on its gate post; and four women who had loved it in its better days were now taking a last sad look at the scenes of a happiness that had departed.

"Let us go, daughter!" said the elderly lady, after drying the flood of tears that the other's recital had evoked. "I cannot

stay here—the memories revived by these scenes are too painful. Let us go!"

"Shall we call *them*, or leave them behind?" was the inquiry of the daughter, as she pointed to the ladies conversing a short distance off, and at the same time beckoning to her children.

"As you please, dear!"

"Come Mrs. Adams—both of you! We are going. Are you ready?"

"Certainly!" replied the younger, but the sadder of these ladies, hurrying forward to join the group nearest the gate.

The sun was sinking, and the western sky was brilliant with variegated colors; white clouds, drifting over a background of cerulean blue, were rimmed with blended gold and red; long shafts of illuminated silver shot upwards, like mighty columns of moonbeams, resting on the dark horizon, ever and anon lifting themselves to the zenith, as if to light the world, now that the Day-God had abandoned his throne; while sweeping from North to South was a vast expanse of an orange sea, over the surface of which crimson billows were beating like the furious waves of a tropical tempest-tossed ocean at dawn. From this sky there lingered a reflection of light on the roof of the Rushbrook House, and upon the cobwebbed panes of the dormer windows, the sun had wrought pictures of fantastic shapes; the leaves of trees in the park were glistening brightly from the effulgence that was wrapping all nature in its soft embrace; the whole landscape was glowing with a radiant loveliness! While all was yet entrancingly beautiful, she, who was called mother, turned and beheld the gorgeous pageant.

"Dear, dear old Rushbrook!" she exclaimed with great fervor. "How can we leave you? O God! why have we been doomed to so much misery?"

"Alas!" interposed a weak, sorrowful voice. "Alas! that I should have been the cause of this parting. It would have been better to have died than to have brought grief and poverty to my friends!"

"Say not so!" responded the other. "Say not so, my child! We regret the loss of our home; but we are proud of the

act that has rendered the sacrifice necessary."

"And do you still love me, since I was the immediate cause of his incarceration, since to save me you have been forced to surrender your home?"

"How can you doubt it?" was the half pitying, half indignant rebuke.

"You must remember that the members of our race count nothing vainly expended that is consecrated to the maintenance of Truth, or that is devoted to the defence of Innocence!"

With these words, Mrs. Vernon turned her back on the seat of her former splendor, and swept majestically into the C— town road.

The sunlight which had played on the roof and illuminated the park, as if sym-

pathising with the noble matron's sorrow, died out utterly, and the sombre gloom of twilight encompassed the landscape.

What sorrow was it that pressed on this stately woman? Who were her companions? Of whom did Mrs. Vernon's daughter speak? who was he that had spoken those bitter words which she repeated? Where was he imprisoned and for what? Why had he uttered that horrible command—"TEACH MY CHILDREN TO BE VILLAINS!"

It will be the Editor's effort to answer these questions in the following chapters.

Each reader, after their perusal, must determine for himself whether Roland Vernon was a man, or a devil.