

EXPIATION

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Expiation by Octave Thanet & A. B. Frost

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OCTAVE THANET & A. B. FROST

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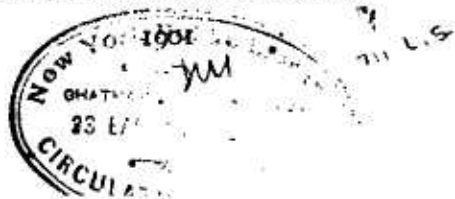
"You have one brave boy alive," said Adble steadily.

EXPIATION

BY
OCTAVE THANET

ILLUSTRATED BY A. B. FROST

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS



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EXPIATION.

I.

ONLY the puddles and sluices of water showed, unless the rider flashed his lantern down the road. Then a disk of landscape, a kind of weird etching, was struck out of the night. Huge gum-trees dripped on either side; a stealthy patter of rain-drops dribbling through the thicket of trumpet-vines, "tar-blankets,"* and briar which masked the swamp beneath. The rain had ceased, but not a star appeared to illumine this surly and dismal nature.

East and west, as the lantern-bearer knew, the rotten corduroy was drawn in a straight line across the morass. East and west, north and south, only a few lonely cabins with their clearings broke the monotony of the forest between Village Creek and the Black River. Wherever the land was creased by a depression, the water covered the roots of the cypresses and tupello-gums.

* Or, *tear*-blankets.

"What a country to live in!" muttered the rider; "is all Arkansas like this, I wonder?"

Any one could guess from the voice that he who spoke was not a Southerner. It was a very pleasant voice, however, with nice modulations, and when the lantern rays swerved at a stumble of the horse, they showed a slender, well-knit figure, and a delicate, bright young face, with gentle brown eyes, and not enough down on the upper lip or cheek to hide a mobile mouth and rounded chin; altogether a handsome young fellow. Tiny wrinkles at the corners of the eyelids and a dimple in the cheek hinted that this was also a young fellow who laughed easily. He was laughing now, swinging the lantern above his mud-splashed legs. "What a figure of fun you are, Fairfax Rutherford," said he, gayly, "and yet you don't look half the native either."

With a praiseworthy notion of suiting his dress to the country, Fairfax, before he left England, had bought such an outfit as they sell you in Regent Street "for the bush." Therefore he was clad in a wide, cream-colored soft hat, a shooting-jacket of brown duck that bristled with pockets, and corduroy trousers pushed into leggins.

"Father will laugh at me, I dare say"—so his