

# Riders in the Night

By Madison Cawein

## I

### MASKS

Death rides black-masked to-night; and through the land  
Madness beside him brandishes a torch.  
The peaceful farmhouse with its vine-wreathed porch  
Lies in their way. Death lifts a bony hand  
And knocks, and Madness makes a wild demand  
Of fierce Defiance: then the night's deep arch  
Reverberates, and under beech and latch  
A dead face stares; shot where one took his stand.  
Then down the night wild hoofs; the darkness beats;  
And like a torrent through the startled town  
Destruction sweeps; high overhead a flame;  
And Violence that shoots amid the streets.  
A piercing whistle: one who gallops down:  
And Death and Madness go the way they came.

## II

### THE RAID

Rain and black night. Beneath the covered bridge  
The rushing Fork that roars among its rocks.  
Nothing is out.—Nothing?—What's that which blocks  
The long grey road upon the rain-swept ridge?  
A horseman! No! A mask! As hewn from jet  
With ready gun he waits and sentinels  
The open way. Far off he hears wild bells;  
And now a signal shrills through wind and wet.  
Was that the thunder, or the rushing stream?  
The tunnel of the bridge throbs with mad hoofs;  
Now its black throat pours out a midnight cloud—  
Riders! behind whom steadily a gleam  
Grows to a glare that silhouettes dark roofs,  
Whence armed Pursuit gathers and gallops loud.

### III

#### THE RENDEZVOUS

A lonely barn, lost in a field of weeds;  
A fallen fence, where partly hangs a gate:  
The skies are darkening and the hour is late;  
The Indian dusk comes,—red in rainy beads.—  
Along a path, which from a woodland leads,  
Horsemen come riding who dismount and wait:  
Here Anarchy conspires with Crime and Hate,  
And Madness masks and on its business speeds.  
Another Kuklux in another war  
Of blacker outrage down the night they ride,  
Brandishing a torch and gun before each farm.—  
Is Law asleep then? Does she fear? Where are  
The servants of her strength, the Commonwealth's pride?  
And where the steel of her restraining arm?

### IV

#### IN BLACK AND RED

The hush of death is on the night. The corn,  
That loves to whisper to the wind; the leaves,  
That dance with it, are silent: one perceives  
No motion mid the fields, as dry as horn.  
What light is that?—It cannot be the morn!—  
Yet in the east it seems its witchcraft weaves  
A fiery rose.—Look! how it grows! it heaves  
And flames and tosses!—'Tis a burning barn!  
And now the night is rent with shouts and shots.  
Dark forms and faces hurry past. The gloom  
Gallops with riders.—Homes are less than straw  
Before this madness: human lives, mere lots  
Flung in and juggled from the cap of Doom,  
Where Crime stamps yelling on the face of Law.