THREE YEARS IN A MAD-HOUSE

The Story of my Life at the Asylum, my Escape, and the Strange Adventures which Followed

BY

E. B. FLEMING

AND

AUGUSTIN FLEMING

We talk of human life as a journey; but how variously is that journey performed! There are those who come forth girt and shod and mantled, to walk on velvet lawns and smooth terraces, where every gale is arrested and every beam is tempered. There are others who walk on the Alpine paths of life, against driving misery, and through stormy sorrows, over sharp afflictions; walk with bare feet and naked breast, jaded, mangled, and chilled.—SYDNEY SMITH.

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DEDICATION:

TO THE CITIZENS OF SULPHUR SPRINGS
IN REMEMBRANCE AND APPRECIATION OF MANY KINDNESSES;
AND TO MISS ALICE E.,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK IN MEMORY OF THOSE PLEASANT
HOURS WHOSE RECOLLECTION HAS SURVIVED
THROUGH ALL THE STORM AND CHANGE,
THE SUNSHINE AND SHADOW
OF LATER YEARS.

A. F.
PREFACE.

I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period of my life; according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove, not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and instructive. In that hope it is that I have drawn it up; and that must be my apology for breaking through that delicate and honorable reserve, which, for the most part, restrains us from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities. Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that "decent drapery" which time or indulgence to human frailty may have drawn over them: accordingly, the greater part of our confessions (that is, spontaneous and extra-judicial confessions) proceed from demireps, adventurers, or swindlers; and for any such acts of gratuitous self-humiliation from those who can be supposed in sympathy with the decent and self-respecting part of society, we must look to French literature . . . All this I feel so forcibly, and so nervously am I alive to reproach of this tendency, that I have for many months hesitated about the propriety of allowing this . . . to come before the public . . . and it is not without an anxious review of the reasons for and against this step, that I have at last concluded on taking it.—From the "Confessions" of Thomas De Quincey.
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INTRODUCTION.

With the purpose of assisting the reader to a more perfect understanding of the truthful and authentic biography which is told in the following pages, it has been deemed expedient to give in this place a brief account of the events connected with, and leading up to, the narrator's imprisonment as a lunatic. This, for reasons which should be obvious to all, will be told in the third person. It is thought, or more properly, feared that the pronoun I has occurred much too frequently in the body of the work to make its introduction here anything but an error in taste.

The peculiar mania which affected the mind of Mr. Fleming, and which so altered the whole tenor of his existence, is probably best described by the term melancholia. The more immediate exciting causes were nervous depression arising from a disordered state of the system, and commercial reverses.

Mr. Fleming is a Georgian by birth and a Texan by adoption, having resided almost continuously in the latter state since ante-bellum days. Near the close of the old regime, as well as during the Reconstruction era, he was a dry goods merchant in the city of Jefferson, at that time the commercial center of northern and eastern Texas, with branch houses in Gilmer and in Sherman. In the year 1885 he had
mercantile establishments in the towns of Sulphur Springs, Coffeyville, and Cleburne. But by reason of ill health, which necessitated the use of deputies or agents in all business transactions, and for other causes into which we need not enter here, financial reverses came upon him, and the various houses were closed by attachment.

One result of this unfortunate occurrence was the overturn of reason and of physical health. In a few months confinement and restraint became necessary; the order was issued; and in the spring of the year 1886 he was incarcerated in the North Texas Hospital for the Insane, at Terrell, Texas.

He remained as an inmate of this institution for about three years, and at the end of that time made his escape in some unknown manner, and for a number of years all trace of him was lost. In the following pages a brief account is given of his life at the asylum, with a number of interesting incidents which occurred there; the first truthful account of the manner of his escape which has yet been made public; together with the strange and unusual adventures which came after.

The authors of this volume entertain the hope that it may not prove wholly uninteresting, and that the time spent in its perusal will not be considered as having been utterly wasted. It is thought that the scenes and incidents which are so tamely described are of such a character as shall, in some degree at least, suitably recompense the reader and the purchaser.
It is to be understood, also, that the present volume is, in however small a degree, an answer to those many kind friends who have so urgently requested the preservation in book-form of some account of these incidents and adventures.

To the critic, if any such shall honor our little book with his notice, it is only necessary to say that any studied attempt at literary embellishment or effect is hereby distinctly disclaimed; and this may palliate—though it cannot wholly excuse—any serious faults or rhetorical or other inaccuracies or solecisms which may occur. We have not attempted to make literature, but simply a work which should possess general interest. We have written neither for the scholar nor the critic; but for the farmer, the laborer, the merchant, the lawyer, and for all, rather than for any individual or class of individuals.

Sulphur Springs, Augustin Fleming.
March, 1893.