

Percy B. St. John



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The Eagle's Nest

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**The Eagle's Nest;
or,
The Lone Star of the West.**

By
Percy Bolingbroke Saint John

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Chapter I.

IN WHICH OUR HERO APPEARS UNDER VERY EXTRAORDINARY AUSPICES.



During one of those really gorgeous and superb days which the traveler meets with at times in the Gulf of Mexico, a small but well-rigged schooner lay becalmed upon its ever-vexed waters, which spread on all sides without sign of land to break the monotony of the scene. It was towards the latter end of the summer of 1835, or in what is so expressively called the fall of the year—a period at which calms are of rare occurrence, and, in general, preceding bad weather. The sky was for the time, however, of that intense blue which is peculiar to the tropics, and was unshadowed by a single cloud, the sun shining with all its dazzling brightness upon the smooth but slightly heaving billows, that appeared to bask in a flood of heat, which, spreading from aloft a few degrees only from perpendicular, scorched the vessel's deck, and rendered walking upon it somewhat unpleasant, even with shoes, as the pitched seams became liquid beneath the burning glow, which warped the very planks. It was, we have said, calm; indeed, not a breath of air was stirring, and but for the long swell, remnant of wind past or sign of wind to come, one would have thought that upon that spot the cold northern, or hot and suffocating south-easter, had never blown.

The huge mainsail and foresail of the schooner, as well as the lighter gaff topsails, were squared to meet the slightest breeze, but at present in vain, the craft rising and falling with the motion of the sea, and turning round towards every point of the compass. The captain, a passenger, and the crew, composed of four men, all stood aft, smoking their short pipes—we except the passenger—conversing and speculating on the probable result of all this delay, or watching in silence the lazy wreaths of vapour which rose and fell from their long puffs, or were borne away by the factitious breeze caused by the motion of the sails. They were seated some on the trunk, some on the deck, leaning listlessly over the low black bulwarks, with countenances plainly betokening an anxiety for action, and great disrelish for their present position.

»Rather discouraging, Monsieur Grignon,« exclaimed the passenger, »three weeks out from New Orleans, a dead calm, very little provender, and at least an hundred. miles from Matagorda."«

»Develeesh provok—ing,« replied the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, »put tish tam culf is nevere vid hout de sacre calme. Mais! vat ish dat on de

vatere? Von tortue-de-mer as I am lif.«

Instantly bustle and activity was the order of the day, the boat was lowered from astern and brought alongside, and the captain and crew jumped in, despite the remonstrances of the passenger, who warned them that the wind was about to rise.

»Bah! bah! Monsieur Blake, dere is no vind can come so quick I not see him,« exclaimed the laughing and light-hearted Gaul, as he sat himself in the stern-sheets of his' boat, »but you keep s look hout hall the while.«

»Never fear, Monsieur Grignon,« answered the passenger; »I see mischief brewing in the south-east, and shall be on the alert.«

Four vigorous arms soon bore the dinghy to a distance in chase of the turtle, which about half a mile off lay asleep on the face of the water—the captain and his men pursuing their object with all the vivacity and thoughtlessness of French sailors, who on sea and land, in all parts of the world, keep up the character of their country.

The young man who remained on the schooner's deck rose with a dissatisfied air, scanned the horizon in every direction, lit an elegant German pipe, and then seizing the tiller stood ready for any emergency which might happen, well satisfied that his energies would shortly be called into action, though he in reality expected nothing save a stiff breeze, which made him attempt no alteration in the craft's canvas, a complicated undertaking indeed for one man.

Edward Blake, such was his name, was habited in the jacket, cap, and well-fitting pantaloons of a midshipman in the English navy, a costume which peculiarly became his stature and form. He was about the middle height, rather more slight than corpulent, though so nicely did he balance between the two as to be sometimes called stout; with a profusion of dark curls, a straight nose, a peculiarly well-shaped mouth, while an incipient moustache of great promise garnishing his upper lip completed the outline of his personal appearance. His mental qualities it is our province in these pages to develop.

Edward Blake had entered on board an English man-of-war at the usual age. The son of a respectable private gentleman of moderate fortune, he possessed no friends powerful enough to ensure his promotion, a fact which had not come home to him with full force until a few years of naval experience had rendered him more thoughtful than before; the idea having once struck him, however, his temperament being quick and hasty, he became convinced that advancement was hopeless in his native country. The conclusion was somewhat illogical, since men do certainly rise to the highest rank in our service by merit alone, and why not Edward Blake, who, strange to say, believed himself beyond hope of redemption

the last of his race. The above notion having once entered his head, nothing could eradicate it. While under the influence of these feelings, he received a communication from a friend who had emigrated to America a short time before, and who informed him that an immediate outbreak was contemplated between Texas and Mexico, a navy was in active preparation, and finally that if he felt disposed to register himself on the books of the young republic, a commission would be given him, with good pay and the prospect of rapid promotion. No more was wanted to inflame the hopes and desires of an ardent and sanguine mind like that of Blake, and at the age of nineteen he quitted his native land on a very brief notice, sailed from Liverpool to New Orleans, where finding the *Dame Blanche*, Captain Grignon, about, to start for Matagorda, he had taken passage, furnished with credentials and letters of introduction from friends in the United States to several of the leading men who had brought about the Texan declaration of independence, letters and credentials equally invaluable with the usual run of such documents.

Meeting with contrary winds, and numerous calms ensuing, they had been already three weeks out, and were at the moment we speak of in lat. 27deg. 50m. N., long. 95 deg. 30m. W., and consequently about a hundred miles from their destination. The calm to which we alluded in the opening paragraph had already been of considerable duration, the wind having died away on the previous evening, and it being now about midday. Nothing can be conceived more vexatious and annoying than a calm at sea, excepting it be a storm of such a serious nature as to place life in jeopardy; otherwise I would always prefer half a gale of wind to no wind at all. No matter how excellent your fare, how agreeable your company, how complete and entertaining your library, one always is anxious to get to the end of a sea voyage; while, therefore, you go ahead, everything is delightful—the society of your fellow passengers is all that could be wished; such pleasant aspirations for the future are dwelt upon, such reminiscences, sad, tender, and merry, of the past. But let a calm ensue, and at once one is irritable, snappish, and out of sorts. Your dinner is detestable, your cigar cheerless, your best friend fussy, even the young widow who sits opposite at table rises ten seasons in the scale of years, and is no longer interesting. Sir Walter is serious, Sir Edward a bore, and even the inimitable Rabelais himself would hardly make you laugh. The deck is your sole resource, and there on such occasions will be found officers, passengers, and crew, watching the appearance of the heavens in every direction. A cloud no bigger than a man's head rises, and it is instantly decided that wind is coming from thence, but no, it is a false alarm, and the whole mass of the ship's inhabitants return to their pristine sullenness. Presently, however, the breeze rises, the sails fill, the bow parts the yielding waves, man's love of

locomotion is satisfied, the destined port is felt to be nearer every minute, and all is once more cheerful and smiling.

Whether Edward Blake felt all this I know not, but he sat quietly on the companion, his hand resting on the tiller, now watching the motions of his associates, and now the various signs of a coming breeze, which showed themselves in the heavens and upon the waters. At a considerable distance, the long billows appeared slightly agitated, a bank rose, the smooth shining and silvery appearance of the slumbering ocean was darkened—it was a southeast wind moving rapidly over the face of the deep. In a few minutes a slight air fanned the cheek of the young sailor, the lazy sails swelled, and the craft was gently in motion before the breeze. Blake now naturally turned his eyes in search of the crew. At the distance of about three quarters of a mile ahead, they were seen palling smartly for the schooner; and Blake, therefore, using every caution, steered the vessel towards them, the breeze every instant, until it became a matter of certainty that a storm was about to follow the treacherous calm. The wind, indeed, already blew in powerful gusts, dense clouds began to pass over the face of the heavens, and it was not without great anxiety that Blake neared his comrades, who appeared ready to seize a rope which towed astern, resting meanwhile on their oars in the course of the craft. Five minutes elapsed, and it blew a strong gale of wind, the schooner labouring heavily, every rag being set, and Blake being obliged to remain at the helm, as to have left it and let go the halyards would have been to have given the *Dame Blanche* to the mercy of the wind and waves. Rising and sinking, and rising and sinking again on the furious and boiling billows, the schooner under her heavy press of canvas may have been said to have flown rather than to have sailed; and presently a blast more heavy and impetuous than any preceding one, sent her bows under, the masts bending and quivering like a whip handle, and the vessel appearing to plunge into a deep and awful chasm to rise no more; as, however, Blake felt the blast diminish in force, and could see through the dense volume of spray which played around him, he gazed abroad, and found himself alone on the face of the deep, not a sign, not a vestige remained of the boat or one of his companions.

To be alone, is, of all things, the most overwhelming to man. Society in joy and sorrow is his desire, and joy is increased, sadness decreased, by communion with his fellows. But to be left thus rudely, the one solitary object on which the fury of the elements was to wreck itself, one man in a huge unwieldy machine on the wide sea, to combat with death, was inconceivably awful. Nothing, therefore, can be imagined or described more dreadful than the state of mind in which Blake was now thrown; five human beings having perished under his eyes, and no other prospect remaining for himself. The mad wind roared above, the waves,

increasing each instant in force and hollowness, boiled beneath, and the schooner, which never, under such a press of sail and in such a breeze, had walked the waters, rose, and fell, and pitched and laid over, in the most extraordinary and unprecedented manner. The labour at the helm was immense: It was port and starboard, hard up and hard down at each moment, in the earnest endeavour to keep right before the wind; then a huge and combing wave, as the vessel came up unwittingly in the wind, swept across the deck, and casting our hero from the helm, nearly pitched him overboard. The schooner, meanwhile, left to its own guidance, broached to, lay down almost on its beam ends, and the topmasts and topsails parted from the lower mast. In an instant however Edward Blake had regained his feet and seized the tiller, when, by a desperate exertion of strength, he once more brought the craft before the wind, somewhat eased by the loss of the canvas just mentioned. Still, as the topsails had not been entirely carried away, and yet hung by the sheets and halyards, their loud and discordant flapping was to be heard even above the roar of the tempest, and expecting they would demolish the lower masts, Blake determined to cut them from their fastenings. Watching carefully for an instant for a slight diminution in the force of the wind, our hero left the helm, just as the sails were shaking on the larboard side, jammed the tiller hard aport, left the helm, and let go the topsail sheets and halyard., and away went topmasts, topsails, sheets, and halyards, blocks, and hooks and eyes, overboard. Quick as lightning he regained the helm, pat it slightly a-starboard, and then, half kneeling on the deck, slippery with the salt spray, gazed around on the terrible scene which presented itself.

In an indescribably short space of time the sky had been covered by one dense mass of black clouds, which completely hid the sun, and presented the appearance of coming night; an atmosphere of damp fog encircled the schooner, the sea foaming, roaring, swelling, heaving, and sinking, exhibited a tremendous fury; the wind shrieked and howled through the rigging as if a thousand demons had been let loose, while the vessel itself, now plunging into the hissing waves, now rising aloft, astonished him by its vitality amid the almost chaotic state of the elements, which appeared about to resolve themselves into their original state of being. Willingly would Blake have eased the Dame Blanche, by lowering the mainsail, but the momentary lull which enabled him to let loose the topsail halyards was passed, and did not occur again. A choking heat too was just now experienced, the very air appeared full of poison, and the wind at times seemed ready to hurl him from the deck, while the blast taking effect upon his body, rendered his skin hot, feverish, and uncomfortable.

Suddenly an object caught his eye, which, for a short time, divided his attention, though he did not cease to watch the helm with the greatest care and

assiduity. A barque, her royal yards sent down, her top-gallant sails furled, her courses up, her spencer, gaff-topsails, jib, and flying jib snugly stowed, was seen standing towards him, close on a wind, under treble-reefed top-sails, storm stay-sail and spanker, which moderate allowance of sail was even too much for the occasion, as when Blake first noticed her she was lying with her starboard covering board evidently under water, the larboard side rearing its huge black surface aloft, and almost showing, as it rose and fell, her whole copper, down to the very keel. She neared him rapidly, evidently striving to get as much to windward as Possible in order to speak the schooner, and as he saw her English colours run up to the gaff, his eyes were almost suffused with tears as he gazed, perhaps for the last time, on that banner which was associated with so many dear recollections. Every man, and she was crowded with passengers, was clinging to the rigging and watching the singular spectacle afforded them; the captain, meanwhile, stood erect on the companion, holding with one hand to the cabin, which was built above deck, and with the other grasping his speaking-trumpet.

»What craft is that?« roared he, making himself heard above the howling of the tempest, as Blake shot under his stern.

»La Dame Blanche, of New Orleans. All hands drowned!« shrieked Edward Blake, but his voice was borne uselessly on the blast, it never reached its destination.

In another instant the barque was before the wind, her spanker and staysail in, standing after the smaller craft. The intention of the captain was, evidently, to make an effort to save Blake, but to the daring and undaunted young midshipman it appeared that to get alongside the ship was a useless risk, though with the addition of his square mainsail his comrade on the ocean was keeping up with him.

»Can I help you?« bellowed the jolly-looking English sailor in command, having once more resort to his speaking trumpet.

Blake rose, holding fast the tiller, giving his vessel now and then a dig into some hollow wave to lessen the rapidity of his own motion, and waving his cap in the air, pointed, with a shake of the head, to the boiling waves between them, and then resumed his former position. A loud and prolonged cheer burst from the crew of the British barque, marking their admiration of his courage, and Blake's heart swelled with strange emotions as he remarked that even the female passengers had ventured on deck to gaze upon the gallant and apparently doomed young sailor, who wore the dress of an English officer, which, more than all, puzzled and interested the old ex-quarter-master who commanded the barque. The friendly vessel had only kept up with Blake by his manœuvring, and he no longer attempting to remain beside his larger companion, and she hauling up her

main course, and drawing aft her starboard sheets, they parted, and out hero was onee more slone on the face of the deep.

Hour after hour passed by, when, presently, by the sudden increase of the gloom, our hero considered that night must be coming on. Presently deep darkness covered the face of the waters, and alone in this raging wilderness of waves the schooner pursued its way, cutting through the liquid hollow masses which reared themselves to oppose his progress. The howling of the wind appeared more terrible, the clamour of the waves more furious, when, suddenly, a bright flash of lightning poured its brilliant and meteoric light upon the waters, showing the outline of every rope, and the whole features of a wild and terrible scene—a scene which is rarely gazed upon by mortal eyes; when once gazed upon, however, never to be forgotten! A storm at sea, when life and hope, death and despair, are ideas of vague and indeterminate signification—when we are conscious that our efforts are vain, when we know that we are helpless, that all rests with One whose whisper stills the fiercest war of the mightiest tempest. A storm at sea, when a faithless and senseless plank of oak is all between us and eternity, is not to be erased from the mind by any subsequent events. We speak from experience. For Blake there was but one point of attraction, and that was a low jagged black line ahead, which, as flash succeeded flash, became at each instant of time more distinct.

»And now,« said he fervently, as he grasped the obedient tiller still more energetically than ever, »I have overcome the raging tempest thus much, but by far the greatest danger is at hand; He alone, who has till now saved me, can bear me harmless through it,« and easting a somewhat stern look on high, he gradually allowed his features to relax into calmness and placidity. The young sailor sent up an inward prayer. What a time, what a place! Could it be unheard? »So soon!« muttered he, as dashing amid a species of whirlpool of breakers, a huge crested wave swept the deck, sufficiently betokening his proximity to land; »‘so soon, now for it then.«

A tremendous peal of thunder, preceded by a brilliant flash, lit up the heavens, the sea, and the low outline of the coast which our hero appeared rapidly to near. With a quick and keen eye, he had caught sight of one spot more low and flat than the rest, for this he determined to make. When darkness once more overspread the scene, a fire showed itself on the land, a species of safety beacon to the weary traveller. It was faint and indistinct, now it vanished entirely, and then it rose more vivid than ever. Presently the air was illumined by an extraordinary blaze, a column of fire shot ap towards the sky, burnt brightly for a few minutes, showing plainly the outline of various forest trees, and then it fell, leaving only the smaller light which had at first attracted Blake’s attention. He grew nearer and nearer,

until at length, when apparently not more than a couple of hundred yards from the fire, which was now to his left, a violent concussion took place, the schooner grated harshly, and then struck with tremendous force, hurling him from his position to the deck, His head striking against the trunk as he fell, he became insensible to all around.

Chapter II.

BLAKE MEETS WITH A CELEBRATED CHARACTER.

About an hour previous to the accident with which our first chapter concluded, a very different scene presented itself at no great distance from the spot at which the gallant schooner had happened to arrive, guided by the mad wind, which, having done its worst upon the waters, swept by to scourge the prairie and the forest, to drive man closely within doors, and the wild beasts to their most sheltered haunts. An extensive grove of trees, somewhat scattered over the surface of the ground, stretched to within a few yards of the water's edge; to the right, about a mile off, was the Sabine river; to the left, the wide and apparently interminable prairie, now screened by the huge and sombre canopy of night. In the centre of the grove was a small hollow, surrounded on all sides by trees, but itself untenanted by any. It was about three yards long and three or four broad, and not more than six feet deep in the lowest portion; at the northern end was an opening, whence ran whatever Moisture at times poured into it, and to this spot there was a slope from all parts of the hollow. Across it, from the eastern side, leaned a stunted and aged tree, almost touching a solitary and majestic pine which stood directly opposite to it, while dark masses of similar growth rose plentifully in the background. The pine here particularised, had been made to serve the purpose of a back to a blazing pile of wood which spread a lurid glare upon the surrounding grove. Opposite the fire was a man, sheltering himself from the blast behind the stunted tree above-mentioned, which had been made the central point of a species of rude tent, in the open entrance of which the individual in question sat, quietly and contentedly gazing upon a ramrod which was thrust in the ground before the fire, and on which were spitted various Jong slices of venison, cut from a freshly killed deer, that hung to the topmast branch of the gnarled tree above his head. Within reach of his right hand was a long, old, American rifle, which had apparently seen better days. Its owner had certainly been younger than he now was, for though there was fire in his eye, and much strength yet visible in his long and sinewy limbs, he had evidently approached a term of years at which few refrain from seeking refuge from toil and labour, if not in the grave, at least in ease and retirement. The continent of America has, however, wrought wonderful changes in the constitution of those men who, in its wilds, lead a simple but laborious life. The traveller in the Texan wilderness would have been taken for a remarkably hale man of eighty; he was, in reality, fourteen years over four score. His garb was half military, half venatorial, buckskin forming by far the most prominent material of his various articles of clothing; if we except a

red flannel shirt, which he wore next his dark red skin, his whole dress was of deer's hide. A pistol butt protruded from the left side of his waistband, a silver hilted dagger, or bowie knife, peeped out of the right. His powder horn, shot bag, and lead pouch, were hanging inside the tent, jealously covered by a blanket to shield the former from the night air—a matter concerning which all true Texans are wondrous particular, and justly so, when their existence, their food, their lives indeed, so often depend on the efficiency of their accoutrements.

Close to the old man's feet was a little heap of hot ashes, which the hunter kept constantly renewing, until at length he ceased, as if satisfied with the result of his labours. He then spoke for the first time.

»Cap'n Harry,« said he, turning towards the interior of the little tent, and shaking a form which had up to the present time been shaded by his own erect person —»Cap'n Harry, I conclude you've had snooze enough for any moderate man; open your peepers and chaw. Supper waits, and I reckon if I were one eyed enough to jerk it into me, without callin' on you to foller my example, you'd call me the meanest thing on 'arth, an old 'coon dog barking at the wrong tree.«

»Oh, I know you're death onto a deer, Colonel Crocket, but I sagacitate as how it 'ud take two like you to walk into the whull of that buck.«

»I'm the yaller flower of the forest, and no mistake,« replied the famous hunter of Tennessee, »but it ud go beyont the power of my intarnals to swaller that brute. But git up, cap'n, git up, a volunteer out west should be as smart as a streak o' lightning, whin a fight, a gal, or a supper, is in question, When I was out we' Gen'rl Jackson in old times at Pensacola, Talladago, and Jallisabatchee, I know it wur a caution if I said no to ere a one.«

»Ah, colonel,« continued the individual addressed as captain, rising from his position in the tent, and seating himself alongside his companion, »we all calculate what you were sixty year ago; he must be eternally deaf who ar'nt heard tell of the bay filly. That was like a man who war'nt afraid of the galls.«

»That I guess was'nt so smart as might ha' been, seeing that wur whin I was arter my first wife, Cap'n Harry,« said the old man, laughing, though not without a certain saddened expression; »but thin have you got the right end of that story? I conclude not. So just scrape thim sweet. potatoes out of the hole, hand here the ramrod, and while you're digging your teeth into the deer meat, maybe I'll tell you the rights of that anecdote.«

»Right as a trivet,« replied the person addressed as Captain Harry, obeying the requests of his companion, after taking out a huge chaw of tobacco from his left cheek, and carefully laying it aside to be again replaced as soon as the meal was

over; »here's the praties, here's the meat, and now, venerable steamboat, go ahead.«

»Go ahead I will, friend Harry, in a brace of shakes, but as to saying it 'ull be like a steamboat, I ca'nt promise, since thims an invention I knows little of, and likes less. But do you see, whin I was quite a boy, I reckon not more than three-and-twenty, I fell over head and yars in love. This were Quite nat'ral like. Well you know, Cap'n Harry, I reckon, that it wur at a frolic, the girl wur pretty,« continued the veteran, sadly, »very retty, and I concluded to have her and she me. So we agreed I should ride over to her mother and ask her consent, I wur a mighty long time thinking of it, but one day I plucked up smart, mounted one of my master's horses, and rode over to where I heard she wur on a visit to a friend's house. Well, whin I kim in sight of the log, I began to feel mighty cool about the heels and hot about the head and shoulders, but it war'nt to be thought I was a going to go back, so I rides up to the yard, where wur standing a power of-boys and gals, and says I, to mask my love scrape, »Has any one seen a stray bay filly of m master's?' Well, they all roared, for it seems they all knowed I wur coming, and one told me I should hear inside. My heart in my mouth I went in, and there wur my gall. So I asked her plump if she wur going back to her mother's, cause if she wor E would take her up behind me. She said, yes, directly, and after a drink of milk and a bite of cake we started, I a straddle and she behind me. As I went out of the yard, feeling a little bearish about the knuckles, a fellow calls out, 'Have you found your bay filly now?' I wish I may be shot if I know how I felt, all I know is, I felt all overish.« ^[1]

The captain laughed as he handed a fine large brown potato to his aged associate, which the latter accepted, and his bowie knife being brought into use, huge lumps of deer were speedily disappearing, proving incontestibly that age had diminished few, if any, of his faculties.

»This fox-hole,« exclaimed the captain, »was smartly hit upon, colonel, for I reckon we'd be pretty extensively cold, with all the fires in creation, if we war'nt burrowed here below.«

»It takes me to pick a camp, friend,« replied Crockett, quietly; »I conclude I ar'nt lived all these years for nothing; and whin I find a cold south-easter blowing, which is mighty apt to end in a norther, it's a caution if I don't find some hole to lay my head in. But I tell you what man, that ere tree's too near the fire, and I'll be on my oath, as a christian man, it falls before another half hour.«

»It will make a fine log for the night, colonel,« replied the other, carelessly; »it must fall the other way, so no danger, old sagacity.«

»Danger!« replied the great bear hunter, somewhat contemptuously, »I ar'nt lived all these years to come to Texas to be smashed by a falling tree, cap'n; but it'll spile our fire, if you do'nt take mighty good care; and it'll be pretty tall work to make it up again.«

The individual in question rose, and taking up a long pole from a heap of wood which lay to his right in the hollow, proceeded to draw the fire a little away from its contact with the trunk of the pine, which, red hot and almost blazing, appeared about to verify the prediction of the old hunter, who, after all his exploits, real and fabled, doings extraordinary, etc., in the United States, had left his own wilds, where the bear, deer, and elk, were alone to be hunted, to seek a land where the progress of revolution promised to bring all who entered its confines in battle with the forces of the Mexican federation, as well as with the hosts of Indians who infested the frontier and interior settlements.

»It's many a fire, cap'n, that old tree has stood,« observed the colonel, »but this here's doomed to be its last, I reckon. See the very heart of it is open; there, I told you it's in a blaze.«

As he spoke, a stream of fire flew from the trunk to the very summit of the tree, and the captain stood back a few paces, gazing anxiously at the progress of the flames, which had so suddenly enveloped the pine in their embrace.

Captain Harry Coulter, as Crockett, in the true spirit of American politeness, called him, but as he was oftener denominated Mr. Henry Coulter, and oftener still plain Harry, was a man some six-and-twenty years of age, under the middle size, of stout athletic make, but with a thin haggard face, sunken red eyes, and bitter sneering lip, a complexion naturally fair, but on which climate, dissipation, and, latterly, exposure, had done their work. A brace of pistols and a huge bowie knife were seen beneath an ample blue cloak, which covered habiliments much less elegant than his outward garb might have led an eye witness to expect. His trade, profession, mode of life, and character, are summed up in a word—he was a New Orleans gambler; one of that numerous class of individuals whose baggage consists of a shirt, a pack of cards, and a bowie knife. For some reason which he did not choose to explain he had taken it into his head to visit Texas, and had fallen in accidentally with the celebrated Colonel David Crockett, who had himself travelled from New York, chiefly on foot, though sometimes a wagoner would induce him, by dint of great persuasion, to take a lift.

»Going—going,« said the gambler; »it's a tall tree that, and casts a glare that might lead an Indian war party further than would be pleasant.«

»If there were any Ingine varmint in these parts,« replied the other, without pausing in his meal, »I reckon you would'nt find David Crockett out lying even

sich a night as this, with a fire by his side enough to roast an ox; he'd burrow in a hollow tree man, and never mind the cold. But see, Cap'n Harry, that old pine is raaly going.«

Of a truth, the sturdy old tree had seen its last days. The fire had eaten half through its expansive trunk, had then mounted ploft, caught the dry boughs, and was blazing in the keen blast like some huge beacon in time of war. Every now and then the flame heightened afresh, and sent forth myriads of sparks amid the darkness around. Presently a loud crash was heard, the tree bent slowly, and then fell heavily to the ground; the flames being extinguished by the violence of the concussion.

»Bravely,« cried Crockett, laughing, »that was smartly done, cap'n; that ere log, if pulled up in its proper place, will make a rare good back to our fire for the night, and will burn a first-rate time.«

»It's broken in two, by G—; snapped like a bow of pine wood,« responded Coulter, »and here's boughs enough to last a week. Bear a hand here, colonel, and we'll settle the matter in less time than one 'ud take to drink a quart of whiskey.«

»And that's two 'coon skins,« said the colonel, rising and assisting his companion to place the log in the desired position, after which he once more seated himself before the fire, and surveyed the handiwork of his friend and companion with evident satisfaction.

»Talking of 'coon skins,« observed the captain, »I've heard you did wonders with them in electioneering?«

»Sartinly. It stands to reason,« replied Crockett, »when I went on thim expeditions, I always went fixed for the purpose. I put on a suit of deer skin, with two mighty big pockets. In one I puts a bottle of Manogahela, in tother a fifty cent plug of rale Virginny, none of your Oronooko stuff, and started right away, slick as leather. Whin I comes across a friend I hauls out my switchel flip and gives him a taste; he'd be mighty apt you know afore he'd swizzle, to throw away his old soldier, and whin I seed a man do that, why I out with my plug and gives him a chaw, and did'nt mind if he cut off a piece and put it in his shot pouch, so, do ye see, I never left a man worse off than I found him. If he got a drink and lost his tobacco, he would'nt have made much, but I gave him tobacco and liquor both, and was mighty apt, do ye see, to get his vote. Whin my bottle was out I walks into a store, gits a quart fresh and a plug, claps down my four 'coonskins, and I was all right agin.«

»But how, in the name of Martin Van Buren, Gen'rl Jackson, and all the presidents of our blessed republic, did you find 'coon skins enough, colonel?«

The hunter smiled sarcastically.

»Do you see old Bet there?« pointing to his long rifle, »she rarely missed, and then my boys at home would go their death to hunt during an election, and when alone I always carried hare skins to pay for half pints.«

»Right,« replied the gambler; »but were you never a care, hard up in a clinch, and no knife to cut the seasonings?«

»Once I reckon I was, cap'n. I fell upon a grog-shop where there wur a woundy lot of boys. Well, do you see, I was a case, flat, without a dollar—had but one 'coon skin about me. But never mind, I slapped it down like a man on the counter, and ordered a pint. The man measured the liquor and threw the skin into a loft. Well, the logs above were mighty open, and I felt woundily vexed at being hard up; so, do you see, I hooked my screw onto my ramrod. poked it up when the man turned his back, twisted down the 'coon skin and pocketed it. When the liquor was out I slapped down the 'coon skin upon the counter and called for another pint. I wish I may be shot if in this rale smart way we did'nt drink all the evening.«

»What's that?« cried the captain, starting to his feet, as a loud and heavy crash was heard on their right, at the same time seizing a rifle which lay beneath the tent, and rushing out of the hollow in the direction of the sound.

The colone followed slowly, and when about half way his companion shouted to him to return and bring a torch. Crockett wheeled round, and once more approaching the fire, selected from the heap of wood at its side a pine knot, which soon ignited in the flames, and then was borne aloft, serving excellently well the purpose of a torch. With this in one hand and old Bet in the other, the great bear hunter hastened forward in the direction to which his friend's voice carried him. Captain Harry Coulter, on leaving the cover, had observed a dark mass at two hundred yards distant. Close to the grove above alluded to was a narrow gut, leading into one of the lagoons, which communicated with the Sabine lake. On the edge of this bay lay a large two-masted schooner, with her mainmast and foresail set, her bow embedded in the bank, her larboard gunwale under water, her starboard side high above. The gambler advanced to the water's edge, wrapping his cloak closely about him, and concealing his rifle beneath, for when out of the shelter of the trees he found the wind furious and cutting in the extreme. Two minutes brought him close upon the devoted craft, over which the mad waves broke furiously. By the dim light which prevailed he saw something lying, as it were, in a heap upon the deck, which he judged rightly to be a human being; laying his rifle a short distance from the beach he clambered upon the planks, and raising up young Blake supported him in a sitting posture until Crockett stood over them both, and threw the glare of his torch on the pallid but sory features of the young sailor. Both the hunter and his companion looked on for a few minutes, curiously and in silence.

»A smart youth, as sure as ever I slayed a possum or« bear,« remarked Crockett. »But how came he here? I wish I may be shot if I can tell.«

»Nor I; one thing's sure—he's a British er. This here jacket is that of a midshipman in the English navy;« remarked Coulter, examining the article of dress with attention.

»Well, I conclude you're right, since you say so, cap'n, but I can't say myself, seeing that sarvice is a trifle beyant me. The youth's but stunned and will soon revive, I reckon. But it's 2a huckleberry above my persimmon to cipher out how he got here alone.«

»Look in the cabin,« said the New Orleans black-leg hastily, as if a sudden thought had struck him; and fastening the look of a basalisk on the breast of Edward Blake. Crockett assented, and turning round moved towards the place pointed out, with some anxiety, as if expecting that the interior would explain the secret of the vessel's presence on that barren strand. Quick as thought Coulter leaned the young man against the inclined plane formed by the deck, drew forth his bowie knife, seized upon something which encircled the youth's waist next his skin, cut it in twain, and, thrusting it into his own breast, replaced the poniard in its usual position.

»Not so much as a rat to be nosed out hereabouts,«« exclaimed David, returning from his fruitless search. »This youngster is flower of the forest here. Does he revive?«

»He breathes audibly,« replied Coulter, a little confusedly; »suppose you take hold of his legs, and we'll carry him to the camp. The fire 'ull warm his blood and pull him up smart.«

»Nay, cap'n; Til carry thy rifle, the torch, and my own Bet, a load I take it for one of my years. I reckon you'll carry the lad yourself.«

»Humph!« replied Coulter, contemptuously, »I conclude he ai'nt an elephant, nor al OX, neither. Lead the way, I follow.«

Crockett shouldered the two rifles, raised the torch, the blaze of which scarcely gave any light, so great was the fury with which it was blown about by the furious wind, and stepping on shore led the way towards the shelter of the welcome hollow. Coulter, tottering under his burden, followed, and a few minutes brought them once more back to their camp.

»I'll be catawampourly chawed up by a Florida alligator,« observed the gambler, depositing his burden upon the ground, »but though he ai'nt so very big, he's heavy as lead.«

»Why, you see a dead man and a stuuned man is much of a muchness, awk'ard to carry, and still awk'arder to bring too; howsomever, we'll do our best, tho' he

be a Britisher, and we raal true born Yankees.«

Without noticing Coulter's sarcastic smile, Crockett proceeded to fulfil his humane intentions. Placing Blake in as easy a position as possible, the old hunter took down a gourd from the inside of the teat, and having first washed the bleeding temple of the young man with water, bound it up with some rags carried for patching rifle balls, and then poured down his throat a small quantity of brandy. Our young friend, who had been severely stunned and slightly wounded, opened his eyes feebly, stared at the fire, at his companions; consciousness gradually returning, he sat up and gazed for some minutes in silence on the scene around him. Mutual explanations ensued, and ere half an hour had elapsed, the excellent constitution of the young English sailor gained the ascendancy, and he sat before the fire eagerly devouring venison and sweet potatoes, Exhaustion from want of food had, more than anything else, retarded his recovery.

»By the way,« observed he, suddenly, »there is in a small locker of the cabin a liquor case, in which are sundry bottles of excellent Irish whiskey, which, being my private property, I freely offer you, my kind and hospitable friends.«

»Irish whiskey!« replied Coulter, with a bright flash of the eye, and, as a nicely critical ear might have it, the smallest trifle of a true Hibernian accent. »Irish whiskey is first rate, and by your good leave, Mr. Blake, I will conclude to light the pine torch, and make a v'ge to the schooner.«

»Darn my grandmother, but it's a smart youth,« said Crockett, approvingly.

»Thanks, my good sir,« continued Blake, addressing Coulter, »and perhaps while you are about it, you will just put your hand into the lower locker and fist the bread bag?«

»Consarn your young skin,« again cried Crockett, »but you're rale juicy. Bread's a rarity in these parts, and I reckon I could scarify another pound of deer's meat if I had a biscuit or so to Crackle with it.«

Coulter hurried to execute a right welcome commission, and soon returned with three or four bottles of whiskey, a bag of bread, two or three lemons, and a canister lamp sugar, not forgetting three tin mugs.

»Cap'n Harry arn't lived in New Orleans net to larn something,« said Crockett, chuckling. »he knows a hare skin Toma 'coon skin, and whiskey punch from the raw extract.«

»I reckon so, Colonel Crockett. Your late friend, Cap'n Grignon, Mr. Blake, knew what living was, I can see.«

»Colonel Crockett!« exclaimed Blake, not noticing the levity of Coulter's remark in his surprise, »you don't mean to say I am in company with that famous hunter and politician, whose name is as well known in England as the king's?«

»As to that I can't say, Master Edward,« replied the gratified hunter; »but Colonel} David Crockett I am, and that's the short and long of it.«

Edward Blake did not reply, but gazed silently and with undisguised interest upon the man who, above all American celebrities, he had been desirous of knowing, that is to say historical celebrities, since, while the English language endures, Cooper's fictitious Hawkeye must ever remain the most deeply imprinted continental portrait ever presented to the imagination. Coulter meanwhile was engaged in the manufacturing of punch, in which occupation he showed himself no mean adept, and proved himself quite ingenious in the way in which he overcame the obstacles presented to him. Taking down his own gourd from the inside of the tent, and emptying its contents into a tin can, he placed this over some hot embers which he raked from the fire and drew around the substitute for a kettle. Having done this, and filled Crockett's gourd from the spring that had induced them to camp near this spot, and which was close at hand, he poured about a pint of the generous liquid into the natural punch-bowl, squeezed a lemon upon it, melted the sugar and infused it likewise, then taking the water, now boiling, and adding it to the Hibernian spirit, a sup~ ply of bot punch was ready for imbibing.

»Rale spicy,« cried Coulter, with an American oath, with which he continually interlarded his discourse, but which elegant universal expletive we spare our readers, since none can say swearing is now an English gentleman's accomplishment. »Rale spicy. I'm bound to be drunk to-night.«

Blake looked up startled at the blasphemous expressions of the reckless gambler, he was yet to learn that cursing and swearing, of a nature too horrible to be described, are the necessary accompaniments of the discourse of a »southerner,« of whom it has been said, »a more humane, generous, and high-minded class of men does not exist!« Crockett, however, laid a veto upon drinking as yet.

»Jist take a squint at thim horses, and shift their larietts to new ground. I'll lay they've chawed up all the grass within reach. Business afore pleasure, and as you conclude to be drunk, it's a caution if I arn' ditto, when the horses 'ud be a case.«

[1] The exigencies of our narrative requiring this one Introduction of the famous Colonel Crockett we are compelled to make use of certain anecdotes, perhaps too well known, for which we apologise. Our motto is, »Speak the truth, and shame,« etc.

Chapter III.

EDWARD BLAKE BEGINS TO SMELL POWDER.

At the expiration of a twelvemonth after the occurrences of the events narrated in our previous chapters, which must be considered introductory, night fell upon the skirts of a long strip of forest, as two travellers cantered up and halted upon its extreme edge. The one, in dress and appearance, was clearly a white man; the other was no less certainly an Indian. Both were clothed with extreme plainness. The aboriginal wore a red hunting shirt and leggings of mountain goat-skin, with buck mocassins, while a rifle and small axe were his only arms. The tinge of his countenance, and his peculiar features, alone gave token of his being a native of the wilds, which his accoutrements in no wise demonstrated to be the case.

The garb of the white man was similar, while his naturally fair skin, tanned by constant exposure, was not much lighter than that of his companion. In the stout bearded hunter, of marked features and sturdy frame, few would have recognized the stripling who, under the name of Edward Blake, has already been introduced to our readers. Disappointed in his expectations of a commission—the navy not being as yet formed—he had started to pass the time on a long journey into the interior, during the course of which we take up our narrative.

Both seemed truly weary from the effects of their day's journey across the wilderness, and drew rein with every appearance of extreme satisfaction, such as is seldom more warmly experienced than when, after hard riding for some ten hours, one prepares to stretch the weary limbs, and, in the very changing action of walking, to find repose.



Behind them was a vast prairie—a very ocean of high grass—one of those picturesque and deep-clad rolling meadows of Upper Texas, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, and over which they had travelled since the morning. Before them lay a narrow opening in the belt of trees, a slight gap or Break leading to some forest path or woodland glade. At no great distance, on their right, and somewhat in their rear, an island of timber contributed to the scenic effect of the whole.

»Well, red skin,« exclaimed our hero, »I really cannot advance any further, I am dead beat, thoroughly worn out, and must rest.«

»Good!« replied the Indian; »here camp.«

»I am glad of it,« continued Blake; »and if you would only converse a little more, friend Chinchea, we might pass another very tolerable evening in the woods. Tobacco is plenty, venison in abundance, and I have no doubt you will find water. Three things which, however incongruous to other minds, to one who has seen the elephant of very serious moment.«

The Indian did not reply, which, seeing that he scarcely comprehended what was said, was less to be wondered at, but leading the way, and entering within the arches of the forest, they soon found themselves in the centre of a green glade, surrounded on all sides by the dense mass of wood. Not more than a dozen yards

across, with tall trees, pea vines and thick undergrowth compassing it about, with a huge half-burnt log as a foundation for a fire, with a very mountain of dry wood piled up in one corner (it being a favourite hunting camp of the Waccos), it wanted but the presence of a rippling stream to render it the very beau ideal of a forest encampment.

»Good camp,« said the Indian, with that sententious gravity for which his race are famed, leaping from his steed at the same time, an act in which he was speedily imitated by Blake; »white man light fire-Indian stake mustangs.«

»Agreed,« replied the young man, speedily disburdening his wearied animal of all trappings save his lariette; and drawing forth a flint, steel, and a supply of spunk, a species of fungus which admirably serves the purpose of tinder (so provident is nature for those whose necessities call for aid), proceeded to light a fire.

It is in the wilderness, in those vast and desolate regions which seem the abiding one sees the mercy and goodness of dence. Each hour, some one of its goodly provisions are discovered, for the health, comfort, and subsistence of man. In towns, in congregated multitudes, we see and feel more the effect of human art and human contrivances—we fall back upon the vast body of those who surround us; but in the wilds, where man is not, and where we have leisure to contemplate the deeds of Providence, one is apt to feel how much is due to a superintending power, and how little to our own unaided intelligence.

Blake in another moment was alone in the dark solitude of that gloomy little forest cove, on the very verge of the wild Indian country, with nought to depend on for liberty or life save the sagacity and honour of his Indian guide. Such, however, is the constant position of those who venture into the interior wilds of Texas, and other parts of America; the very doubts, dangers, and difficulty, constituting a great portion of the pleasure of such journeys.

Disappointed in his hopes of obtaining an immediate berth in the Texan navy, Blake, ever venturesome and fond of excitement, had started on an expedition to visit - the tribe of aborigines to which his companion belonged. A year's residence in the young republic had familiarised him, as it will all, with every hardship, and with difficulty experience had ensued. To use the expressive language of the backwoods, he had seen the elephant, and no longer felt any emotion of surprise at occurrences however remarkable—a happy state of mind, which many may envy Eh. Indeed, though nil admirari be good philosophy, to be surprised at nothing is even more practically useful. Blake was now a tolerable backwoodsman; the more that, sanguine and enthusiastic, he entered into every feature of his new life with a spirit and animation that betokened the zest with which he enjoyed it.

Anyone who had seen him in his rude leather-stocking garb, lifting the logs from their pile, bearing them to the spot selected for a camp, and placing them with artistic skill so as to form sides to the camp fire, and thus by confining the heat to make it more intense, would have scarcely supposed him fit, as he really was, both in manners and accomplishments, to adorn a drawing-room, or any other fashionable locality. Those men, however, who can accommodate themselves to every circumstance, are ever the most valuable members of the community.

The ready acuteness, the aptitude to catch the tone and manners of the position one is placed in, with the power to cast it off again, with also a willingness to bear with much that is rough, and not to find fault with trifles, are essential requisites for your true travellers. Of these Blake was one.

From the huge trunk of an aged sycamore near at hand, whose boughs spread in leafy grandeur far and wide, he speedily drew a handful of dry Spanish moss, which, with dead and leaves, formed the foundation of his fire. Twigs, thin boughs, small bits of stray sticks which cumbered the turf all around, served for the second layer, over which logs were heaped. A spark waved backwards and forwards in the air, within a handful of the first-mentioned article, soon produced a cheerful and welcome blaze. This placed below the pile, and gently:fanned, speedily kindled the whole mass.

Blake was too intent upon his occupation, so necessary to the comfort of an open air encampment, to notice the return of Chinchea, who glided to his side with a number of slight poles cut from the neighbouring forest, and which he stuck in the ground all round the fire, hanging thereon, so as to screen the blaze from without, their blankets, sheepskin saddle-cloths, and every other spare article of furniture usually serving the purpose of a bed. Above, drawing the tops of the supple boughs together, a narrow aperture allowed the smoke to escape.

»But, Indian,« said Blake, somewhat indignantly, as soon as he discovered the intentions of his companion, »pray what am I to cover myself with this cold night? you are making pretty free with the clothes.«

»Bad place,« replied Chinchea; »Comanche got sharp eyes—so Blackfeet-white man make big fire—red man hide it.«

»I never knew you fail in a reason yet, Chinchea, no matter how absurd your acts,« said Blake; »and as our scalps seem to be in danger, I can have no possible objection to your proceedings.«

The Wacco Indian did not reply; but drawing forth several slices of venison, the whole stock of provisions they now owned, proceeded to broil them over the smoaky fire. Blake, seated on part of the log against which the fire rested, looked on admiringly. His journey had been long, and without rest or refreshment the

whole of that day, which made him regard the Indian's proceedings with a complacency which would have surprised our young Englishman at no very distant period of past time. As, therefore, the viands were turned and turned, emitting savoury odour, he congratulated himself on the acquisition of an appetite which made him so little nice, and left so little desire for more luxurious food.

While, however, his eyes were thus pleasingly occupied, his active mind dwelt upon the singular features of his position.

The warm blazing fire, that crackled and rose in curling flames, emitting volumes of white smoke, cast all without into dismal shadow, save the sky, which, cloudless and spangled with myriads of stars, was a glad sight to look upon. There was no wind; all was still, silent, breathless, The very trees, usually rustling and sighing in the breeze, were motionless, their tops silvered by the reflexion of the fire. The distant gobbling of the wild turkey, as it flew to roost, the hooting, screeching owl, the croaking of the sand-hill crane, were the only sounds which broke the monotony of the dead night-air.

Suddenly a cry so-unearthly and horrible as to make Blake start with horror to his feet, came full upon their ears. It was a long howl, a screeching, horrid sound, that made the blood curdle in the veins as it yelled and yelled in the distance.

»What infernal whoop is that? is the forest alive with devils?« cried Blake.

»White wolf,« said Chinchea, calmly, turning the unbroiled side of his venison to the fire, and examining it with an appearance of much gusto.

The restless neighing of the affrighted horses prevented the immediate reply of Edward Blake, who stood still, bewildered by the sudden nature of the surprise which he had suffered, Nothing can be conceived more wildly lugubrious, more unearthly, or more horrible, than the howl of the prairie wolf at eventide. It booms across the plains, first in a low howl howl howl and gradually rising, becomes at length fearfully horrible.

»You are right, friend Chinchea,« said the young man, after a pause; »but they do howl most frightfully. If the Comanche war-whoop be more horrible than that, Tam in no hurry to hear it.«

Chinchea replied not, though a grim smile played round his mouth; and handing the meat to Blake to finish, took up a large pumpkin gourd, and left the circle drawn by the blankets around the fire.

During his absence, Blake, speculating on the relative horrors of an Indian war-whoop and the howling of prairie wolves-very similar in nature to the jackal—finished the cooking of their meal, having during his wanderings become a perfect wild Soyer.

Chinchea returned in less time than Blake had expected, but he brought no water; and as he glided noiselessly and cautiously within the shelter which they had erected, laid his finger in a warning manner upon his lips. Blake instantly knew that something was in the forest of more than common interest, to disturb thus the calm serenity of the Indian.

»Come,« said Chinchea, pointing to his arms; »bad man in forest, close by.«

With these words he beckoned Blake to follow him, and silently led the way to the wood pile, whence he, and in' imitation of him our hero, took an armful of heavy logs and bushes, which they hastened to heap upon the fire, in such a manner as for the time completely to deaden its brightness. Over this they cast leaves and earth, which done, loading themselves with every article of their baggage, not forgetting the venison, they crept with noiseless footsteps towards the horses. Not a word passed; the white man knew too well the exigencies of the case to waste time in idle questions.

Breathless with excitement, his blood tingling with delight at the novelty of danger, Blake followed the movement of the Indian with his eyes, rapidly imitating him in his every act; Chinchea, as soon as they had laden their horses, again dived within the forest, passing the fire, and entering on what, to the young man's surprise, presented all the features of a beaten bridle-path. Neither mounted; but, with their hands grasping their rifles, led their horses by the extremity of the lariette. The growth of the boughs overhead at once explained to Blake the reason of Chinchea's not having attempted mounting.

»Look!« said the Indian, in a breathless whisper, as, after ascending the side of a somewhat steep acclivity, they suddenly halted. As he spoke these words, Chinchea caught the young Englishman's arm in his grasp, and holding it with great firmness, pointed through the trees. Blake followed the direction of his hand with his eye, and at once understood the reason of their change of camp.

A small fire in the depth of a hollow revealed a party of no less than thirty men, some Indians, some whites, sleeping or watching. In every variety of costume, scarcely any two Indians were of the same tribe. While some were rolled in blankets, others less fortunate lay on the bare ground uncovered; a few stood leaning against the trunks of trees, while one who, by his costume, somewhat more military than that of any of the others, appeared the chief, was supporting himself with his arms crossed on the muzzle of his rifle. The lucid glare of the fire in that dark and gloomy dell, fell upon the bronzed countenances of the men with singular effect. It was a scene worthy of Salvator Rosa, which the wild costume of the prairie robbers, the piles of arms, and their variety, in no slight degree tended to heighten.

Their position was well chosen. In the very bottom of a hollow, surrounded by tall trees, their small fire was but little likely to be observed.

The presence of white men, the variety of tribes visible in the Indians, were indications which left no doubt of their identity; it was, therefore, with little surprise that Blake heard from Chinchea that they were a dreaded gang, commanded by a white man, who roamed about Texas, pillaging, and enacting scenes more bloody, ruthless, and horrible, than any of which the Indians were ever guilty. Indeed, bloody and ruthless as the red skins, writhing under consciousness of oppression and wrong, have become, they are infinitely surpassed in cruelty by the desperate pangs of whites who, under the name of »Regulators,« haunted the borders of Texas.

»Blackhawk,« said Chinchea, gravely pointing to the figure we have mentioned as leaning on the muzzle of his gun.

Blake made no reply, save by a slight nod; he was busily engaged in scanning the features of this very man. They were familiar to him, or, at all events, lived in his remembrance; that he had seen him before he felt certain, but at so distant a period it seemed to have been, as to leave the impression of its having occurred previous to his departure from England. Events, however, had crowded upon him so thick and fast during the last twelve months of his life, as to leave but a feeble recollection of his earlier existence.

»Hist!« whispered Chinchea, drawing the attention of Blake to other matters.

At the moment that the Wacco spoke, the blaze of the fire they had left burst forth at the termination of a low and dark vista of the forest, discovering itself, however, not to them alone. It was no faint mass of flames—they rose manfully and merrily, the more from having been previously pent up.

»A camp!« cried one, who stood on the outskirts of the party overlooked by Edward and his Indian guide. °

»I see,« exclaimed the chief, raising his head calmly, and then gloomily relapsing as soon as he had spoken, into his thoughtful mood; »slip through the trees, and bring word who and what they are.«

»It is time to be moving,« whispered Blake, his blood leaping and coursing through his veins with the utmost rapidity, turning towards the place where the Indian had stood, but which was now occupied by his horse only. In the close observation of the movements of the knot below, Edward had not noticed his departure.

Blake, however, was surprised, but not alarmed or distrustful of his guide; and satisfied that his absence was connected with some matter necessary to their

safety, turned his eyes again upon those who had caused so serious a change in their movements.

For some brief space of time, no alteration was manifest in the disposition of the extraordinary gang—their camp remained in its pristine quiet—those who slept were still recumbent, those who had been standing were yet in the same position. Suddenly a rush, a sound like the heavy but disorderly charge of cavalry, was heard, and every man started to his feet. The tramp was at that moment plainly upon the eastern side of their camp.

»The horses are loose!« cried the chief, with a fearful imprecation.

»Indians!« exclaimed another.

»A stampede!« put in a third.

A rush then took place towards the corral which contained the horses, some few remaining on the outskirts of the camp, taking good care, however, to keep at some distance from the fire, which might have too conspicuously betrayed them to the mark of the enemy, whom they supposed had surprised their secret place, and whom they knew, if in force, could be no other than the bold, daring, and warlike Comanches, that picturesque tribe of warriors who wander, like the Arabs of the desert, in search of plunder and spoil.

In a few minutes after carrying out this daring manoeuvre, Chinchea returned, and taking the halter of his steed in hand, fell into a cautious trot, in which he was imitated by Blake, who had the good sense in all similar contingencies to be guided by one whom he knew to be more experienced than himself. In about ten minutes they once more emerged upon the prairie.

»Well, Chinchea,« said Edward Blake, mounting his wearied steed, »you have, it is plain, stampeded these rascals' nags, and how much further do you intend going?«

The moon had risen now for some time, its pure effulgence illumining the whole landscape which lay before them. A prairie stretched out for some distance, and then again the forest was plainly visible. To this the Indian pointed.

»Camp in wood,« said he, »Blackhawk no follow—too busy find horses.«

»The sooner the better,« exclaimed Blake, »for that disappointment about the venison was a serious thing to a hungry man. Proceed—I follow.«

The night was now lovely in the extreme. They were advancing over an interior prairie of some extent, entirely surrounded by the forest, and covered by a low grass, the result of a burn, which materially assisted the rapidity of their movements. Here and there certain bushes, in knots and clumps, rose in their way, and hence as they rode up, startled deer flew from their haunts, and hastened to find another shelter for the night. The air was cool and chilly, a slight wind having

risen which blew keenly in their faces. Edward Blake listened with intense anxiety for the sound of pursuit, and watched with scarcely less eagerness for the shortening of the distance, which was to be the termination of their journey.

At length the skirts of the much sought wood were reached, and pushing away through the bushes and trees for some two hundred yards, another open space presented itself, and before the two men, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, rose the clear outline of a hill stretching to the right and to the left as far as the eye could reach, rising gradually in height both on its right and left wings. A small spur appeared to advance towards them, jutting out like some buttress from a huge wall, and reaching in its gradual slope to the very spot occupied by the travellers. Jagged, with here a gap, there a pointed summit, with groves of trees dotting its sides, and afar off the sound of water rushing and falling, this line of hill was a novelty in Texan scenic features.

Edward Blake felt surprised, and his astonishment was in no degree lessened when, advancing up this acclivity, the Indian guided him towards the very summit of the height. He followed, however, in silence, until at length Chinchea halted on the verge of a deep chasm, of, however, very moderate width, not perhaps more than eight or nine feet; of its depth it was impossible to judge by the deceitful glimmer of the moon.

The wind swept by cold and chilling at that height above the plain, growling and moaning as it flew to bury itself in the deep gloom of the forest; and Edward was about to ask an explanation of his guide's choosing this inclement spot for a camp, when the voice of the Indian made itself heard, in a series of cries, or rather howls, of a most peculiar and startling description.

»Why, Chinchas —«

The young man's speech was cut short by an event which added not a little to his astonishment. Chinchea's cries at first brought no answer, but after a few moments were successful.

»Who calls at this hour?« exclaimed a voice on the other side of the chasm, in good and plain English, spoken with a parity which surprised the young sailor.

»Chinchea,« replied the Indian, »and Blackhawk in the woods.«

»Heaven defend you then,« replied the voice; »I will lower the bridge, and then pass you quickly.«

A creaking noise like the turning of a wheel followed, and a huge black mass that had before all the appearance of a portion of the face of the rock, came slowly down, and in a few moments offered a passage to the fugitives.

Edward Blake, between astonishment and weariness, was totally unable to speak; and following Chinchea across the drawbridge which had so unexpectedly

presented itself, and passing, in imitation of his guide, two figures whom he met, quite silently, was in a few minutes dazzled and confounded before a huge blazing fire.

The log-house into which they had entered was of tolerably large dimensions, and composed apparently of one room.

To the right of the door was the fire-place, a deep hollow, piled up with heavy hissing logs of wood, which emitted a heat most welcome to the wearied Englishman, creating a grateful glow in most pleasant contrast to the cold he had so recently experienced, while the fragrant odour of the wood was most agreeable to the senses. In front, occupying a large portion of one side of the room, was what in familiar parlance would be called a dresser, garnished with a goodly array of pewter dishes and plates, horn mugs, gourd bowls, common crockery ware coffee cups, surmounted by a row of saucepans. To the left swung a grass hammock, beneath which was a rude bedstead—that is, a layer of shingle nailed over certain solid supporters, and covered by various articles of bedding. Near this were several barrels, which were not for one instant to be mistaken for anything but flour, while sacks of Indian corn were no less clearly apparent to the eye. Near the fire-place hung several sides of bacon, while a kind of cupboard near at hand appeared—at all events to the senses of a hungry man—to be no less abundantly furnished.

Chinchea had led away the horses, and ushered Edward Blake alone into this welcome shelter.

»Hush!« said the Indian, gliding in next moment loaded with the bedding, »master house—good man—but no talk of great country over water—bad done him there he never forgive.«

Chinchea then slipped away, without giving time for any questions, leaving our young adventurer still more puzzled than ever.

»My position is certainly a very odd one,« thought he; but the buoyant nature of youth came next moment to his rescue; »I have, however, a warm fire, a roof over my head, a supper in prospect; let chance provide the rest.«

Two individuals at this moment entered the room, whom we must pause to describe, though Blake did not discover all the minute features we have recorded until the morrow.

The one of middle height, stout, and of singularly muscular frame, at once attracted our hero's attention. He was a man of about forty-five years of age, in the full enjoyment of the muscular vigour which was incident to his time of life. His face was thin and long, not even the intervention of a moustache serving to break the very glaring character of this defect. His eyes were small, grey, and suspicious

in their glances; his nose slightly aquiline, his mouth wearing, on almost all occasions, a bitter and saturnine expression; while the chin, somewhat full and round, gave a look of sensuality to a countenance which, in its main characteristics, was intellectual. His forehead was the most remarkable feature about him, being 80 high as fairly to occupy much more than a third of the whole length of his face. This gave him an imposing and majestic air, despite the rudeness of his garments. His hair was thin and grey, a circumstance which Edward Blake noted with much curiosity.

A green hunting frock of coarse materials, a common cotton handkerchief round the throat, pantaloons of deer-skin, with mocassins, and a wampam belt, were his attire. A brace of huge pistols, a short cat-lass, and a heavy double-barrelled rifle, were his visible arms.

Behind this remarkable figure, and reaching no higher than his waist, stood a man of some fifty years of age, whose appearance was startling in the extreme. Without any deformity of shape, his extreme littleness was in itself a defect. But four feet ten in height, with sandy whiskers and moustaches, as well as hair, with little hands and feet like those of a woman, his costume was exactly similar to that of his companion; his rifle, however, being of slight and elegant workmanship, and single-barrelled. The expression of his countenance was far from agreeable, his eye appearing to penetrate your inmost thoughts.

»You have been in danger in the woods, stranger,« said the master of the house, somewhat gruffly, laying by his arms, and - advancing towards our hero, who was seated by the fire.

»There you go, Philip,« said the little man, in a shrill voice; »always the same. You never saw this man in your life before —I beg the stranger's pardon—but caution is the first requisite in life—and you lay by your arms, while he's studded like an Italian with pistols, knives, and guns.«

Edward rose, his eyes glancing fiercely at the dwarf, while at the same time he disburdened himself of his defensive weapons, which from habit he had retained.

»Jones, you are mad,« said the man addressed as Philip, turning round with a glance no less fierce than that of our young Englishman; »you seem to take every man for a cut-throat.«

»I do, until I know the contrary,« said Jones, calmly.

»Sir, you are welcome,« said Philip, turning contemptuously from the dwarf; »I trust you will excuse the eccentricities of my friend Mr. Jones.«

»Yes, sir, his friend,« repeated the dwarf, somewhat testily; »and the first duty of friendship is caution for those we feel an affection for.«

»Sir,« replied our hero, with a smile, »I am a stranger, in peril of my life; and, as the Scripture hath it, you have taken me in; I know too well the gratitude due to your hospitality, to feel for one moment hurt at the jokes of your companion. In fact, [am rather partial to humour and excentricity, and am persuaded I and Mr. Jones will ere long be very good friends.«

»I never joke,« said the dwarf, laying aside his arms as soon as he saw that Blake had left himself without a weapon, »never.« There was an ugly grimace about his tone which very strongly supported his statement.

»I rather differ from you there, Mr. Jones, and must say I think you excessively facetious. The idea né@w of taking me for an Italian bandit was rather comic—I, a true-born Englishman.«

»There! there!« muttered Jones, with a look of strange meaning, intended for Mr. Philip; »you hear what he says—a true-born Englishman. Well, I never! who would have thought any of the real islanders would have ventured up here?«

»I was but following a very worthy example,« said Edward Blake, with a smile.

»How?« said Philip, speaking somewhat sternly.

»There! there!« muttered the dwarf.

»Why,« continued Blake, carelessly, »where two of my countrymen were so snugly located, a third should scarcely have any fear to venture.«

»Humph!« said Philip, interrupting the dwarf somewhat fiercely; »how learned you we were Englishmen?«

»The fact is—excuse my ignorance,« replied Edward, bowing, »I never heard of you at all until about twenty minutes since. From Chinchea, however, I gathered that you were countrymen.«

»Our renown is not very extensive,« remarked him called Philip, quietly; »few white men penetrate so far as the Eagle's Nest, save trappers and hunters, whom we always welcome. But come, here is Chinchea, and I suppose supper will be no unwelcome break in the conversation.«

Edward Blake owned that he was somewhat famished, and the dwarf proceeded to lay the meal, glancing suspiciously all the while at the young man—never in fact taking his eye off him for one moment, and seeking to penetrate every article of dress which could conceal a weapon.

Coffee, sweetened with mol, without milk, hot bread from a portable oven before the fire, a stew composed of various game, with mush, formed the staple commodities of a meal which proved most welcome to the travellers, who knew too well the value of such luxuries in the backwoods, not to feel] grateful for the hospitality of him who provided them.

»This concluded, Blake entered fully into every detail in connexion with Blackhawk, the position he occupied, and the number and nature of his forces; while Chinchea also added to the stock of information, addressing the master of the house in his own Wacco dialect, which the other appeared to speak fluently.

»His design is certainly upon this place,« said Philip, after he had heard both stories, »there being no other location within fifty miles. However, he shall meet a warm reception; we are two dead shots-Chinchea is another; while you, sir,« addressing Edward, »will, I suppose, lend the aid of your arms?«

»With pleasure,« replied the young man, who now began to believe himself in reality in the thick of an adventure. »do not boast much of my shooting acquirement's, but a year's experience in Texas will always go for something.«

»It is everything, sir—a country like this opens a man's eyes to their full width. More is to be learned in this land in a month, than elsewhere in a year.«

»You are right,« said Edward; »I for one have learned more in that time than during my whole previous life.«

»You may chance before sundown tomorrow to gather further experience,« replied the other; »a skirmish like this we have before us, is no trifle in a man's existence.«

»You have been in many?« inquired Edward, curiously.

»I have,« continued the master of the house, quickly, »in many.«

»Well,« observed Blake, »I must say I am naturally pugnacious, but still I shall always feel qualms ere I shed a man's blood.«

»Blood!« said Philip, with a stern and even savage look, while Jones muttered, »There! there!«—»who spoke of shedding blood? It is here life for life—theirs or ours. One would think you were about to slay—to kill—to destroy a fellow-creature in cold blood.«

Philip spoke with some difficulty—he seemed indignant at the way in which Blake had stated the question.

»It is life for life, certainly,« replied Edward, »but though it be so, still I would, while calmly thinking on the subject, ever feel a repugnance even to taking life —«

»Tush, man,« said Philip, stooping and fastening his mocassin, »let us drop the subject; we shall have enough to achieve to-morrow, without dwelling on the horrors of it to-night. I shall summon you before dawn, and would therefore advise your taking rest. Yonder hammock will, with the aid of your blankets, be very comfortable.«

»Many thanks,« replied Blake, »but do I deprive you of —«

»By no means,« said the other. »I and Jones never sleep in this house. We live here and give accommodation to strangers at times. On the morrow, however, you will find this but a small part of our residence.«

With these words the two men took their arms and went out, Jones still showing his extreme caution, leaving Edward Blake and the Indian alone.

The latter was already fast asleep before the fire, and Edward, though little inclined for slumber, climbed into the hammock, wrapping his blankets round him, and with the universal accompaniment of every Texan traveller in his mouth—a pipe of real Virginia—passed in review the events of one of the most remarkable days of his existence.

This rencontre with Blackhawk, his flight and escape, his arrival in the mysterious Eagle's Nest, the strange character of its inmates, were all matters which crowded at once upon his brain. The manner of the two men most of all puzzled him. He could comprehend neither. It was clear they were anxious not to be too extensively known, above all to Englishmen. Their object it was not so easy to define. Doubts, even fears, crossed the mind of our young hero—but the reflection that he had nothing with him to lose, calmed all suspicion with regard to himself. Still surmises of the most varied and strange nature entered his head, to be chased away and followed by others only new, strange, and even absurd.

In the midst of all he fell asleep, and his heated imagination once set to work, with the face of Blackhawk (so familiar to him) and those of Philip and Jones, he dreamed a dream. The dream was—but it being a record of a passed event, which the reader must not learn at present, we are compelled to omit it. Suffice it to remark, that though it gave no body and shape to his surmises, it served to add very much to his doubts.

Chapter IV.

A SURPRISE.

The situation of the Eagle's Nest was singular! and strikingly picturesque.

An isolated and bare rock, rising in the chops, as it were, of a narrow valley, and separated from the sloping hill, which fell perpendicular from its crest on the side facing the rock, by a deep chasm, through which rushed a stream, in its depth not unlike a thread of silver—it was so jagged and precipitous on all its four faces, as seemingly to be impregnable. Tho surface was uneven in the extreme, here a point jutting up, and there a deep hole sinking, and to no one would it have offered any features attractive as a residence, save to one whose principal object was security.

On each side were lofty hills, the branches of a common chain broken by the valley, the mouth of which the rock above alluded to almost closed. Covered by a deep canopy of forest, the sombre and dark fir, they were too far distant to render their height of any advantage to a besieger, while the hill, the summit of which approached within eight feet, was so commanded as to be completely useless also to any foe, however daring and bold.

From the highest point of this position the view was magnificent. Behind, the valley opened, spreading away for miles in a straight line, one sea of deep green. In part prairie, rich in grass, a deep stream pursued its serpentine course through its depths, its way being marked by two long and crooked lines of willow and poplar.

Here and there rose a green and grassy knoll, bare of trees, while near at hand some little clearing in the woods, an oasis in a vast ocean of forest, relieved the eye from the monotony of verdure, its light straw-coloured tints, arising from the dry 'grass, being in delicate contrast with the deep clad forest. Far in the distance a perpendicular wall of rock appeared to close up the valley, leaving the mind in doubt as to whence came the stream that meandered through its depths. The verdure both of meadow and wood was most grateful to the senses, while the concealed and hidden mysteries of the vast forest added to the pleasure with which all of tasteful and romantic feelings gazed upon it. Indeed the inimitable beauty, extent, and variety of the prospects, the verdure of the fields and meadows, the agreeable fragrantcy of the air, the general lustre, mildness, and benigance of the heavens, made it a charming and delightful vision.

In front lay the illimitable prairie, crossed here and there by belts of trees, with occasional clumps of wood, while the course of the little river that ran first through the valley, then rushing between the perpendicular rocks of the chasm above described, burst forth upon the plains, was clearly visible for many miles,

until it was lost in the blue distance. A sensation of awe, that still but irrepressible feeling, inseparable from all that is vast and apparently without end, rendered this portion of the scene perfectly sublime.

From the skirt of the wood on this side unto the Eagle's Nest, over the grassy plain, which swept in a gentle slope upwards to the rock, the distance was about half a mile, its monotony broken only by a grove of fir, not more than fifty yards distant from the habitation, and which presented all the marks of having once reached to the very crest of the hill, the intervening space having been cleared in order to provide logs for building, and also for firewood.

The rock itself was surrounded on all sides by a wall of stone, rude and unplastered, while exactly opposite the spot on which Chinchea and young Blake had stood on the night of their arrival, was the drawbridge, which, when up, served the purpose of a gate to defend the narrow aperture left for the purpose of entry. Behind this, leaving first a small courtyard, was the log hut occupied by the travellers, while, on each side, reaching from it to the stone rampart, were outhouses. Behind this, and perched on the summit of a small table rock, was another edifice.

Like the first, it was formed of huge unsquared logs, without windows, though several loops served for that purpose; its roof was of treble shingle, and was surmounted by a bare pole, that had all the air of a flagstaff, even to the halyards destined to haul up whatever colours the owner of the retreat had a mind to unfurl.

The remainder of the surface of the rock, in all about an acre and a half, was composed of corals for the cattle, both horned and other, which owned the sway of the strange beings who dwelt in this sequestered spot.

Young Blake, at an early hour, stood surveying the features of the scene with a zest and interest, which increased rather than diminished as his eye took in all the varied beauties of the landscape, illumined as it was by the rising sun, that over all shed its crimson glories, as it crept slowly its upward course in the eastern sky.

The young man was delighted with his adventure, though his dream and certain vague fancies that floated over his mind, threw an almost unconscious gloom over his spirits. Dim shadows, forebodings of ill, with a conviction of past evil in connexion with his hosts, crowded upon his soul, and left behind that inexplicable but fearful sting which ever belongs to a state of doubt and suspicion. This, however, speedily faded, though from an impulse which he never could explain to himself, he had already resolved not to make his name known to his hosts.

While his thoughts were busy with the past and his eyes glancing over the superb landscape which lay at his feet, a slight rustling at his elbow caused him to turn. It was Chinchea.

»Good camp,« said the Indian, »better place—woods bad-scalp gone 'fore morning.«

»A very undesirable consummation certainly,« said Blake, gravely; »though whether this be a good camp is a question I have yet to solve.«

The Indian grunted, but made no answer, it was clear he did not understand the meaning of the young Englishman's words.

Blake made no attempt to enlighten him, but after a brief pause scanned him with a scrutinising air.

»Chinchea,« said he, »you are my friend.«

»Hugh!« replied the Indian, assuming an air of grateful remembrance, the origin of their connexion being Blake's assiduity in attending him during severe illness at Houston.

»Chinchea remembers the day when his white brother gave him physic in the great village?«

The Indian assented.

»What is my name?« continued the young man.

»Blake,« replied the Wacco, pronouncing the word with a strong emphasis on the a, and nearly omitting the e, making it almost Blacke.

»It is,« said the other; and laying his hand on the Indian's arm, he added, »I have a strange fancy, I know not why, that my name should remain a secret with these people.«

»No business of Indian to know white man's name; Chinchea got no long tongue like squaw.«

»But I must have a name. It would be unpolite to decline giving one,« mused Blake.

»Call himself Little Bear,« grunted the red skin.

»A very fine appellation, no doubt,« said the young man with a smile, »but under the circumstances I think I shall adopt Brown.«

»Brown—good,« said the Wacco, whose long intercourse with the whites made him an adept in their tongues, »when tired call Brown—speak, and Indian call him other name.«

This was said with a quaint gravity that fairly overcame the Englishman; he laughed outright with a heartiness which searched out the echoes, and brought them playing back about his ears in merry guise.

»Well, I do not think I shall adopt many more aliases,« said he; »but Brown is a good travelling name, it leaves no great mark behind.«

While the young man yet spoke, the voice of his host of the preceding night hailed him from the door of the hut.

»Good morning, sir,« exclaimed he, advancing as he spoke, »what think you now of our Eagle's Nest, Mr.—— He paused.

»Brown—Edward Brown,« said our hero, with a slight tremour; »your position is certainly well chosen, and might be defended against vast odds.«

»You think so,« said the other, with listening eyes. »I am glad of it, and as I fancy we shall soon try the experiment, hope your words may come true.«

»I hope so too, Mr. ——,« our hero hesitated, imitating the other's manner to the life,

»Philip Stevens,« said he, drily, and yet with a smile at Blake's manner.

»There! there!« muttered a voice at his elbow, »what occasion is there for you a bawling out your name in that way. There is no occasion for everybody to know your name, Philip.«

»And if they do, no great harm is done,« said Philip, fiercely, »my name is not one that I care hiding much. And if I did, in this country we are pretty much our own masters.«

»There! there! you are so impatient,« said Jones, advancing. »I did not mean anything, and only spoke for your good. Breakfast is ready.«

»Mr. Brown,« said Philip Stevens, turning to our hero, »the keen air of this lofty rock has doubtless whetted your appetite.«

»I am already sufficiently of a Texan never to refuse a good offer,« replied Blake, following the footsteps of his host, who led the way towards the log hut.

The Indian all this time had leant motionless against the stone wall, his eyes apparently fixed on vacancy, but in reality watching the countenance of our hero with jealous care. He had divested himself of every sign of civilised garb, and stood ghastly in his war paint.

Save his long black hair, hanging in thick clusters over his shoulders, he was naked to much below the waist; round his middle was a long strip of leather of various colours, serving the purpose of pantaloons of civilised society. Thence downward he was naked, save his mocassined feet? A buffalo hide shield was suspended at his back, a bow lay beside it, while a large quiver full of arrows, and a buck skin pouch, completed his attire.

His skin, however, was one mass of black and red paint, so put on as to assume all the most hideous and diversified figures. Everything about him wore the air of

a warrior ready for the war path.

A keen and glittering tomahawk, with the long scalping knife furnished by the whites, completed his outward ornaments.

Ere however he entered the hut, the Indian, with an intuitive delicacy which Edward Blake presently appreciated in its full extent, threw a blanket over his form, completely veiling the signs of terror which were so plainly apparent, as well as his almost naked body.

When the young Englishman set his foot upon the threshold of the log hut, his surprise knew no bounds, though he did his utmost to conceal so very great an evidence of inexperience.

At the head of the table sat a young, girl, while four men, besides his host and ones, simultaneously took their seats. A vacant place was pointed out beside the first by Philip.

Behind, occupied in laying the various articles of food upon the table, was a glossy, sprightly, laughing-eyed negro lass, whose healthy appearance spoke volumes for the treatment she received.

»My daughter, Mr. Brown; Captain Cephas Doyle, Mr. Brown; my hunters,« said Stevens, with a glance of peculiar meaning at the girl.

Edward Blake muttered some incoherent reply, and then the whole party fell to upon the viands, he imitating them as much to conceal his surprise as to satisfy his appetite.

Dressed plainly, but in a lady-like manner, of marked beauty, there was a delicacy and grace about this young creature which astonished and bewildered the Englishman the more his stolen glances drank every feature of her countenance.

Not more than eighteen, there was a sadness, a gloom, about the expression of her face which added not a little to our hero's curiosity. She did the honours of the table with quiet grace, and seemed by no means inclined to open her lips, while apparently from being so used to strangers, she paid little attention to the new arrival.

For some time Blake spoke not at all, the others snatching an occasional moment to discuss the probabilities of a contest with Blackhawk and his gang.

Captain Cephas Doyle appeared somewhat anxious that the contest should take place, and his warm antipathy to everything in the shape of an Indian, not even restrained by the presence of Chinchea, who calmly and silently glided into a seat beside Blake-caused our hero to survey him a little curiously,

About five-and-twenty, his face was rather broader than is commonly the case with your true Yankee. His eyes were small, grey, and keen; his nose broad and

straight; his mouth large with thick lips, while his chin was somewhat overburdened with fat; he wore neither moustache nor whiskers, appendages which are rarely to be seen upon Americans at home, whatever may be the case abroad, where Jonathan, we know not for what reason, is generally anxious to be taken for anything save what he really is. His costume was much the same as our hero.

»What is your opinion, Miss Stevens?« said young Blake, addressing the daughter of his host.

»Well, I conclude no female has much of an idea in them partiklers,« interrupted Captain Cephas Doyle, hastily, »I reckon they are about ignorant on that pint.«

»My opinion, Mr. Brown,« said the young lady appealed to, without noticing the captain's interruption, »is, that God made all his creatures in his image, and that while he has given one colour to one, and to another a different hue, he has granted a soul unto all. In my opinion, a man is to be judged by his acts, nut by the colour of his skin.«

The captain appeared not to relish this view of the matter, and continued his argument with the more willing auditors, or, at all events, with auditors who showed less distaste for his views.

Edward Blake and Alice Stevens, the ice being once broken, opened a tête-à-tête conversation, which was speedily carried on with animation on both sides. Edward was delighted with his companion, whose elegant tastes, refined language, and sound knowledge, surprised him. All the accomplishments of her sex appeared familiar to her, while the rich stores of English, French, and Italian literature were equally well known. As soon as the young girl found that her neighbour was one who could converse like a gentleman; who spoke without using the backwood slang; whose education had been that of a scholar; who had travelled much, and observed men and manners—than all her reserve vanished. So animated did their talk, indeed, become, that they scarcely noticed the departure of the greater number of their guests from the table.

»Well, Mr. Brown,« said Philip Stevens, a smile playing upon his generally solemn features, »you and my daughter appear such good friends that I shall leave you to make better acquaintance, while I and the rest see to such preparations as are necessary.«

The two new friends started, nay, even blushed, while Edward replied as he rose »Nay, Mr. Stevens, though not a soldier, I am a sailor, and will not be absent when duty calls.«

»I am sure of it,« replied the other, with another smile, 'and will summon you when needed. Meanwhile my daughter and you can become, as I have said, better acquainted. It is seldom Alice happens upon a traveller who can converse with her—never, indeed, has she seen one who engaged her attention so completely.«

This was said with some degree of playful malice in his manner, that forced a reply from Alice.

»Sir,« said she, with a slight shudder, and relapsing almost wholly into her former gloom, »it is not often that an educated gentleman finds his way into these parts. Mr. Brown has unconsciously recalled to my recollection so much of my early associations, as to be a most welcome companion.«

Edward Blake, alias Mr. Brown, bowed all due gallantry, while Philip Stevens, with a slight frown, called Alice aside for & moment, and having held a brief conversation in whispered tones, left the hut, and these two new friends, who had met before, remained alone, utterly ignorant of the wild and mysterious tie which had ever bound their fates together.

Chapter V.

PIETRO.

About three miles to the west of the Eagle's Nest is a spot very different in its characteristics from that which we have just described. The hills and the wood, in this instance being in close contact, the former even nestling over the latter, in an overhanging cliff some fifty feet high. Beside this rise the fir, the sycamore, the cedar, and the oak, their tall heads waving over the summit of the precipice.

Between the skirt of the wood and the lower part of the rocky height was left a small space, which, being favourable for all purposes of concealment, and being protected from the weather, had often been the retreat of travellers.

On the morning of which we have already spoken it was occupied by a tent, formed from a few poles leant against the rock, and over which a large cloth had been cast. In front of this was a fire, round which several packs formed commodious and comfortable seats, On them were seated three men, of whom one was evidently a man of superior rank, while the others were as clearly his menials.

About sixty years of age, with swarthy complexion, hair as black as jet, eyes large, piercing, and fiery, his costume was that of a Mexican caballero of the first rank, His lofty steeple hat of white felt was ornamented with much bullion; his jacket was striped with various colours, his pantaloons were covered with embroidery, while over all was cast a splendid poncho, a Mexican blanket.

»I wish Pietro would return,« said the master, speaking in that mixed Spanish and Indian dialect, which has, in the present day, been dignified by the name of the Mexican language, »for if he be right in supposing men of evil disposition in the forest, the sooner we reach shelter the better.«

»Pietro is a clever lad, Don Juan,« replied the elder of the two domestics, »and I warrant me was not mistaken.«

»And yet a distant vapour may have been taken for smoke,« observed Don Juan de Chagres.

»Pietro is too used to the woods,« said the old servant, shaking his head, »he has been amongst these wild Texans since a child.«

»True—true!« said their master, »and the more reason, therefore, for our taking a meal. Here comes the signora, and we will breakfast.«

The domestics rose, while their master quietly drew forth a cigarette, and lighting it, puffed away, as if he fancied it a necessary preliminary to the coming meal.

The tent opened as he had spoken, and there issued therefrom young woman in the full pride of her beauty, not a little heightened by the fresh air which came murmuring through the trees.

About two-and-twenty, a brunette, with large, speaking eyes; a mouth delicate, small, and rosy; hair glossy, and jet as the raven's wing; her person had all the fullness and rounded grace of womanhood, with the light airy step of a girl. The chief defect, perhaps the only one in her beautiful features, was the lowness of the forehead.

Her costume was the usual graceful walking dress of Mexican ladies, who, though their darkness be

*»But the embrowning of the fruit that tells
How rich within the soul of sweetness dwells,«*

want the charming skins and rosy complexions of our fair countrywomen. The principal feature in the costume was the reboso, or mantilla, which, flung gracefully over the left shoulder and passed across the mouth, left nothing but the eyes visible, and which is the more necessary that Mexican female costume is but little without it, one garment only, besides the petticoat, being worn, braced with a sash round the waist.

Taking her seat upon a pack opposite the old man, the young woman signified her readiness to partake of the meal which had been prepared, and which, despite the rudeness of the spot, would have been despised by no traveller in any part of the world, Chocolate, coffee, hot tortillias—a kind of very thin pancake—venison steaks—a roasted turkey, were but some of the ingredients of the feast.

»Where is Pietro?« said the lady, addressing the elder domestic, while she sipped her chocolate.

»Pietro is in the woods, signora,« replied the servant, »tho lad thinks he has seen enemies within the gloom of the forest.«

»Santa Maria,« exclaimed the signora, With a start, »then why sit we here so calmly.«

This was addressed to the elderly caballero.

»It would be unwise to move, until we were certain in which direction the enemy lie. There might be such a thing as falling into their very jaws.«

»This comes of these wild journeys,« replied the signora, with a sneer; »were we quietly at home in Santa Fé, there would be no such fears.«

»There would be worse,« continued Don Juan de Chagres, »your own countrymen, when enemies, are even more dangerous than the Texans.«

The old man spoke truth. Enemies, whose blood, religion, soil, language, differ from us—whose feelings, sympathies, and ideas are utterly at variance with our own, are far less ruthless and dreadful in their anger, than those whom we stir up within the circle of our native land. To pass by the thousand instances, which civil wars offer us in illustration, those who have seen enmity between brother and brother, will own how much more deadly it has been, than any generated between mere strangers.

It is because where once love has existed, there is no medium; affection or undying hatred!

»We never suffered those miseries before it entered your head to oppose the General Santa Anna,« continued the signora, glancing round at the dark vistas which opened on every side; »for my part, I cannot see the good of opposing the government.«

»Santa Anna,« replied Don Juan, »is a tyrant, whose sole object is to snatch a crown, Every good Mexican is bound to sacrifice himself for the commonwealth.«

»Don Juan de Chagres,« said the young woman, with a laugh, »has not sacrificed much. I fancy he has left little behind him.«

»I have left my home,« exclaimed the old man, severely, »for the dangers of this wild country.«

»Where I suppose you fully intend wandering evermore.«

»I intend crossing Texas, and taking up my abode in New Orleans, until things take a turn.«

Santa Maria, madre de Dios!" cried the young woman, as a rustling was heard in the bushes, »what noise is that?«

»Pietro!«

As the elder domestic spoke, a young man, half Indian, half Mexican, in the many coloured garb of the latter country, and armed with a heavy short rifle, large pistols, and small axe, stepped forth from the cover of the woods.

»What news, Pietro?« cried the signora,

»Blackhawk is in the woods,« replied the young man, with a slight shudder.

At the period we speak of, the gang of marauders, commanded by Blackhawk, had gained by a series of atrocities of a most frightful character, a most widely extended reputation. Now appearing on the border settlements of Texas, now on those of Mexico, it defied retaliation by the swiftness of its movements. Both Indians, Mexicans, and Texans, were bent on its destruction, it being composed of outcasts from the three races, who treated all they happened on as enemies.

»Blackhawk!« exclaimed the old man, rising.

»Blackhawk!« almost shrieked the young woman.

»Blackhawk!« repeated the servants, in a kind of chorus.

»Bring up the mules,« cried the master, »we will return upon our steps.«

»To advance would be better, Signor Don Juan,« said Pietro, who was satisfying his hunger, »there is a white settlement not three miles ahead.«

»A settlement,« said the signora.

Pietro assented, and in a few words described the position of the Eagle's Nest.

»Doubtless, the post of these thieves,« said the terrified signora.

»By no means,« exclaimed the signor; »It know the owner. It is Signor Filippo Stephano, a brave Englishman.«

»Then,« said the signora, rising, »let us hence.«

The mules, eight in number, with five horses, were now brought up and hastily loaded. In less than a quarter of an hour, the whole party, with the exception of Pietro, were en route. Having given ample directions to the others, he remained Behind, intending once more to creep within sight of the terrible gang, whose chief had given to it so unenviable a reputation.

Pietro stood in the skirt of the wood watching the disappearance of his companions, and was about to turn to seek the shelter of the forest, when some sudden and inexplicable impulse induced him to glide beneath the shelter of the rock, and by standing motionless against its blackened and cracked surface to cause his body to blend with its shadow.

A slight noise, the cracking of a dry bough, a rustling as if some animal pushing his way through the bush, had induced this rapid precautionary measure.

Next moment the face of an Indian peered through the trees in the direction of the retreating party, whose forms were not yet quite concealed in the distance, and then, after a rapid survey of the late encampment, he stepped forth into the open space.

About six feet high, hideous as paint and ugliness could make him, naked save round the middle, and armed with musket, cutlass, and knife, Pietro at once recognised him as an Apache, a tribe to whom he in common with most of his countrymen bore the most deadly and unextinguishable hatred.

»Waugh!« said the Indian, with much satisfaction, shaking his fist in the direction in which the fugitives had then disappeared; and with this one word he advanced into the centre of the open space, and presently strode up towards the rock, and stood beside the dying embers of the fire.

He was now but eight feet distant from Pietro, who lay hid behind a projection of the rock to the Indian's left, The young Mexican, however, was too experienced

a woodsman not to know that continued concealment was in the present instance hope 'less; and accordingly determined to have the advantage of a surprise, before the Indian could retreat a step, rushed forward, and gaining a position beside the enemy, in one bound, grappled with the huge Apache.

Pietro's hands were encumbered with his rifle, as were those of the Indian with his musket, and in the hurry exhibited by each to gain a hold upon the other, their weapons met, crossed, and were blended into one, each clutching his own and that of his enemy with terrific force.

The Indian gave vent to his never failing »hugh!« and then the combatants paused, face to face, gazing intently one at the other.

Pietro was shorter than his foe, but he was muscular, and full of strength; still, had not the other been enervated by drink, there would have been little doubt as to the superiority of the man of the woods.

Neither spoke, each striving to wrest the murderous weapons from his opponent's grasp, when the most dangerous arms would be in possession of the stronger party, and the other wholly at the victor's mercy.

They writhed, they jerked, they seemed about to tear their very arms from their sockets; now Pietro cast the Indian half to the ground, and now the Apache would dash the Mexican from his feet. The muscles of their faces were fearfully distended; both fought for dear life and for the much prized victory, but they were too equally matched for the contest to be speedily decided.

Suddenly they paused, and each took breath, while both glared in the other's face with an intense loathing that appeared almost inexplicable in men who had never before met. But the hereditary hatred of their races was added to the love of life, and the desire for victory. Death spoke in their distended eyes.

»Apache dog—carajo,« said the Mexican.

The Indian spoke not a word, but darting backwards, and swinging himself round at the same moment, fairly dragged his enemy from his feet, and whirled him round and round in the air. But Pietro, though startled, held on with unflinching energy, and his weight being too great for the Indian to continue his efforts for any length of time, the young Mexican was soon once more upon his feet.

The tiger glares not upon his prey more ferociously than did these two well-matched warriors now glare one upon another. Again they struggled, their hands burying themselves, in appearance, in the iron barrels, until, at length, they slipped together, and came tumbling headlong to the ground, both guns exploding at the same moment.

The Indian sprang to his feet, and waving his heavy cutlass, rushed upon the Mexican, but Pietro, coolly cocking a heavy horseman's pistol, shot him through the heart, and he fell dead with a yell that waked the dying echoes both of the forest and rocks.

Seizing his own arms and those of his enemy, the young and victorious Mexican plunged at once on the trail of his master and mistress, whom he speedily overtook. The report of the guns had reached them, and had added much to their alarm, believing as they did that the dreaded gang were in full chase.

Pietro, much fatigued, indeed completely worn out with his struggle and subsequent pursuit of his friends, mounted his horse, and having regained his breath, related what had passed.

»Those reports will bring the whole party to the camp,« exclaimed Don Juan de Chagres, hurriedly, »and our trail will be the next object of pursuit.«

»We shall be all murdered,« responded she, signora in alarm, more affected than real.

»We are much ahead of the ruffians,« said Pietro, »and will gain the shelter, I hope, before they can catch us, See! yonder is the settlement!«

Chapter VI.

THE ATTACK.

When Edward and Alice were left alone, a momentary embarrassment ensued. Alice seemed subdued and mournful, while the young sailor, much struck by the gentleness, beauty, and seemingly graceful mind of his companion, began to feel somewhat doubtful as to the precise nature of the feelings which were, even at that early stage of their acquaintance, rising in his bosom with reference to the guardian bud of the Eagle's Nest.

»Do you intend remaining long in Texas, Mr. Brown?« said Alice, first breaking the brief silence which followed the departure of Philip Stevens.

»I left England and came to Texas with the intention of remaining altogether,« replied Edward.

»And do you still adhere to so rash a determination?« said Miss Stevens, with the faintest shadow of a smile.

»At home I have no friends,« observed Blake, somewhat sadly. »I have lost all—parents, friends, and, by some strange chance, fortune itself. I am now a species of adventurer, a soldier, or rather a sailor of fortune, and, therefore, where my subsistence is to be obtained, there is my country?«

»But do you not regret England, your real home?«

This was said curiously, and with some degree of anxiety.

»Every Englishman does who is worthy of the name,« answered Edward. »Circumstances may render his native land an undesirable residence; he may find an easier living elsewhere; but no matter what his foreign success, he will ever find a moment to give to memory, and it will be of home that memory will be busy.«

»Ah, Mr. Brown,« said Alice, warmly, »I that know little of my country, that was a mere child when I left it, I still yearn for England—for that land that my imagination paints as little short of a paradise. I see the beauty of this wild and romantic position; I enjoy to the full the luxury of its pure air, its delightful scenery. its glorious mornings, and alas, as in life, its still more glorious evenings; its sunrises and sunsets charm and delight me, but I ever feel some secret want here, which, I fear me, never will be supplied.«

»And this want« said Edward, despite himself, eagerly.

»Is companionship; I know not why. I that live and have my being among hunters, trappers, and wild Indians, should be: rights assimilate myself unto them, but cannot do so, Their ideas and mine do not harmonise; their conversation is

distasteful to me; their thoughts and feelings are foreign to my nature, and I feel alone.«

»I comprehend you fully, Miss Stevens,« replied Edward, after a pause; »and can only ascribe your sensations to an innate appreciation of female dignity, and to the fact that neither birth nor education originally fitted you for the wilds.«

Young Blake kept his eyes fixed keenly on the countenance of the young girl as he spoke, with a view to gather from its expression if his ideas were correct or not. Alice changed colour rapidly, and for a moment made no reply. Some chord had been touched, which vibrated to the heart of the listener.

»We are very new friends, Mr. Brown,« said she, at length, with some little more of distance in her manner, »to be thus cross-examining one another's feelings. Supposing that, instead of thus speculating, I were to show the secrets of the Eagle's Nest.«

»With pleasure,« replied Edward, not, however, without some slight evidence of pique in his manner, and rising at the same time; »this romantically named habitation should have many curious features. But believe me not impertinent if I have cross examined you; it has been because I have taken an interest in one whom I see removed from all fitting society.«

»Impertinent! oh, no!« said Alice, turning, and giving her hand to the young sailor; »but [am peculiarly circumstanced, and you must not always ask me to explain either my acts or my words.«

»In me then find a friend in whom to trust,« said Edward, warmly.

Alice replied, but turned again towards the door, and led the way into the courtyard. On a little rising mound that reached nearly to the summit of the stone battlements of the Nest, stood the whole party connected with the Nest, gazing out upon the vast prospect that lay in front. Of these Miss Stevens took not the slightest notice, though Philip glanced with an approving smile towards the young couple; but opening a little wicket to the left, another court-yard, or rather division of the surface of the rock, was gained.

It was about ten yards square, and had been covered with a thin layer of mould, divided into beds by paths of shingle and pebbles, and was dignified by the name of Alice's garden. Various wild flowers, of which the prairie yields an abundant supply, had been transplanted from their native beds, and under the careful cultivation of Alice and her negro girl appeared to thrive amazingly, and to take kindly to their new home. A rude seat, a table, with a tarpaulin awning over it, such were the other features of this spot.

The prominent building alluded to above, and which appeared the keep of the castle, formed one side of the young girl's garden, and towards this her steps

were now directed. It had two stories, the upper one being without a roof, and approached by a ladder. Alice led the way into the lower room. It was a small apartment, for the locality well furnished with many a little feminine luxury, and to the surprise and great gratification of Edward Blake, several books and a guitar lay prominently on a table.

»You have many things here, Miss Stevens, to which in the wilds one is usually a stranger,« said the young Englishman.

»They are remnants of the past, of which some day you may know more,« replied Alice. »the books are at your service, and, if you play, so is the guitar.«

»I do play a little,« continued Edward Blake; »but would, if you object not, converse of this wild spot.«

As he spoke, the young sailor unconsciously took up a book, and it opened at the flyleaf.

A name had been in it, and more, an engraved one, surmounted by a coronet; but much pains had been taken to erase and efface all sign of what had once existed. Struck with surprise, Edward, forgetting that the girl's eyes were upon him, fixed his glance curiously upon it, and endeavoured to decipher the name which had been blazoned on the page.

Blake thought he could faintly trace the arms and words, and as he did so turned faint, while a deadly pallor overspread his face.

»You are unwell,« said Alice, who had been a strangely interested spectator of this little scene.

»It is nothing,« replied Edward, recovering himself, and laying down the book; »but methinks I hear a bustle without; my assistance may be wanted.«

»You will be summoned fast enough,« said Alice; »but that you may see all that is going on, let us ascend to the roof of this block.«

The sailor; whose ideas were in a complete whirl, obeyed, and preceded the young lady, knowing that all over the world that is etiquette in going up a ladder.

It was a level esplanade, with four guns, one commanding each side of the Eagle's Nest. To mask their presence the portholes were raised. Each taking one as a seat, the new friends sat down. Neither appeared much inclined for conversation. Edward was pondering on a long forgotten subject, brought forcibly and painfully to his mind, he knew not why, while Alice was dwelling on the somewhat strange manner of her countryman.

Blake was leaning over the parapet—his eye wandering carelessly down the slope towards the forest—when the Mexican party burst from the woods, making eagerly for the Eagle's Nest. Both he and Alice rose with some anxiety, as the manner of the fugitives sufficiently explained the reason of their hurry.

»Look out, Mr. Brown,« said Philip Stevens, turning towards the block, »warm work is commencing.«

»Shall I join you?«

»Nay; you can work one of those carronades, I expect.«

»With pleasure,« cried Blake, all his energy and love of adventure at once effacing any other impression from his mind; »give the word, and I will serve them with a vengeance.«

« Bravely spoken,« replied the master of the Eagle's Nest, who seemed much struck with Edward's spirit; »and you, Alice, give the rogues a bit of bunting. We will tight for our lives under good colours.«

Alice quietly turned to a huge ammunition box, and, taking therefrom a large bundle, proceeded to attach the colours to the halyards. Blake was so intently engaged in watching the progress of the fugitives as they hurried towards the refuge which appeared to offer them protection, that he hardly noticed the young girl's proceeding. Presently, however, a rustling and fluttering over his head made him look upwards, and there on a red field waved the arms of England.

A slight tremour of pleasure came to his heart, such as we feel ever, when, in a strange land, a memorial of that country which gave us birth is brought before our eyes.

»You see, Mr. Brown,« said the daughter of the outlaw, for such Philip Stevens appeared, »that we have not lost all memory of home.«

»Indeed I do, Miss Stevens,« he replied, warmly; »and if anything could add to my willingness to meet so foul a foe as that we have to contend with, it is the sight of that gallant, proud, and time-honoured flag.«

At this moment, the fugitives being half across the prairie, the band of pursuers came whooping, yelling, and rushing from half a dozen different points of the forest; and from the quickness of their movements, compared with the slow progress of the heavily laden mules, appeared certain to overtake them. Blake's heart leaped within him, for he saw that a woman was amongst the flying party, and the native gallantry of his character tempted him to risk all to save her from the gang in pursuit. The Mexicans were evidently urging their beasts to the very utmost, but Blackhawk and his party were coming up apace.

»Stand by to lower the gangway,« said Philip, in a voice which rang through the Eagle's Nest, and bespoke that now he was in his element; »get ready your gun, Mr. Brown; and when the Mexicans turn into the marrow path, give it to the rogues behind?«

»Pray, Miss Stevens, go below,« exclaimed Edward.

»Nay, Mr. Brown, while one of my own sex is in danger, I will remain. Ah! they are close upon them. Heaven preserve the poor lady.

As she spoke, Don Juan de Chagres and his party had reached a narrow beaten trail, which led directly to the entrance of the Eagle's Nest, and to enter which they left what had formerly been the track of a ball from the gun which Blake had level-led at the pursuers. Next instant a loud report and a flash drew all eyes to the summit of the block, and a ball went ploughing up the earth in the very centre of the wild and ferocious band of the renowned Blackhawk. The whole party halted, and next moment the Mexicans were under cover of the rifles of Philip Stevens and his men.

»Served like a true man,« cried the outlaw, approvingly; »that ball killed no man, but it saved one or two lives. They will now think twice before they attack us, so e'en come down and aid me to receive our new guests.«

Alice had thrown a shawl round her shoulders, and assumed a straw hat, having added which slight features to her costume, she accompanied Blake towards the portion of the Eagle's Nest through which the Mexicans were, no doubt with heartfelt satisfaction, hurrying. Hearty congratulations were passed; and while Alice led the young Mexican away to her private chamber, there to seek quiet, and to recover from the severe fright which she, in common with the whole party, had undergone, a conference was held of the men, and various numbers were suggested as being the numerical force of Blackhawk. As, however, Pietro and Chinchea, who alone had seen them, agreed pretty well in calling them fifty or thereabouts, this was received as that against which they would probably have to contend; while twelve, including Don Juan and Chinchea, comprised the utmost force of the woodland garrison. As the Eagle's Nest was well protected and supplied in abundance with food and ammunition, while water could always be drawn up in buckets, the numbers would not have been so very disproportionate, had it not been for the desperate and reckless character of the men who composed the beleaguering force.

It was agreed, therefore, that every precautionary measure should be taken, that a look-out should be continually kept on the summit of the block, and a sentinel keep constantly on the watch near the bridge. This decision had been scarcely come to, when the sharp twang of a rifle was heard, and a bullet struck the edge of the stone parapet about half a foot from the person of Philip Stevens.

»So ho! warm work already,« cried he; »but whence, in the fiend's name, comes that shot? Ah! from the pine-grove yonder—a sad mistake of mine, as these bloodthirsty devils will, I fear, show me.«

»A gun from the block,« observed Blake, »would scatter any skulkers.«

»True, and you, John, give it to them,« addressing a man who had taken up his post as sentry. »But it were better an it were burnt about their ears.«

»Ugh—good,« said the Indian; and without a word, he proceeded to put the suggestion into execution.

Providing himself with flint, steel, and tinder, he laid himself on the ground, and rolled across the narrow planks that formed the bridge. Between the Nest and the grove of firs above alluded to, were the charred and blackened stumps of the trees which had been felled, ending in a dense pile of boughs recently cut for firewood from standing trees, that had been doomed to share the fate of their predecessors. It took the Indian but 4 brief space of time to reach this position; and then seating himself behind a log, the whole party, rifle in hand, watched his operations with intense anxiety. Cautiously collecting a few leaves and dry twigs, the Indian arranged them in such a manner as to communicate a blaze to the surrounding pile with the greatest possible rapidity, and then proceeded to execute the most difficult portion of his task.

Placing the tinder—composed of woodland spunk—upon the flint, and holding ready the dry cotton mixed with a few grains of powder, which was to provide the necessary blaze, the Indian struck two sharp strokes upon the stone. Quick as thought, some half dozen heads were protruded from the fir-grove in eager haste to capture the daring incendiary. A volley from the Nest at once drove them back, and next minute the whole pile was in flames.

Up to this moment the gun—arrested at a signal from Philip, when he saw the Indian about to follow out his other suggestion—had remained silent; but in order to prevent the possibility of the fire being extinguished, two or three rushed to the summit of the block, and rained an iron volley into the thick of the fir-grove. In a few moments the flames had their own, and away scampered the small but daring band that had been thrown, by the foresight of Blackhawk, into such close propinquity to the Eagle's Nest.

On the Indian's return, the entrance to the place was closed, and every preparation made for the serious siege which was now expected.

Chapter VII.

THE LIVE OAK CREST.

Repulsed once, the gang, which lay in the woods-seeking the destruction of the Eagle's Nest, was little likely to attempt any renewal of the attack, until favoured by the dark canopy of night; and the garrison of the stronghold having, as stated in the previous chapter, taken every important precautionary measure, occupied themselves in the minor details of backwood warfare—casting bullets, preparing patching, filling powder horns, etc. As Edward had none of these duties to perform, and was, moreover, anxious to continue his acquaintance with Alice, he strolled towards the little garden, and stood at the gate.

It were idle to say that Edward loved the young girl, whom he had but seen for the first time that morning; no such feeling or sentiment actuated his bosom. Far from the haunts of civilisation, it was deeply society of one so very different to what backwood life generally affords, and Edward appreciated the opportunity. He was however heart whole, though he had been much interested both by the pleasing manners, graceful mind, and lovely form of the outlaw's daughter.

Love at first sight is to us an imaginary creation of a poetic mind, or if not, it is one of those freaks of the human heart which should be indulged in as little as possible. No love can lead to happiness which is not founded on mutual esteem and knowledge of one another's character. A solitary meeting will at best tell us, if the lady have pretty ankles, or what is the colour of her eyes or hair, with a glimpse of her nose and chin, and such like small circumstances, which have a very trifling effect upon the whole.

Edward paused when about to raise the latch, as he heard voices, but recognising them as those of the fair Mexican fugitive, whose dazzling beauty had not escaped his notice, he hesitated no longer, but pushed the gate open, and entered.

On a seat near the lower stone wall of the block—above fashioned with huge wooden logs—the two young girls were seated side by side, presenting one of those marked contrasts which are most pleasant to the eye. The human head and human heart delight in the variegated tint. It is not the delicate bloom on the roseate peach which pleases, it is the contrast it presents to the straw-coloured tints of the white—it is not the golden streak of day, at early dawn, which captivates the senses, but its beauty as relieved against the dull sky above—it is not the mere lovely and delicate hue of the blushing rose, but the contrast which its petals bear to all around—it is not brown or black, auburn or golden hair—it is not the blushing charms, rosy, pink, and lovely, which burst on woman's cheek,

but the gentle contrast to the marble brow which excites so much of pleasing emotion in our bosoms. So with woman on the whole. It is the comparison of one style of beauty with another—it is the fact, that no two of God's fairest creatures are alike, that makes the whole so bright and beautiful.

As he caught sight of them, Edward hardly knew which to admire most—the gentle, fair, and lovely Alice, all retirement, modesty, and blushing beauty; or the proudly handsome and womanly Mexican, who moved with the majesty, which, on paper, is usually given to queens, but which belongs, without regard to station, to peculiar form, figure, and feeling. They were conversing in Spanish, a language which, in its corrupted form, is familiar to every good Texan.

»I hope, signora, I do not intrude?« said Edward, approaching.

»Say rather that you feel you are doing us a favour, in deigning to throw away your time upon two forlorn damsels,« said Margaretta, such was the Mexican's name—in a gay and open manner, such as an English woman would scarcely have assumed after seven years' intimate acquaintance.

»Mr. Brown is visitor like yourself,« interrupted Alice, quietly, making way for him at the same time upon the seat, »and hospitality requires that we make him free of our castle; the favour, however,« she added, with a smile, »is on our side, as this garden is rarely open to visitors.«

»Perhaps I am intruding now,« exclaimed Edward, rising, with a slight crimson flush on his face.

»Nay you are quite welcome; indeed I am very glad you have come,« replied Alice, laughing, »for we were just talking of the strange chance which had made the silent Eagle's Nest suddenly become so gay and bustling.«

»Gay I should hardly say, since we are in a state of siege which I can scarcely see the end of.«

»Indeed,« said the Mexican somewhat eagerly, »shall we then be kept here so long. Do these terrible outlaws seem so determined?«

»Were we beleaguered a week, aye, 8 month, it would little surprise me,« replied Edward.

»Nay, perhaps, three months,« exclaimed Alice, »for though the gang may not be in sight all the time, they may prowl about until the depth of the winter drives them to the lower settlements.«

Margaretta took no notice of these replies, and it was impossible to tell whether she were pleased or not at the prospect of being shut up for so long a period in this wild and sequestered spot.

»But,« said she, after a pause, desirous to change the conversation, »what of my party, where is Don Juan?«

»The old gentleman, your worthy father,« replied Edward, »was taken very unwell just now. He has, apparently, overexerted himself.«

»Then show me where he is, I will go to him,« said Margareta, rising.

»Nay, he sleeps, and 'twould be pity to disturb him, Let us rather discuss how we are going to employ ourselves. I suppose if not fighting all the time, we may manage to have one or two dances, and as you ladies sing, and there is @ guitar, a little concert may be expected. _I, faith, do not think we shall do so very badly. We poor sailors are exposed to much more hardships than that.«

»You are naval then,« said Margaretts, raising her eyes inquiringly.

»I hold a commission in the navy of the young republic, for which I was foolish enough to give up one in the British service.«

»A—a—an officer, of course?« remarked the Mexican, hesitatingly.

»Of course,« replied Edward; rather glad in his somewhat rough costume to be able to explain his rank. »I have the honour to be an officer, and a gentleman, though but a poor one.«

»In Texas that is the case of too many to be any drawback,« observed Alice; »and as long as you can sport, hunt, and fish, for your own existence, you rank equal with the president himself.«

»But we are wandering from the question,« said Edward, gaily, »I was planning amusement for you, and you run off to discuss the economy of Texan life.«

»Allow me to run a little farther,« added the Mexican; »I wish to understand the probabilities of our sojourn, and, in the first place, would ask who is Blackhawk?«

»A who indeed,« said Edward, becoming suddenly grave.

»I can give little explanation,« answered Alice, who saw that she was appealed to, »save that less than a year ago, a band, composed of the refuse of the white and Indian population, appeared on the frontiers of the country, doing deeds of robbery and murder. This chief, whose name is Blackhawk, is said to be a terrible fellow, without heart or conscience.«

»Have you ever seen him?« inquired Edward.

»Nay, heaven forbid,« exclaimed Alice,

»I have, twice,« added Edward, somewhat gravely.

»When?« exclaimed Alice.

»Where?« cried Margareta.

»Once, a year ago, and again last night. On the first occasion, as Captain Harry Coulter, he robbed me of all I had, while insensible, and in the felon chief I recognised the same personage.«

»Captain Harry Coulter!« said Alice, in a faltering voice. »I have heard him spoken of. When we were in New Orleans, Mr. Stevens, that is, my father, had some connection with him, but they quarrelled, he having tried to rob my father. I never saw him, however.«

»Strange fatality,« exclaimed Edward; »but that man's face is as familiar to me as a youthful dream. I know not why it is, but I often catch myself dwelling on his face, in your presence more than at any other time.«

»Surely I am not like the monster?« said Alice, with a laugh.

»Mr. Brown is very gallant,« added Margaretta, merrily, »to say that the presence of a lady reminds him of a bandit.«

»Mr. Brown,« exclaimed the full rich voice of Philip Stevens, »dinner is ready; if the ladies be at hand tell them as much.«

The summons was obeyed, and the whole party were speedily congregated together, with the exception of Don Juan, while Cephas Doyle and Jones stood apart as Blake entered, eyeing him with a scowl which showed how little favour he had found in their sight. He heeded them not however, being fully occupied in seating his fair companions. The dinner was profuse and excellent, as usual in the backwoods, indeed more so than seemed wise with a siege before them.

»I think, Mr. Stevens,« remarked Edward, »that considering we are likely to be confined here some time, this ample store would have been better somewhat husbanded.«

»Nay, you would not have me stint my guests,« rejoined the other gaily, »especially with such a store as I have to back me. Think not I have been taken unawares; I have foreseen some such contingency, and provided for it.«

»There! there!" cried Jones, with a scared countenance, »what business have the gentlemen to know that you expected anything of the kind.«

‘Don’t talk at random,« replied Philip, with ill-disguised irritation, »mind your dinner, and leave us to converse as we please. You must excuse him, Mr. Brown, but in his youth he had a fright which he has never recovered. It has rendered him timid ever since.«

Alice turned pale at these words, which were said with a calm and bitter sarcasm, which Jones quailed before, and he continued his meal without further remark.

»To the walls!« shouted a sentry from without at this point of the meal, which cry being followed up by a discharge of gunshot from half a dozen commanding points, the whole garrison rushed to defend the works, leaving the women sole tenants of the apartment.

On reaching the open air, Blackhawk and his gang were found to have occupied every available position round the Eagle's Nest. Behind the smouldering trees—on rocks around, seemingly inaccessible, it was clear they had crept, for though after the first discharge, not living being could be seen, yet the body of a sentry, riddled with musket shot, showed how near and how numerous must have been the volley.

Blake gazed with horror on the bleeding corpse. It was his first sight of blood, and his impression was of a character, which at once raised his feeling to a pitch of wild excitement that he had never known before.

»Keep close every man,« said Philip, sternly; »this bloody work is begun in good earnest, and with the extermination of one party, will alone end.«

»You Jones and Doyle keep the block,« he added after a pause, »and let not a head be seen without a shot. They must be met warmly, or we shall have them charging to our very gates. You, William,« addressing a tall youth with a huge rifle, »take the Mexicans and scatter them at the loops around the gate. You,« this was said to the rest of the party, »except Mr, Brown and Chinchea, post yourselves as best you may. First, however, remove the body where the women may not see it—we will bury it to-night.

»With others, perchance,« said Brown, in a low, but firm voice.

»Perchance not one may remain to do it,« answered Philip, with emotion; »but come, I will take you to my council-chamber, and there, while we guard that side, we can discuss our plans of defence.«

Creeping cautiously along the wall of the Nest, Philip Stevens, followed by Edward and Chinchea, passed the door of the room where they had been dining, and entering & passage, soon found themselves in a rude bed-chamber, that where Don Juan slept.

It had two doors, while as many had been passed in the passage. One to the left led into the garden, and could be seen from the common room, while the other, which opened into a small apartment, was entered by the party, and Blake now found that he had reached the very edge of the cliff on that side, and that a small and narrow window looked out upon a singular and striking scene.

»Here we are, Mr. Brown, on the summit of the Eagle's Nest,« said Stevens; »look out and you will gaze upon a view rarely surpassed in this part of the world.«

Edward obeyed, and at the first glance grew dizzy. Sheer perpendicular down almost two hundred feet went the rock, with a piece shelving outwards, about a dozen yards below, while a gushing stream came tumbling from the opposite

side, and fell in white mist into the depths beneath, running round the Nest in two branches, like a ditch.

About a hundred yards across, but towering fifty feet above the little fort, was the summit of the opposite rock, crowned by a covert of live oak and pine that waved majestically in the breeze.

Scarcely had Edward put his head on side the loop, and taken a hasty view, than Stevens called him away.

»A rifle carries far and true,« he said, »and if the vermin are not already on yonder rock, they soon will be.«

»A lovely scene, truly,« mused Edward; »pity that it should be marred by crime and the struggles of man against man.«

»Blackhawk on rock,« said Chinchas; »him gun point at Nest.«

»Say you so!« exclaimed Stevens, and running to the side, he threw open a window overlooking the garden. »Jones,« he cried, »stoop low, and keep so. The vermin are on the Live Oak Crest—make it too hot to hold them.«

»I see you are fully prepared for every contingency,« observed Edward; »but, seriously, this contest grows warm, and to be candid, are we strong enough to keep this place against so many.«

»We are not,« replied Stevens, coldly.

»Then you expect defeat?«

»Were we all men I would defy the rogues. We would fight to the last gasp, and then blow up the Nest, and escape by the stream below. But there are women here.«

»Then what propose you?« inquired Blake, eagerly.

»I propose to gain assistance. We can hold out some days. Camp Comanche is within thirty miles, and if they but knew of our position, we should next day be free.«

»But how is it to be done?«

»Chinchea will go,« said the Indian, quietly.

»Of course,« replied Philip, still addressing Brown, »the Indian alone could be of use. This, however, must be a secret with us. At nightfall Chinchea will depart, and on the third day we shall see him return, backed by a hundred warriors.«

»And how will he escape?«

»By this window. Until black night he would be discovered. At an hour after dark we will be here to aid him, until then he will remain here alone.«

A loud report, a second, then a third, now proved that the carronades were at work, while the crashing of boughs, and falling of stones, dirt, and fragments of

wood, proved that the balls struck the summit of the Live Oak Crest. As fast as they could load, Jones and Doyle kept up their volley, making the echoes rise from every nook and cranny round about. They ceased, and all was still as night. A silence sad and melancholy brooded over all, not a sound or trace of the enemy could be heard or seen.

Chapter VIII.

A NIGHT WITH DEATH.

It was two hours after sun-down, and Philip, accompanied by Edward and Chinchas, stood again in the chamber described in our previous chapter, preparatory to the ' departure of the latter. He was stripped, and stood erect in his hideous war paint, while a short knife and tomahawk were suspended to his waist. In his hand was a short and light fusil. His demeanour was calm and passionless; not a motion, not the faintest contraction of a muscle, betrayed his sense of the perilous enterprise in which he was engaged. He was rather in that dim light the motionless statue of an artist's hand, than a human being.

Near him stood Philip Stevens, holding a dark lanthorn, with the light so directed as to stream upon the ground, without showing any sign to those without, while Edward Blake knelt at his feet, knotting firmly together the ends of two coils of rope.

»You are an apt hand, I perceive,« said Philip, with a smile.

»I should be, having been a British sailor,« replied the other.

»And you are sure it will bear his weight?«

»It will bear many times as much; and did you not want me here, I would gladly make the trial by descending with him.«

»No,« said the Indian, bluntly, »pale face like bear in the dark—no use.«

»I knew you would rather not have me,« continued Blake, with a laugh; »but would gladly share your peril. Believe me, Indian, I shall have a load off my mind, when I see you return in safety.«

The Indian made no reply, but holding out his hand, took that of the young man, and clutched it with a gripe like that of the animal he had just compared him to.

»And now to see that the coast is clear,« said Stevens, depositing the lanthorn on the ground.

Blake followed him to the window, and looked out.

The night was dark and tempestuous. The wind whistled round the building, as if about to commence operations for the evening; the fitful gusts which bowed the trees on the crest of the opposite rock were frequent and violent, while the whole sky formed one huge canopy of black vapour. No ray of the moon, no stars twinkling in the loopholes of the clouds—inky masses, that drove with impatience along—spoke of light and life. There was a settled gloom on all nature, while the

depth below presented the appearance of a bottomless gulph, save when the tinkling sound of the waterfall came melodiously on the ear.

About twenty feet beneath the Live Oak Crest, however, was one evidence of cheerfulness and animation. A faint tracery of light there rose from behind a ridge of rock, betraying the presence of a fire. It looked the mouth of a witch's cauldron; though but the glow of heat, the light from below was visible; not a flame was to be seen. Now and then a shadow passed before it; some one was slowly walking up and down.

»This is unpleasant,« said Philip Stevens; »the Indian must pass yonder by the fire, and how he is to do so unobserved I cannot tell.«

»Chinchea will go—he is ready,« replied the Indian.

Without remark, Edward Blake and his companion proceeded to attach the rope by a loop to the Indian's waist, who, as soon as this operation was performed, quietly walked to the window, and commenced his perilous descent. His fate was not trusted to one rope alone, for Blake and Stevens held one a piece, which they gradually lowered. The rock shelved slightly inwards at the summit, and the young warrior, therefore, swung wholly in the air, oscillating fearfully, and performing gyrations which would have turned the head of many a less nerved man. Those above were carefully to lower him as slowly as possible; but presently Stevens, who was looking out to catch a glimpse, nearly overbalanced himself, and for a moment Blake felt the rope running through his hands with fearful rapidity.

»Pull back,« cried Stevens, »or he will be dashed to pieces. Curse the rope; if he had trusted to me, he would have required not Blackhawk to finish his career.«

They both now proceeded with the utmost caution; and after the lapse of about ten minutes, came to the end of the two ropes; but the weight was as great as ever. The Indian had not reached the shelving rock above mentioned.

»He must be drawn up again,« said Stevens, moodily; »we can never let him hang there while I find another cord.«

»I will look and endeavour to see how far off he is from his journey's end,« replied Blake.

The night was still dark, though a few breaks in the dismal wreaths of cloud permitted a faint breath of light to pass; and, straining his eyes to the utmost, Blake could nearly discover the Indian's position.

»His feet are about a yard from the shelf, and were it wider, we might trust to his fall.«

»Not there,« cried Stevens, »the shelf slopes downwards, and he would fall a hundred and fifty feet into the black abyss.«

»Merciful God,« exclaimed Blake, as the rope hung loose in their hands, »he is off«

Both thrust their heads through the narrow aperture, listening, with blood that iced in their veins, for the sound which should bear tidings of the Indian's destruction. No sound came, and a second glance showed him standing erect and motionless on the very edge of the terrific precipice. Next instant he disappeared.

Drawing a hard breath, like men who had witnessed a wonderful and providential escape, they drew up the rope, and found the ends cut by the sharp steel of the Indian's knife.

»I have seen many an act of Indian courage and sagacity,« cried Stevens, with earnestness, »but never did I see that surpassed. On the brink of a fearful gulf, he preferred risking all to delay.«

»He is a bold fellow, truly,« replied Blake, »and this beginning augurs well for the result.«

For about an hour they kept their now silent watch, listening with keen and practised ear for any sound which might guide them as to the envoy's progress, but in vain. Not the faintest footfall could be detected, and still they moved not, for apart from the gallant Indian's own safety, their own, in all human probability, de'pended upon his success. At length, after straining their visual and hearing faculties to the utmost, they caught sight of a dark form, which for an instant showed itself near the fire on the opposite rock, and then high on the night air rose an awful sound to which nothing human could be compared. It was a shriek, and yet so mingled with the howling of a panther as to be scarcely distinguishable. They listened again. But all was still.

The two men then retired from the window, but, anxious to know the fate of Chinchea, we prefer following in his footsteps.

We take up our narrative at the moment when, by those above ceasing to pay out any more rope, he discovered that by that means he could descend no lower. Glancing his eye downwards, the Indian saw that the shelf of rock below him sloped downwards, and that, though its surface was uneven, and afforded purchase to the foot, yet that a fall would almost of a certainty precipitate him into the gulf beneath. The smooth face of the hill against which he swung was, however, broken in one or two places, and jagged. <A rapid glance showed him a hole within reach, at which he grasped with his left hand, and quick as lightning severing the cords round his waist with the knife which he held in his right, he stood securely upon the shelf, for though the rock he grasped crumbled and gave way, it still sufficiently broke his fall to enable him to rest his feet in security.

A natural path, narrow, sometimes almost imperceptible, sometimes a mere shelf of shingle, now lead downwards; and this the Indian slowly and calmly followed, taking every precaution against any false step. The descent was laborious and fatiguing, but at length was accomplished, and Chinchea was at the foot of the diminutive Niagara which formed the stream running round the Nest.

Without a pause, except to drink a draught of water, he commenced an ascent as painful and full of danger as the descent, but which continuing with that indomitable perseverance so native to his character, he completed, so as to stand within a few yards of the fire beneath Live Oak Crest, in less than an hour after his departure from the window. Dangers, however, appeared to multiply rather than decrease.

The fire was built on a platform, near the mouth of a cavern, with a screen of rock protecting it from the gaze of the Nest. It was composed of small branches of the live oak, which emitted a crackling sound, with much smoke, thus aiding the Indian in his stealthy progress towards the solitary man who now occupied a seat near at hand. His occupation was somewhat singular for one alone in the wilds. He was busily engaged in cooking, not such a meal as one man would reasonably be expected to consume, but a supper for a whole platoon.

Half a dozen ducks upon a ramrod, a huge earthen pot, from which something sent forth a most savoury odour, a pile of sweet potatoes cooking in the embers, with a vast turkey turning upon a rude spit, formed the groundwork of the repast.

The cook, whose face was plainly visible to Chinchea, was an Indian of his own tribe, in whose utter absorption in his task, in his vacant eye, luxurious chuckle, and heavy air, the half idiot was plainly to be traced. His nostrils snuffed the steam which owed its origin to his own gastronomic ability, with intense satisfaction, while his two eyes glistened with an almost irresistible longing to fall to. Prudence or fear seemed, however, to restrain him, and he pursued his task with patience and gravity.

Suddenly Chinchea was upon him, with a howl like that of the famished panther; the other, in his terror, emitting a shriek which filled the air, and, though smothered by the wind to any one above, was plainly heard at the Eagle's Nest. Chinchea had wound his arms round the startled cook, and cast him to the ground, ere he was scarcely aware of his enemy's presence, and in a Moment stood over him, with waving tomahawk, and a mien which froze the very heart of his victim.

»The Leaping Panther,« said the other, who was not so great a fool as he was cowardly and gluttonous—qualities which had caused his expulsion from his tribe—is very brave; he will not take the blood of a slave.«

»Ugh!« exclaimed the other, with ineffable disgust. »Chinchea wants not his blood, he would not stain his axe with so muddy a stream; the Leaping Panther is a man, and takes the life of men. But Anton must be dead until morning.«

He then explained to the trembling cook that he must enter the cavern, where, gagged and bound, he was to pass the night; while he, the Leaping Panther, assuming his costume and mien, took upon himself also his duties and office. Anton, or Antonio, as the other had been called, finding that his life was to be spared, freely acquiesced, and after greedily devouring some food, entered the cavern, at the very mouth of which he lay, gagged and bound, Chinchea having given him plainly to understand that, on the slightest sign from him of mere existence, though he himself perished, he would first meet his reward.

This done, the Wacco proceeded to conceal his arms, and so to disguise himself as by that light to deceive those for whose eating the sumptuous woodland supper above described had been prepared. He even, on seating himself, assumed the very look and expression of the unfortunate cook, but too soon, however; for scarcely had he done so, ere several footsteps were heard descending from above, by the rude path which led to the summit of the Live Oak Crest. Chinchea gave a guttural hiss, to remind Anton to exercise prudence; and then busied himself in laying the well-cooked viands upon the rude dishes prepared for their reception.

»Well, Anton,« said the foremost of the party, the renowned Blackhawk himself, »are you quite ready, for I am. This besieging is hungry work.«

»Ready,« replied Chinchea,.

»Then, gentlemen, be seated,« exclaimed Blackhawk, addressing his companions, two white men and a young Indian chief.

The party obeyed.

»I do think, Pedro,« remarked the chief, »that after the busy cares of the day, nothing is more delightful than to retire from one's position as a chief, and, with a few friends around, to enjoy the sociality of the supper table.«

»Si! si!« replied the Mexican bandit, with a grin; »supper is a very pleasant meal. It has one great merit.«

»And that?« inquired Blackhawk.

»Is, that as there is no exertion required after, one can eat one's fill, without fear of its incommoding.«

»Ma foi!« said the third, a Frenchman, »quality, not quantity for me—though I must say I have never had better fare than in Texas.«

»Because, Carcassin, in Texas one lives in the open air, one takes ample exercise, and, thunder!—why one can eat anything, from prickly pears to a wild mustang.«

»Horse very good,« said the young Indian chief.

Chinchea quivered in every muscle.

»»Why, that is as men think, Long Arm, for 'myself, I never could try it; though you savages are partial to the animal.«

In conversation such as this about an hour was consumed, during which the greater part of the fare provided followed the example of time, Chinchea contriving to come in for his share, despite his wonder and anxiety at the presence of the young Wacco chief, Long Arm. At length, however, even Pedro the Mexican seemed satisfied.

»And now Anton, the whiskey, and we will initiate our friend, Long Arm, into the mysteries of punch.«

This was a puzzler, as Chinchea was quite ignorant of the place where the liquid fire was kept. He, however, acted with his usual decision, and clutching his knife, with which he never parted, he advanced to the mouth of the cavern.

»Where?« said he, in a low moaning whisper.

»Inside.«

Chinchea groped his way along, and following a passage some twenty yards long, suddenly came upon a kind of room dimly lighted by an oil lamp, and in which were deposited several jars of various sizes, stolen from neighbouring planters and settlers.

But why pauses Chinchea? Why does his gaze become fixed, impassioned, stern? Why does he clutch his knife, and grind his teeth?

On a rude pallet, having cried herself to sleep, lay a young, beautiful, and exquisitely formed Indian girl. The tears were yet standing on her cheek, while her swollen features showed how violent had been her sobs and grief.

Chinchea took one glance, and snatching up a jar hurried back towards the festive party.

Chapter IX.

AFTER SUPPER.

When the Indian regained the fire, the company had armed themselves with the usual after supper pipe, and were apparently quite ready to enjoy the bacchanalian hours. Indeed Chinchea received a polite intimation that if he did not make haste, he should go more rapidly down hill, and alight in a warmer region than he had any taste for; threats and menaces were, however, alike to the Indian, who rapidly prepared the required beverage, and handed mugs all round, taking care that very little water entered into the composition.

»That's a regular stinger,« said Blackhawk, having drained his goblet; »but go on, Long Arm, don't be afraid of it, it will do you a wonderful deal of good.«

»Ugh!« replied the young chief, who appeared to entertain considerable doubts on that point, having caught a violent fit of coughing consequent of his inexperience. Determined, however, to be nowise behind the other, he forced himself, though with an ill grace, to swallow the fiery decoction.

»Now, Long Arm,« said Blackhawk, with an almost imperceptible wink at his companions, »about this love affair of yours—are we to hear the whole story?«

»Ugh,« grunted the Indian, savagely, »you have heard. The Rose of Day is the fairest girl in all the wigwams of the Waccoes, and Long Arm loved—he would have given his life for her. He said in her ear, that he would hunt the bear to bring her furs, the deer to supply her with venison and mocassins, the mountain sheep for cloaks—but all in vain. She was betrothed, and the face of him she was to marry was ever before her.«

»And who was this fellow?«

»The Leaping Panther, a great warrior.«

»A braggart whom I long to punish for filling the world so much with his impertinent name.«

»He is a brave,« replied the Indian, with a smile of pride, which he could not forbear, though speaking of a rival.

»Well, and where is he?«

»He is gone to see the land of the paleface; his mother died on the field of battle, and he found friends in the whites.«

At this point in the conversation Chinchea having replenished the mugs out of which the party were drinking, rose and left the platform, making his way along the path by which he had arrived. On his upward journey he had seen the bright

shining leaves of a plant, the stalk of which was invaluable to him now, and he was determined to seek it.

In ten minutes he returned, and passing the merry party—none of whom, wrapped in their calumets and drink, noticed his proceedings—moved on one side with the whiskey jar. He had stripped the stalk of its leaves, and bore the plant like a cane in his hand. Taking his knife he made several incisions in the side of the weed, and gently pressing it, a light frothy liquid poured in a little stream into the spirit.

It was a deadly poison, but mixed with the alcohol, became merely a powerful and rapid acting narcotic.

This done, Chinchea rose, and as he did so met the cold grey eye of his rival fixed upon him.

The recognition was mutual, but by no outward sign did the Long Arm betray his discovery, though it was clear he was much the worse for the amount of drink he had imbibed.

»More drink, Anton, my boy,« cried Blackhawk, »more drink. Fill high, Long Head—Arm, I mean. Pull away, the liquor is immense. It is nectar, ambrosia«

»Never heard of those names before, signor; what are they?« asked the Mexican.

»They are the Greek for gin and whiskey,« replied Blackhawk, in @ rich Hibernian accent, his native dialect, though he assumed Indian and Yankee at will.

»Now Pedro and Carcassin, and you, long Arm, ready with your bumpers, while I giwe a toast. You, Anton, blow your cloud a little farther off.«

Chinchesa had lit a pipe, and was calmly smoking, gazing on the scene with certainty as to the result.

»Fill, I say, and I'll conclude to give a toast, which you're all bound to drink.«

»Its diablement fort,« said Carcaasin, who had sipped.

»So much the better, the subject is a strong one.«

It was pure whiskey.

»Ready!« cried Blackhawk.

»Ready,« replied Pedro.

»Bon,« said Carcassin, making a desperate plunge forward, and in the act of picking himself up, half spilling his glass.

»Ugh,« observed the Indian.

»Here is to the Rose of Day, and he who wins her.«

»Hurrah!« cried the two whites, and the toast was drank with bumpers.

Chinchea ground his teeth, and swallowed a pint of tobacco smoke.

»Ugh,« growled Long Arm, exhibiting sundry signs of drunkenness, which were not far from precipitating him wholesale into the arms of the god.

»It works,« whispered Blackhawk.

»Good,« thought Chinchea.

Long Arm rolled backwards, gave a huge sigh, and was fast asleep.

»He is got rid off,« muttered Blackhawk. »Did the fool think to bring that sweet girl among us and keep her to himself? Psha!«

»Certainly not,« growled the Mexican, who could scarcely keep his eyes open.

»Parbleu, non!« muttered the Frenchman.

»Carcassin, you are drunk!« said Blackhawk, who was unsuccessfully endeavouring to insert the end of his pipe into his mouth.

»Et vous?« asked Carcassin, slily.

»Oh, me, I am all right, by St. Patrick, mavourneen,« said Blackhawk, whose eyes were half shut.

»And what is the meaning of mavourneen?« asked Carcassin.

»Its Latin for my dear,« replied the outlaw, raising himself, »and that puts me in mind of my little dear that's waiting for me in the cavern yonder.—Tell me, Carcassin, why it is, that when hardened as we may be, we are about to commit a great crime, that we feel a physical pain here a dilatation of the heart, a swelling of the muscles of the throat?«

»It is the working of conscience,« said the Frenchman, drily.

»Of what?« inquired Blackhawk, as if he had never heard of any such appurtenance.

»Of conscience,« replied Carcassin, who had been educated for a priest; »which never departs from even such men as you and I, Blackhawk.«

»You think then,« continued the outlaw, moodily, »that our acts are of such »black die? Why so? We are freemen; we roam the world, and take what chance gives us; what more?«

»But chance neither gives us the lives of others, nor woman's honour,« said Carcassin, sarcastically, »and we take both.«

»You are growing moral,« sneered the other.

»Not I, but it is the whiskey,« replied the Frenchman; »it opens the heart, and wrings truth from the bottom of the well.«

»Hear the philosopher, Pedro, what think you of him?«

The Mexican was fast asleep.

»The drink works potently to-night,« mused the outlaw; »it stupifies Pedro and the Indian; it weighs on my spirits, makes me sad and gloomy, and takes all heart

away; the Frenchman it sets philosophising. Egad, there's something in it after all.«

»So there is,« muttered Anton.

»Who spoke?« said Blackhawk, looking towards the entrance of the cavern.

»I,« replied Chinchea, waving his hand menacingly at Anton.

»I say, Carcassin,« continued the chief, »will you have another glass? Gone too!«

Carcassin lay beside Pedro, both seemingly vying with each other in their attempts at nasal music.

»Well, sleep your fill. One more glass, and I go,« and Blackhawk, despite himself, shuddered.

»You have had enough,« said Chinchea, gruffly.

»Speak for yourself, Anton—by the way, does the Rose still weep and deplore her fate? does she still refuse the honour of mating with the Wolf of the Prairies?«

»She sleeps.«

»Thank St. Patrick,« replied Blackhawk, drawing a long breath; »and now, Anton, fill high another bumper, and mind you what I said about 'Long Arm; pitch him over the rocks; everybody will believe he stumbled in a drunken fit. I say, Anton, I feel as if I were at home; my eyes shut of themselves. It's very dark; ah!«

The outlaw had fallen beside his companions.

Up rose Chinchea, his arms in his hands, and a stern purpose in his eye. He clutched the knife which he had not parted with all night, and approached the sleeping robber. He knelt and gazed on his sleeping countenance.

»Bad paleface,« he muttered; »the Manitou has given me your life; but Chinchea scorns to take it away from a sleeping man,« and he took in his hand a long tress of the robber's hair, cut it, and laid it on his breast.

»Chinchea,« hissed a voice in his ear.

The warrior turned slowly round.

The Long Arm stood before him, pouring out upon the ground the drugged liquid which his rival had given him.

»Chinchea is a great brave,« said the young warrior, sadly, »and Long Arm is a boy, squaw. The Rose of Day loves the Leaping Panther—the Leaping Panther has saved her; let him keep the life which is his.«

»And the Long Arm?«

»Will Chinchea call him friend?« continued the youth, thoroughly humiliated at the risk which his inconsiderate conduct had caused the woman he loved to endure, simply because she could not return his affection.

The hands of the two warriors were st once clasped in amity, and they entered the cave, from which in ten minutes they again emerged, leading forth the bewildered and half-sleeping Indian girl, whose joy and delight on being reunited to him she loved, was plainly visible in her whole demeanour.

With a parting warning to Anton, Chinchea turned into a narrow way, which led round the bottom of the Live Oak Crest, and, about two hundred yards distant, lay down with his companions to snatch a few hours' rest, in a thick and almost impassable grove of trees, where a bubbling spring burst forth, and by many a winding way, some secret, some open—and by many a leap and fall, with here and there a smooth glide along a rock—went to swell the cataract below.

Chapter X.

THE CONFERENCE.

On the evening of the escape of Chinchea the storm continued its violence for some hours, and yet Edward, from causes which will hereafter be explained, preferred the open air in the little garden to which Alice had introduced him, to the comforts of the parlour of the Eagle's Nest, where Jones, Philip, Cephas Doyle, and the other tenants of the locality, solaced themselves for some hours in conversation over the usual Texan evening amusements.

At length, however, the Mexicans and the usual inhabitants of the Nest, wearied with the excitement and fatigues of the day, retired to rest, leaving Stevens and Jones alone in the chamber. They, however, moved not, but after closing the doors, drew near the huge and cheering fire, refilled their glasses, loaded a fresh pipe, and made every preparation for a private carouse.

For some time neither spoke. Their thoughts were evidently busy on some subject which was deeply interesting to their minds, and there they sat drinking, smoking, and holding no communion. At length, after about half an hour had elapsed, Stevens spoke rather in an audible whisper, addressed to himself, than with a view to be heard by his companion.

»It must be ours.«

»At any price,« added Jones, with an approving nod.

»What?« said Philip, raising his head, and gazing fiercely at the dwarf.

»Of course you know. If men will tempt their fellows, why they must pay the penalty.«

»Who is tempting, and who is tempted.«

»Don Juan de Chagres comes here for shelter, nobody asked him to. His servants let out that he has a mine of wealth with him, nobody asked them to.«

»Well?«

»Why, of course, he having brought this money here, here it must stay.«

»Jones, I will blow your brains out one of these days.«

»No you won't,« replied the dwarf, sneeringly.

»Why?«

»Because you are afraid.«

»I afraid —«

»Afraid of ill using a friend who speaks for your good. The fact is, Philip, I am tired of this wild life. It doesn't suit me at all, and I would have you think with me.

Break up the Nest, realise all we have, and with as much as we can make, retire into the centre of Mexico, and there live among our fellows.«

»I too am weary of this life. It is too lonely—it leaves too much time for thought—too many memories are stirring in the stillness of night. Yes! could I see Alice but mated, I would gladly leave here for ever.«

»As to Alice,« said Jones, with his usual, hesitating manner, »I have often told you.«

»Then tell it not again. You! by whose hand -«

»Well, what?« said the other, fixing his little grey eyes on the speaker.

»Nothing—but you are the last man who should dare to have such a thought. This young sailor now——«

»You think so,« replied Jones, savagely. »I hate the fellow, from his very face, and this would be another reason.«

»I know not why,« half mused Stevens, »but I feel an irresistible longing towards that youth. His face softens me as I look upon it.«

»He is the very image of——«

»Jones,« thundered Stevens, rising and grasping the other by the throat, »breathe but that name, and I cast you dead at my feet.«

»Fool that you are,« cried the dwarf, who was half choking, »I will drop the subject.«

»Jones,« continued Stevens, loosening his hold, »I have warned you before; let me not have to warn you again.«

»Enough. Let us speak of the Mexican's gold.«

»Go on.«

»Well,« said the other, speaking slowly, firmly, and distinctly, »this money must be ours. We take it; there is at once an outcry; Don Juan insists on searching the premises; his followers join him; Cephas Doyle and your young English friend join him, and so will our own people.«

»Perfectly true,« replied the other; »and by your own showing, it is best left alone.«

»Not at all,« continued the other, coldly.

»What then?« said Stevens, his face half livid with emotion, while avarice glistened in his very eyes.

»If Don Juan were dead, no outcry would take place against us. He is near the outer window, he leans out, he overbalances himself, and is killed.«

»Speak plain,« sneered the other.

»Then I say, he must die.«

»Who is to kill him?«

»We must.«

»We! why not you?«

»Because, my dear friend, it is quite necessary that in all matters of this kind we should both be fully equal.«

»Idiot,« said Stevens, »why should I betray you?«

»Why not?« replied the dwarf; »the reward is tempting.«

»Jones, this man shall not die. He has claimed my hospitality and protection, and he shall have it.«

»You grow moral, Philip,« said the other, sullenly.

»No!« cried the other; »but enough blood has been shed, Sleeping or waking, the gory flood is before me. When I rise at morn, and gaze out upon the sky, I see blood in the very tints of dawn; the setting sun crimsons all nature with gore. I sleep, and I swim in oceans of the accursed —«

»I never dream.«

»Tis well for you—but I do, and voices, as of the past, come peeling to my ears; and he cries, ‘Give me back my life.«

»He is very troublesome to you, Philip.«

»Tis twelve years ago, and I have seen and endured much since that day, but not one moment, one second, has he been from my side. At meals, he sits by my side; walking, he walks behind; hunting, he runs to the death; fighting, he shields me from harm, that my torture may be longer. Jones, if I could recal that day, if I could be what I was up to that hour—though then not innocent—I would gladly suffer every misery of poverty, of starvation, of woe.«

»Regrets are useless, All we can do is to try and make life while it lasts as pleasant as possible.»

»How?—by repentance and restitution?«

»I have no wish for a trial and halter,« replied the dwarf, with a contemptuous scowl.

»Then how?«

»By adding to our means of enjoyment.«

»And what means is there left us?«

»Gold,« said Jones, calmly; »‘ gold, that buys every enjoyment.«

»We have enough.«

»Enough for here, but not enough to bold our heads high in towns among our fellow-men. Come, Philip, be advised; listen to an old friend.«

»I listen too often.«

»We have sunk ourselves deep enough in guilt; we can go no deeper. Blood is on both our hands; but we have been scarcely repaid for the trouble, A mine is now within our reach; should we not be fools to refuse acceptance? Besides, recollect how we were compelled to leave New Orleans for want of money. There we were happy, joined in every amusement, and held our heads high. But money failed, and we were compelled to fly.«

»We were, and I hope yet to be revenged on those who shunned us when our poverty became apparent.«

»You can at once. Possessed of this Mexican's gold and jewels, we return to New Orleans, no longer with a mere paltry pittance, but with a fortune. What pride to overtop those who turned us from the hazard table, who shunned us in the streets, and called us adventurers and poor devils.«

»Curse them. Remind me not of those damned days; I would give years of my life to punish those scoundrels.«

»Money will do it.«

»It will.«

»And money alone.«

»This Mexican is rich.«

»Very rich.«

»He is old.«

»But a few years, perhaps months, to live.«

»He will be missed by nobody.«

»No man that dies is. A nine days' grief is all the best of us get from widow, children, mother.«

Too true, in part. We grieve for the absent, for the away, but not for the dead. We do for a short time, for a few months, perhaps a year; and then one who was perhaps the living joy of a vast circle, the cherished soul of near and dear ties, is forgotten, is unremembered, unchronicled, except upon a cold stone. Death effaces memory. His place is empty, and his name is known no more. Perhaps in a mother's heart a corner, ever during, everlasting, may be found for a departed child, but nowhere else. The sorrowing widow, choking with grief—the grieving brother—the pitying friend—alike, in this busy world, forget, forget, forget.

But he who has taken life remembers for ever.

For an hour the conference was continued, and after almost giving way to the insidious persuasions of his friend, whose avarice and love of pelf had evaded every compunction, whose soul was dead to remorse, whose mind was as distorted as his body, Philip exclaimed, »I will decide nothing to-night. All shall depend on

this young Englishman. If he shows any signs of paying earnest attentions to Alice, and there be a prospect open of their union, my fate is decided. We part—I go to live in peace where they dwell, for heaven will have taken pity on me, and Alice will——«

»Never consent."

»We shall see. If you be right, then ay soul shall be in your hands, you shall ad me where you will, for heaven will ave closed its portals against me.«

With these words they parted. Philip so dream of a vision which hope had conjured up; Jones to lay his plans, so as, without fail, to bring about his companion's consent to the murder.

Chapter XI.

EDWARD AND MARGARETTA.

Two hours previous to the interview recorded between Jones and Philip, Edward Blake, according to agreement, wandered into the garden of the Eagle's Nest to spend a quiet hour with Alice and Margaretta. The young sailor was actuated by various and strange emotions; he knew not why, but his mind foreboded ill. In reality he was in that state of uncertainty and doubt, which, of all sensations, is most disagreeable. He had hitherto never loved; he had heard and read of this passion, of which it has been truly said, that »it breathed the breath of life into poetry, and elicited music and voice from the coldest human clay,« but he had never experienced either its joys or its sorrows.

Young, sensitive, full of the quick passion and tenderness that seem inseparable from the educated and high-minded sailor, Blake was now placed in a strange position. Beside him were two women, both attractive, both lovely, both possessed of every charm which could soul-entrance him, and yet he hesitated. On one side, the gentle charms of the fair Alice subdued his heart, and filled him with quiet and radiant hope; on the other, the fiery beauty, the energy, and commanding mien of the Mexican involuntarily filled his thoughts, and he entered the garden prepared to drink deep the intoxicating draught, but as yet ignorant which would gain the day.

He found Margaretta alone.

Now, had the blind god have selected any means of entrapping the susceptible hero of this narrative, he could not have chosen a time or place more favourable to the triumph of her who first presented herself to Edward's notice. It was true, he was already much disposed in Alice's favour, but her's was one of those natures which grow upon our affections by degrees, but which, once rooted, are not to be cast aside, while the Mexican was of a beauty and character likely to strike the eye, to induce an immediate surrender, as likely however to be followed by a speedy rebellion.

The moon was faintly glimmering in the sky, a gentle sweetness filled the cold night air, refreshing both to mind and body, as Edward approached the seat on which Margaretta, in a pensive mood, sat smiling as the young man came near.

»Good evening, cavalier,« said she, gaily.

»Good evening, signora,« replied Edward; »but where is our hostess?«

»Alice is with Don Juan,« she said; »he has been unwell, and she has taken him some refreshment. I sat with him awhile, but the room was close, and I came out here.«

And then, as if anxious to change the subject.

»Have you such evenings in your country?«

»Rarely,« he said, »but as I am not of those who find only faultiness in their own land, I will say, that I have seen as beautiful a night there as in any other part of the world.«

»I should like to see your country, signor,« she continued, gravely; »I have heard much of its power, and would fain know the truth.«

Blake's heart beat quickly.

»I is a great country,« he replied, »and though less grand than some of its compeers, can yet show front with the most picturesque.«

»There is enough of native beauty here,« said the Mexican; »it is not that I seek. I would find a land where my soul was free, where a woman is not a slave, to be given away at will; where parents, proud relatives, have not the power to make a heart miserable for life.«

»Can they do it anywhere?« said Edward, surprised.

»Can they?« replied the Mexican, with an hysteric laugh. »They can, and do it in my wretched country. There a woman, ere she be married, is a mere puppet without will, a thing to be tossed about with so many wretched dollars, as a make-weight; a peg to hang a scheme upon. Two families are united in the bonds of friendship or interest, and this friendship or interest she is made the mere instrument for consolidating. If her partner be hateful, aged, a fool, it is no matter—she has no voice, no will, Tell me, signor, of a country where such things are not, and there is my home.«

This was said with terrible vehemence, and Edward Blake let into his heart a powerful ingredient of love—pity.

»Signora, you speak warmly,« he said, in tender tones.

»Because I feel,« she exclaimed. »I am a Mexican, but I am a woman, and I know the day might have come when I might have loved, when I might have felt the affection which should bind me undyingly to a fellow creature, and I know too that by the fearful power of custom, because I own a fortune, that I am doomed, and it cannot be.«

Edward Blake scarcely knew what to reply—his mind was so filled with varied and tumultuous thoughts. Could it be that, affianced to some hated one whom policy and family arrangements bound her to, she now, on seeing him, had allowed tender thoughts to arise, and in the dawn of her love for him, cursed the cruel fate which had promised her to another. Blake, young, inexperienced in the world's ways, knew not woman's heart, and that though she might love him, yet

too, all this while, be but conjuring up imaginary ills to excite his pity, and thus command his tender interest.

»Doomed!" he exclaimed, with an effort at gaiety, »you, so young, so beautiful, talk of being doomed—«

»So young, so beautiful, you say,« she replied, with a transient gleam of satisfaction, which she effectually prevented him. Were I not young, this ill might soon pass; were I ugly, I might less repine.«

»Madam,« said Edward, gravely, »I do not pretend to know your secret history, but I surely cannot tell why one, with native charms like yours, with many and happy years before you, with wealth and fortune, should repine. Were I, a poor devil, to do so, I should scarcely think it out of place.«

»And are you poor?« inquired Margaretta, fixing her large eyes pityingly upon him.

Poor Edward, his heart was escaping him every minute.

»I am poor, madam, very poor; but I have my sword and my honour, and I fear nothing.«

»No! you may look around and choose where you will. You are poor; well, success waits for the brave, and then a rich and lovely wife may repair what fortune had before churlishly denied.«

»A rich wife, if I could love her,« said the young man, his face crimson with emotion, »would be a good gift of fortune, but if, when I choose, I love truly, I shall not ask her wealth.«

»You would love her for herself alone?« said Margaretta.

»I would.«

»Happy woman!« muttered the Mexican, in faint tones, which, if not meant for his ear, reached it, and made his heart leap.«

»Why happy woman?« he timidly inquired, fixing his eyes anxiously on the young woman's face, beside whom he was now seated.

»Did you hear me?« said the other, with a sigh; »because a woman who is loved for herself, whose fortune never tempted, whose lover cares but for her, is happier than a queen.«

»Doubtless you may be as happy,« remarked the young sailor.

»Never!«

»Why?«

»It is impossible.«

»Lady, you speak in enigmas.«

»I speak the truth. But this is idle talk; I know not why I have indulged in it.«

»It may not be so idle,« replied Edward, with a swelling heart.

»How so?«

»Forgive me, lady,« he said; »I am as yet a stranger to you; we have been cast together by accident; we may in time know one another better——«

»What mean you, signor?« exclaimed the young Mexican, starting back in affright.

»I mean,« said Edward, trembling with anxiety, »that I know not what to say—I would fain hope ——«

»Hope what?«

»Madam,« he exclaimed, »I will not say I love you, because I know you not enough; but this I cannot refrain from uttering, that I know I shall.«

»Sooner love hell itself,« cried the girl, starting from her seat, pale with anguish, for heaven knows whether she responded to his feelings or not; »sooner go and cast yourself headlong from the top of yonder block—sooner do any mean and terrible thing, than let your heart say you love me.«

»Why, lady?«

»Signor, I felt wretched to-night, and I spoke freely, more freely than I should to you, a stranger; had I known that there was the bare chance of such an ending to our speech, I had not said one word. Young man, this is the last time we speak together. It might rob you, it would rob me, ever of peace.«

»Gracious heavens, lady! why this terror?«

»You speak, signor, to the wife of Don Juan de Chagres. Yes! It was my own wretched fate, being bound by force, to suit the will of a rich family, to wed a man near fifty years older than myself, that I foolishly complained of to you.«

Edward Blake, pale, trembling, horror-struck, leaned against the wall for support.

»The wife —«

»Yes,« said Margaretta, with assumed gaiety, »you see before you the wife of the man you took so gallantly to be my father. This should I have said before, but I own am ever ashamed to say. So come, signor, your pretended passion, for surely it must be pretended, will have no excuse now. Had I been a maid, you might have feigned a sudden fit of love, and have kept up the joke; but as it is, excuse me if I remind you that, in our country, such jokes sometimes end seriously. Jealousy is the passion of old men.«

It was difficult to tell if Margaretta felt or not as she spoke. But Blake was yet unable even to hear what she said.

»The wife of Don Juan de Chagres!« he muttered half incoherently.

»Good God!« mused the Mexican; »and does he love me then? Is it come to this so soon? Oh, wretched fate is mine. But though his forced bride, though dragged by violence to the altar, though I spat upon the ring, and called God to witness I was not his wife, yet in the world's eyes I am Donna Juanna de Chagres.«

This was said with a proud and swelling mien, as if she remembered herself.

»Madam, I thank you for reminding me,« said the young man. »I had hoped different, when I thought you free. But,« he added solemnly, taking her hand in his, »fear me not, madam. I now am armed against myself. So quickly born, this love will as quickly die. With me, I feel there must be hope for love to feed upon. There is none here, and I shall think of this evening as a dream.«

In truth, so simple, and yet so right-minded, was the character of the young sailor, that with him the discovery he had made, as a matter of course, at once erased even the shadow of love from his heart, though it left that heart sorely vacant. He had lived ages in an hour. In that time, his sudden passion had grown to a climax; in that time, it had perished. There was a void, however, made, which caused him to feel far less at ease than he had done before.

»Believe me,« said the Mexican, with equal gravity, though not without some slight evidence of pique in her manner, »had I known your susceptibility. I should not have hesitated a moment about declaring myself a wife this morning. I rejoice, however, to see that your good sense can so speedily efface the first impression.«

»Had you been free, madam,« replied Edward, with a sigh, »my first impression would never have been effaced. Each day my love would have increased, each hour it would have grown stronger; but here comes Alice.«

»Welcome, our hostess,« said Margaretta, half gloomily.

»I am sorry not to have met you here before,« replied Alice, addressing Edward; »but as madam wished me to remain awhile with her husband, while he dozed to sleep, I thought it a duty to comply.«

Margaretta bit her lip. Why, it was difficult to tell.

»At length, however, you are come,« said Edward, endeavouring to rouse himself; »and as 'tis said better late than never, I think I have a promise to perform.«

»I think you have,« replied Alice; »but as it is growing late, and Norah yonder points to tea—which remnant of civilisation I indulge in—let us into the house, and then I will hear you with pleasure.«

Edward Blake willingly acquiesced, though when, as coming into the light, he saw how Alice gazed curiously at his pallid countenance (nor was Margaretta undisturbed), he regretted the change. Miss Stevens walked silently to her chair,

and the young sailor saw that she was musing on what might have caused his being thus moved. Determined that she should have no cause for suspecting his untoward feelings, he at once roused himself, and began the narrative of his shipwreck, which he had promised to detail.

There is always eloquence in truth; and when, therefore, a man tells of things which have happened unto himself, he possesses a power of description, an animation, of which he is before scarcely cognisant. Thus was it with Edward; for rising with the occasion, his language became rich and glowing, his eyes beamed with light, his colour came and went, his nostrils dilated, and forgetting all but the event he was narrating, he swept on in a perfect hurricane of scenic power. His listeners heard him with wrapt attention, and as he ceased, from actual want of breath, sat silent and anxious for the termination. So minute, however, was the young man in his details, that it was midnight ere the party broke up.

Chapter XII.

THE ESCAPE.

The moon shone silent on the misty night, the white vapours that rose from forest and prairie hanging heavily in »ghost-like billows« o'er the scene.

*»The fireflies o'er the meadow
In pulses come and go,
The elm tree's heavy shadow
Weighs on the grass below,
And faintly from the distance
The dreaming cock doth crow.
All things look strange and mystic,
The very bushes swell,
And take wild shapes and motions
As if beneath a spell.
The snow of deepest silence
O'er everything doth fall,
So beautiful and quiet,
And yet so like a pall.«*

A faint breeze moving as yet in dim whispers, to which the pines and elms made tremulous reply, was rising, and before it the enchanted ocean of ghostly vapour began to move, like wreaths of smoke from the battle-field after the fight is done. Masses of fog,

»Fitful like a wind-waved flame,«

broke around, unveiling the forest and prairie; then the sea-like swell of the blast came louder and louder, the nebulous appearance of all nature gradually faded, the fog soared upward on the wind wings, and sought its accustomed place.

It was dawn of day.

*»Tis morning; and the sun, with ruddy orb
Ascending, fires the horizon; while the clouds
That crowd away before the driving wind,
More ardent as the disc emerges more,
Resemble most some city in a blaze
Seen through the leafless wood.«*

Chinchea, the Long Arm, and the Rose of Day, were already on foot, as the most difficult part of their enterprise had yet to be accomplished, that of passing the chain of banditti which surrounded the summit of the Live Oak Crest.

Fair and sunny was the morn, as Chinchea and his party prepared to brave the perils which surrounded them, {on their departure towards Camp Comanche,

whither it was now doubly necessary he should arrive, both to bring the promised succour, and to place the Rose of Day in the safe keeping of her parents until he was prepared to unite her fortunes to his for ever, The utmost caution was used to deceive the no doubt watchful sentinels, who awake and alert, now that they knew an enemy had been among them, would be baffled only by great ingenuity and care. Their purpose was aided by a breeze which had sprung up, for as

*»The tallest pines feel most the power
Of wintry blasts;«*

so, on that lofty summit, a wind which on the plain would scarcely have been perceptible, blew keen and raw, making rude music in the trees.

Chinchea, his rifle thrown into the hollow of his arm, and the lock, which all night had been carefully wrapped from the influence of the envious dew, now uncovered and prepared for action, led the way, erect, proud, in all the prelude of savage dignity. Long Arm, humbled by his own act, that of the forced abduction of the bride of another, walked behind, while the lovely Indian girl, all roses like the dawn, which she greeted merrily—more merrily than for many past days—came meekly in the rear.

They proceeded but a few steps skirting the edge of the pine grove which had sheltered them from the night, and reached a platform of rock removed only from that occupied by Blackhawk, by about fifty feet of bush. Here the party halted.

At any other time even the Indian might have been disposed to revel in the beauty of nature, but now all his energies were devoted to the task of extricating himself from the difficult position in which he was placed. Clutching his rifle, and treading with almost noiseless footsteps, he skirted the thicket which had served to shelter him and his friends for the night, and brought himself thus facing the Eagle's Nest. He listened now with eager attention for any note of preparation on the part of the besiegers, within a few yards of whose position on the summit of the Eagle's Nest he was 'now about to climb, that being the only route by which he could hope to gain the plain.

»The pale faces sleep,« said the Long Arm, with an uneasy contraction of the face, as if the memory of the past night were unpleasant to him; »the fire water has filled their head with dreams.«

»Good,« muttered Chinchea; »but they are snakes; they hide themselves in the grass, and may bite and not be seen.«

»Ugh!«

»Let the Long Arm go,« said the chief, pointing to the path which led upward to the camp of the banditti, »and see what the white men do above. He will be safe; the chief of the pale faces sleeps yet in the cavern mouth.«

»Ugh!« replied the other, and loosening his tomahawk he obeyed.

With this monosyllable, the Long Arm, concealing under a careless mien his anxious feelings, moved slowly up the rugged path which led to the summit of the Live Oak Crest, in an opposite direction to that by which Blackhawk had descended to his woodland supper.

»The Rose will wait yonder,« continued the chief. tenderly, pointing to a huge sycamore, which,

*»Autumn dyed
With lavish hues,«*

could, behind its vast umbrageous head, shelter and conceal her.

»The Rose will wait,« said the girl, with a smile, a smile which

»All rosy fresh with innocent morning dew,«

went manlike to the heart of the warrior.

»Good.«

This was all he said, and then treading softly, so as not to be heard, he moved towards the scene of the previous night's debauch, in order to discover if any movement, dangerous to his own plans, had as yet taken place in that quarter. As he neared the spot, silence brooded over all. Nor voice, nor sound of life was heard, and when reaching a spot whence, without being seen, he could overlook all, the whole party presented the same aspect as when he had left them on the previous night. Blackhawk lay near the extinguished fire, his head thrown back, his arms stretched as if in a deep and heavy sleep, while Pedro and Carcassin were near at hand in a similar state.

Presently, however, the chief of the outlaws moved uneasily, the chill morning air seemed slightly to affect him, and he gradually gained a sitting posture. His eyes opened slowly and with difficulty, and he gazed around as one who believed himself, in a dream. After a while the senses gained their sway, and he discovered the severed lock upon his breast, and Anton sitting upright at the entrance of the cave, his arms and legs bound, but the gag removed from his mouth.

»Anton,« said the outlaw, »what means this?«

»Ugh!« granted the Indian.

»Why, methought I went to sleep in the cave, and here, at cock-crow, I wake and find myself on the stony platform.«

»Ugh!«

»Where is the Long Arm?«

»Gone.«

»The Rose of Day?«

»Gone.«

»Thunder!« said the outlaw, springing up, and rushing at the throat of the unfortunate cook, »gone! how—when—where?«

»Chin——«

»Chin me no chin!« exclaimed the bandit, striking the crouching Indian furiously as he spoke, »where are they?«

»Gone with Chin——«

»Dolt! idiot! knave!« cried Blackhawk, more furiously, »who told you this?«

»Chin——«

»Fool! who waited on me last night?«

»Chinchea!«

»Who is Chinchea?«

»The Leaping Panther.«

»The Leaping Panther!« thundered the outlaw, »he here last night! Bearding me in my very den. But he and Long Arm are enemies!«

»They have buried the hatchet.«

»And the Rose of Day?«

»Is with her own warrior—the flower of the Comanches.«

»God of Heaven, and am I to be tricked thus with impunity by a brutish red skin? My very soul thickens at the thought. How they will laugh and jibe.«

»Ugh!« said the sullen savage, scowling at the bandit, his soul writhing beneath the blow which the other had most unwisely conflicted.

Blackhawk had roused a lion which he would have some difficulty in putting down.

»But this is all idle,« cried the chief; »action, not talk, will serve our turn, Pedro, Carcassin, awake.«

»Buenos noches,« muttered the Mexican, »caramba! nuestra demonia; who calls?«

»I.«

»Who's I?« said the sleepy lieutenant, opening his eyes.

»Blackhawk,« thundered the outlaw.

»Qh! what's the matter, that one cannot sleep?«

»Matter! hell is the matter. Wake that brute Carcassin.«

»Carcassin, my boy!« said Pedro.

»Plait-il, garçon,« replied the Frenchman, »an omelet and bottle of Burgundy.«

»Why, what does the fool say?«

»Oh, I was dreaming, mon dieu, that I was in the Café Royal, supping with the devil.«

»You were not far wrong then,« said Blackhawk.

»I think not,« said Pedro, slily.

»No jokes,« continued the chief, furiously; »that devil Chinchas, the Leaping Panther, was here last night, bound our cook in the cave, took his place, drugged our liquor, laughed in our sleeves, and stole away with Long Arm and the Indian girl.«

»The Rose of Day,« said Pedro, drily.

»I say, Blackhawk,« asked Carcassin, maliciously, »what was that toast of yours?«

»What toast?«

»Here's to the Rose of Day, and he who wins her.«

»Damnation!« thundered the outlaw, »this is no time for folly such as this, Away above, alarm the camp, let the whole country be scoured, but they must be found.«

»Bon? said the Frenchman; »here's some warm work.«

»I like it,« said Pedro,

»Which way went they?« asked the chief, addressing Anton.

»Ugh?« answered the sullen Indian, inquiringly.

»I say, idiot, dost hear, which way went they?«

»Down!« replied the irate Comanche, pointing in the direction whence the Leaping Panther had ascended on the previous night.

»Go,« said Blackhawk, »bring down the whole band; if they be there, the foxes are caught in their own trap.«

The two lieutenants sped upwards on their errand, in obedience to the commands of their chief, secretly delighted, as all bad men. ever ere, at the annoyance which one of their own party was subject to.

»Good,« muttered Chinchas, »now is my time.«

With these words he turned to go; when his eye taking a last glance at the 'platform, a movement on the part of Anton at once rivetted his attention.

Blackhawk was leaning on his gun, his back turned from the cave, near the mouth of which stood Anton. The bandit chief was musing on what had passed, and, by the expression of his countenance, planning revenge upon those who had baffled his criminal designs.

Anton had in his hand a tomahawk, a huge, heavy thing, with which an ox could have been brained.

A scowl was upon the Indian's face; the rankling of the blows that he had received was still at his heart.

»Blackhawk is gone,« thought Chinchea; »Anton will take his life.«

The outlaw remained motionless where he stood, gazing vacantly upon the Eagle's Nest.

Stealthily, with serpent tread, on sped the Indian. Murder was in his eye, revenge flashed from their glare.

»Good,« said Chinchea, breathing heavily; »the bad man of the pale faces will lose his scalp.«

Still the Indian advanced, and still the chief remained motionless.

»Pale face,« whispered Chinchea, solemnly, »the happy hunting-ground now awaits you. The Manitou has stayed his course.«

Still the Indian advanced, and now stood within a couple of yards of the outlaw, while in his right hand the avenging weapon was held, prepared for the blow.

»Take that, fool,« exclaimed the white, who had seen all.

With these words, he wheeled round; a sheet of flame, a report, and Anton was dead, falling without cry or groan.

»Idiot,« muttered the bandit, turning again, and resuming his former position; »it was of your own seeking.«

»Ugh,« said Chinchea, letting his short rifle fall into the hollow of his hand, and taking aim at the cool and reckless ruffian. But at that moment the picture of the young Rose of Day presented itself, and prudence whispered that the fate of his party would certainly be death, if he revenged the slaughter of his countryman.

With a heavy heart, but a light and cautious step, he turned away to rejoin the Rose of Day, with whom he found the Long Arm, who reported the path difficult but practicable. Chinchea at once led the way in the direction of the summit, taking the Indian girl by the hand, and aiding her in her ascent of the rough ground. A few moments brought them upon the camp of the enemy.

To their right was a dense growth of brushwood, thick, black, and impenetrable; in front, the sloping hill, leading to the vast illimitable prairies; to their left, the position of the outlaws, who had just been alarmed by the arrival of Pedro and Carcassin.

At a short distance, tethered and hobbled, grazed the horses of the band.

»Now, my lads, follow,« cried Pedro, as soon as with as many sly inuendos against the chief as possible he had told the story; »the dogs are not far distant.

We shall have rare sport.«

»Turtle hunting,« suggested Carcassin.

»And if we catch them?« said Pedro.

»A deep tragedy,« answered Carcassin.

And all the banditti laughed in chorus.

»But the captain,« said Pedro; »oh! oh! it was too good. He had smuggled the lass so nicely into the cavern; he had got the Long Arm so gloriously drunk, and then, ah! ah! ah! he—got—drunk-himself.«

»A perfect vaudeville,« said Carcassin.

»Good as a play,« laughed Pedro.

Again the robbers roared in chorus.

»And this morning, when he woke us,« added Pedro, »if you had seen his face, black as night, and his rage, perfectly sublime.«

»Ah,« said the Frenchman, »he was like poor Robert Macaire, when he would have robbed the mayor; he tried, but he could not.(»J'y ait essayé, et je n'ai pas pu.«)«

»He's a capital captain,« observed Pedro, seriously; »but I am afraid he is no philosopher.«

»Never read Voltaire or Rousseau,« said the Frenchman, with infinite pity.

»Who were they?«

»Only two gentlemen very much our way of thinking.«

»Philosophers?«

»Exactly.«

»French?«

»Of course.«

And again the robbers laughed, for though they did not understand the joke, they knew a hard hit was meant at somebody.

»But I say, the captain all this while. Santa Maria, just now he was in the devil's hurry; I heard him blaze away a signal with his gun.«

»Let us go,« answered Carcassin.

»Let us go,« repeated the whole body of thieves.

»And yonder pass,« suggested Pedro.

»Well, I conclude I'll just guard this fixin,« said Ben Smith, a huge Yankee.

»Do so, and keep with you your company,« replied the lieutenant. »Now away, boys.«

Without further parley, the robbers then vanished from the camp, pouring down the narrow path which led to the platform and the cave, and presenting, in their confusion, in their variegated costume, and still more various arms and defensive weapons, an admirable picture for the pencil of a Salvator or a Claude.

Behind remained Ben Smith and three Comanche Indians, young men, who had accompanied the Long Arm in his ill-advised flight from the camp of his people. As soon as the rest were out of sight, Ben Smith, placing his arms near at hand, drew forth a pipe, and loading it, invited the Indians to follow him. They, nothing loath, readily complied, and in a few moments were deeply immersed in discussing the mysteries of the exhilarating weed.

»Well, I conclude,« observed Ben Smith, in a serious tone, »this are better nor a wild goose chase, I guess.«

»Ugh,« grunted the Indians.

»Now, Ingins, don't; you cut a huckleberry above me; I don't reckon on grunting; that't his'yile of conversation suited to hogs and them like. There arn't no sociality about yer.«

»Ugh,« repeated the Indians, as if they did not understand him.

»Now, Ingins, if you grunt at that rate, I'll fancy myself in an Alabama piggery, and I'll bust. »Cause hogs don't generally smoke, I expect, and I do think I see three swine now with pipes.

»Ugh,« said the Indians, with a broad grin of genuine astonishment.

»Now, red skins,« exclaimed the Yankee, laughing, »that Ooo! will be the death of me. I'm bound to bust, I reckon. Now do jist for variety say something. I'm the yaller flower of this forest, ain't I now?«

»Ugh,« said the Indians, still all in one breath.

»Ingins, do you never talk in your part of the world? don't you larn any lingo?«

»Red skin talk when him understand,« replied one of the group.

»A there it jist is; it's all along o' that Tower of Babel, I'm concluding. Well, if I was a king, I'd just make a law agin any lingo but what I could clearly understand.«

»Indian talk good fur Indian, white talk good for white,« replied another.

»There now,« said big Ben, with a chuckle, »I know'd you could if you would. That's sociable, I reckon; I wish I may be shot, if I arn't larnt something in these diggens.«

»What has the big white man learnt?«

»Larnt to know that there is some locrum in an Ingin.«

»And what is locrum?« said the aboriginal, curiously.

»Wake snakes and walk yer chalks,« cried Ben Smith, starting, and in his eagerness nearly swallowing his short reed pipe; »what's that? A bar, I'm thinking.«

At the same time an angry growl was heard to emanate from the adjoining thicket.

»It's a bar,« continued Smith, sententiously, laying his hand on his gun at the same time.

The Indians never moved, but continued amoking with even greater energy than ever.

»Well, that's cool, any how you fix it,« observed the Yankee, annoyed at being outdone in calm courage, and laying down his gun; »but it's a bar, I'll swar.«

A still more angry growl, much nearer to the group, aroused Smith's ire to the utmost.

»Well, I'm bound to say them Ingins is right away cool; but I'm not a-gwine to be made a meal for monsters. So here goes at the bar, slick!«

»My brother is wrong,« said one of the Indians, calmly; »it is not a bear.«

»Not s bear; well, I conclude you're cool; darn my old grandmother, tell Ben Smith he don't know a bar from——«

»A panther!«

»A painter?« cried Ben, moving uneasily; »no, it ain't a painter, is it?«

»The Leaping Panther,« replied the Indians, rising simultaneously, and disarming and casting the American to the ground ere almost he knew he was assaulted.

The keen ears of the Comanches had recognised the favourite signal of their beloved war chief, and had at his oll at once returned to their allegiance, and owned the power and tie which, in all parts of the world, is connected with the words »my country.«

The wanderer and the sojourner in many lands sees strange and marvellous things; his eyes are delighted, his admiration is moved, and his whole soul kept in a state of pleasurable excitement. Travel expands the mind and enlarges our ideas; but we all have eaten, more or less, of that charmed leaf wich affects the mind with a species of madness—that madness being a longing for home. We know not what it may be with others, but thus it is with us; there is something in our minds in the name of country; and a crust there, where we were born, where the shadows of our ancestors flit around and hold secret commune with us, is preferable to riches and plenty in a foreign land. We have said, and we hope to say it all our lives, England, with all her faults, is the best place for Englishmen. No man ever left it who did not wish himself safe home again.

Ben Smith was so astounded at the assault which had been operated upon him by his three companions, that he suffered himself to be thoroughly overpowered without resistance. At length, however, as the Leaping Panther and his two companions emerged from the thicket, his tongue became loosened.

»Well, if you can't talk, Ingins, you can cheat above a bit, I reckon, I do; may I be eternally sucked up into a waterspout, and come down agin in a frog shower, if ever I believe a Ing in agin. If I do——«

The remainder of his speech was too thoroughly in the backwood style to bear being recorded.

»Away, brothers,« said Chinchea, calmly, »pick from the white men the six best horses. They can lend them to an Indian whose feet are sore.«

Away darted the warriors, obedient to the commands of their leader, and eager to cover their former bad conduct by assiduity on the present occasion.

»And you're a-gwine to take them horses, are you?« said Ben Smith, with nonchalance, »you're quite welcome; they arnt mine I conclude.«

Chinchea made no reply, awaiting in a dignified but keenly attentive attitude for the horses to be brought up.

»Tell Blackhawk,« said the chief, as six of the choicest horses—selected with a keen and practised eye—were brought up, »tell him he is a coward and a knave. The Leaping Panther says so, and the Leaping Panther never lies. Tell him that when he killed the poor fool Anton, the eye of the Manitou was upon him, and that the Leaping Panther will revenge him.«

»Oh, my!« cried Ben, in no little astonishment, and at the same time with infinite disgust. »He ain't killed Anton, I reckon.«

»The Blackhawk stoops low, he beats a poor Indian without a soul, and then kills him because he feels the blows. Go! he is a coward.«

»He is,« thundered Ben, in genuine disgust, »and if ever I foller a fellow as ain't more of a man any longer, Ill tarn a nigger, and that's about the last thing any Christian man'ud wish to be.«

»Good!« said Chinchea, »the pale face speaks like a man.«

»A man too without a cross,« replied Ben, »who may do a little in land privateering, but who ain't agoine to stand by and see a dark Indian murdered. Jumping Panther, I'm one of your'n, I swar.«

»Let the pale face loose,« said Chinchea.

»Well, that's kind,« cried big Ben, stretching his huge limbs with infinite satisfaction, »and I'm bound to say that I'm a deal more light-hearted than when I owned the bloody-minded Blackhawk for a leader.«

The party were all rapidly mounted, and then giving loose reins to the fresh and champing steeds, coarsed o'er the prairie in the direction of Camp Comanche,

Chapter XIII.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

About an hour before midnight on the evening after the interview between Margaretta and Edward Blake, Alice sat alone in her chamber, ruminating on the passing scene. The young sailor had that evening been unusually gay and lively, had told merry tales of his adventures at home and abroad, and had made himself, in fact, exceedingly agreeable. He had, however, retired early, in which his example was followed by the Mexican, and Alice had been left alone, or at all events with the quiet, silent, and unpretending negro girl, seated on a chair at some distance from her side.

Alice was thinking, a luxury in which young ladies are very apt to indulge.

It was a delicious night—calm, sweet, and serene. On such a night the soul expands and embraces within its grasp the thoughts of years. She lingered on the past, she dwelt upon the present, and then came the future, dim and undefined to all, and to none more than to her. Where should she be, when another cycle of the sun came gently round? In this dreary solitude, surrounded by beings so utterly unakin to her nature, or far away in the land of civilisation with—

With whom?

Alice blushed rosy red, as she asked herself this question; and then, she knew not why, came to her mind the thought that she liked not the Mexican. Why did she not like her? why did she shrink from her presence, and wish that she were not? And why had she found them so solid and so stern on the previous evening in the garden, and why had Edward so suddenly brightened up?

These were perplexing thoughts, and yet did Alice, in the simplicity of her heart, wonder why they occupied her mind, for she had yet to learn how the events of these few days were bound up with her destiny. What was Edward or Margaretta to her? And yet she could not refrain from thinking that the young sailor who had so strangely come into the solitude of the Eagle's Nest, must be that perfection of mankind which girls are apt to consider to exist, and a feeling of real regret came upon her, as she remembered how short was likely to be his stay.

»Come, Norah,« said she, rising, as if anxious to drive away unwelcome and annoying thoughts; »let us out upon the block, it is a shame to be indoors upon such a lovely night.«

»Him berry cold, him spect,« replied the negro girl.

»Cold!«

»Him always cold ater dark,« continued Norah, who was in truth getting sleepy, and who had no reason just then for feeling romantically inclined.

»Nay Norah, if it be really cold, we will not remain out long.«

»Berry bell, Miss Als, him Norah quite ready,« said the good-humoured negress.

With merely a deer-skin cloak thrown over their shoulders, and a broad-brimmed and loosely flapping straw hat, they then went out into the garden, and ascending the ladder which led to the summit of the block, seated themselves upon the carronades, and relapsed into silence.

It was one of those starry nights, when the Milky Way, the nebulae that shine in Andromeda's belt, when Orion and the Bear, with the spangled Cross, high heralding peace, come forth in their grandeur and power, and shed their twinkling light upon nature. The heavens were cloudless, though meteoric substances slightly agitated the pellucid sky, and presently one of these vaporous appearances, usually denominated falling stars, made a bright stream of light, and vanished.

Alice sighed deeply, as if some sudden feeling had animated her bosom.

»Alas!« she cried; »such typifies my fate. Across my path, sad, dark, and weary, has come a momentary gleam, to fade away as sadly, as wholly, as yon truant meteor. Why is it so? Yesterday I was at peace with myself, my hopes were bounded by the fate which so strongly seems to be mine, and I crushed within myself those aspirations which my birth, my family, my name—but that is gone; and now he has come here to show me brighter things, as the picture in a mirror, to fade and die.«

Again was Alice silent, brooding over her strange destiny awhile.

»But,« she continued at length, »this is idle. I must school my foolish heart to think of him as I would of a stranger, I must laugh at his tales, and remember not the gentle voice, the impassioned gesture of his being; I must remember that never —no never—can I mate my fate to any-never!«

»You call, miss,« said Norah, starting from a slumber in which she was already indulging.

»No.«

»Den sartin, me dream you call, Norah!«

»Hush!« whispered Alice. »I see a movement on the cliff facing the porteullis, Stoop low, girl, the robbers will make a night attack, and we have no power of moving.«

»Oh, my!«

»Stoop low, girl, I say; if we be seen, we shall be picked off by these bold and bad men.«

»Dem debbles,« muttered Norah, trembling.

»Would I could alarm the Nest, but to descend the ladder were fatal.« »Him be killed, sure as I'm a nigger.«

»But see! they have a plank to throw across the narrow chasm, they will enter the court-yard, and we shall have dreadful work here anon.«

»Him Norah faint.«

»Faint, child, when 'tis is over;« said Alice, whose firm, but feminine soul, forgetting self, grew bold and courageous, in the cause of the sleeping dwellers of the Nest; »they must be alarmed. Would I could fire one of these carronades in the air.«

»Dat berry easy,« said Norah.

»How girl?«

»Him ole rope, burn all night,« replied the negress, pointing to a thick old rope, well tarred, which hung smouldering, in readiness for every emergency, and which would last many hours.

»Use it, girl,« said Alice, turning away.

»Him nebber could, Miss Als,« half shrieked the negress.

»Then give it me,« replied the young girl, who however trembled as she took it, »it must be done. Good heavens! they are placing the plank across, and will enter the court-yard in a moment. How can I do it?—but I must.«

»Oh, Miss Als.«

»Remove the cover from the gun,« said Alice, with an endeavour to be firm.

Norah removed it.

»Now stand away, girl,« exclaimed she, with an hysteric laugh, and turning her head one side, she applied the match, and fell half fainting on the block, while Norah gave a shrill scream.

A dozen rifles, aimed at the summit of the block, answered the report.

»Bravely done, Alice,« cried the thundering voice of Philip Stevens; »awake, my lads, and drive back this hungry crew. Give them their own again,« and up starting the ever watchful and ready men of the prairie, the Nest was alive with her garrison, and the assailants at once withdrew, leaving their bridge as a trophy of their defeat.

»Come down, girl,« said Stevens, as soon as the uproar was over, »your courage saved us. It was your going to the block woke me, and I saw it all, but resolved to give them a drive, but would have waited until some had crossed.«

»Good heavens, Miss Stevens,« said Edward, who was assisting her to descend, »how came you on the block?«

»Why, I was sleepless, and, as you know, somewhat contemplative,« she replied, gaily; »so went up yonder to gaze upon such a night.«

»And now had better seek some rest,« said Edward, anxiously.

»Nay, you will watch, and I cannot now sleep.«

»As you will, girl,« said Philip with smile, »but we shall not all watch.«

»If Miss Stevens does, surely I may,« answered Edward, laughing.

»Aye, you shall; but your watch and ward shall be to keep her and Norah from climbing blocks at night.« And with these words the bold and ever-ready occupant of the Nest left the girl and her negress in the garden, to go his rounds, and see that all was once more right.

»When I left you, Miss Stevens,« said Edward, »methought you were weary, and going to rest.«

»Would you have a woman of the same mind for two minutes together?« replied Alice; »fie, you would have us reasonable.«

»Indeed would I,« continued the sailor, »especially in regard to ascending blocks within the reach of an enemy's rifle.«

This was said so naturally, in so friendly a tone, that nothing could have been thence construed, but to Alice, unused to such care, the young man's evincement of thoughtfulness was pleasing, and she was silent.

»I must really suppose,« said Blake, after a brief pause, “ that my rambling adventures must have set your thoughts roaming. I must be more chary of my tales of travel, or that I did steal away this old man's daughter, in as far as her sedate habits are concerned, will be as true of me as of Othello.«

Alice remembered that Othello stole away the old man's daughter's heart, and smiled.

»You smile,« said Edward, who had taken her arm, and was walking up and down the garden, while a faint streak of dawn illumined the sky; »but you may not find it a smiling matter. I have known more than one stay-at-home lass made crazy. for foreign travel by the ‘ yarns,’ as we call them, of a travelled sailor.«

‘My mind led me to wish for travel only to my native land, and I do not think you will alter that wish, Mr. Brown.«

‘But your native land is England.«

»It is.«

»Near what part?«

»Mr. Brown,« replied Alice, bowing her head, »I have told you. before I have secrets—that is one of them.«

There was a silence, painful to both, as bringing back certain impressions to our hero's mind; but he stifled them, and in gentle converse, that pleasant intercommunion which always exists between two sensible young persons of opposite sexes, they passed the hours until morning, both too excited for any hope of sleep.

They were, however, no more interrupted, and sat down to breakfast without a renewal of the attack.

At this meal Edward met Margaretta, who observed, with a smile full of meaning, and at the same time with a shade of sadness on her brow, that the young sailor was almost exclusive in his assiduities to the fair daughter of their hostess, whose gratification, though silent and subdued, was, however, not unseen.

»A pleasant night you have had of it,« said the Mexican, with sufficient of emphasis on the word to make it to all but Edward seem a jibe.

Edward grew grave, and scarcely answered.

»Pleasanter than you would think,« said Alice, innocently enough; »for after the attack was over, the hours until morning sped swiftly enough.«

»Indeed!« exclaimed Philip Stevens; »is our friend's converse so very gay and pleasant?«:

Alice blushed, and then laughed to hide her blush, and looked so pretty in her sweet and innocent confusion, that Edward thought her far more lively than ever.

»Miss Stevens is complimentary,« he said; »though knowing the fright she had received, I did my utmost to amuse.«

Philip, seeing that Alice was annoyed, here interposed, and adroitly drew attention another way.

Chapter XIV.

HOW BIG GRIDDLE VISITED THE NEST.

»Why he is coming in a new hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches, thrice turned; a pair of boots that have been candle cases, one buckled and another laced; an old rusty sword, ta'en out of the town armory, with a broken hilt, and chapeless, with two broken points; his horse hipped with an old mothy saddle, the stirrups of no kindred; besides, possessed with the glanders, swayd in the back, and shoulder shotten; ne'er legged before, and with a half-checked bit, and a headstall of sheep's leather; which being restrained to keep him from stumbling, hath been of burst, and now repaired with knots; one girth six times pieced, and a woman's crupper of velure, which hath two letters for her name, facily set down in studs, and here and there pieced with packthread.«

Shakespeare.

As, until the arrival of the looked-for succour to be brought by Chinchea, there was little hope of the attack diminishing in violence, the whole garrison remained on the alert, even Alice and her negro attendant, accompanied by Margaretta, keeping a constant look out. No further sign was given, however, of the presence of an enemy for many hours, and it wanted some two of sundown, when the whole party were collected on the raised terrace which commanded the drawbridge, the men smoking, Don Juan, who, though still very ill, had risen from bed in a comfortable arm-chair, supported by pillows, and Edward, with Alice and Margaretta, chatting near the walls.

»Your promised visit to the Comanche Indian village will be delayed, I fear,« said Alice, »if not prevented.«

»I hope not,« replied Blake; »for I have a great wish to see this famous tribe, of which I have heard such great things. You have seen much of them.«

»Nay, not much,« continued Alice. »Chinchea often wanders hither on a hunt, and the Nest people go and stay weeks beyond the Canon de Uvaldi^[1]; but I have never seen more of them.«

»Let us then form a party,« said Edward Blake, eagerly; »and when these robbers have been repelled, we can make an excursion to the camp Comanche, and witness its wonders.«

»Am I to be one of the guests?« repeated Margaretta.

»Of course,« replied Edward, quietly.

»Well, I reckon that are a queer start,« suddenly exclaimed Cephas Doyle.

»What?« said Edward, turning round half fiercely, as if he thought the Yankee were commenting on his plans.

»If there arn't big Griddle, the New-town pedlar, darn my old granny.«

»What mean you?« said Philip, while the whole party gazed eagerly out upon the prairie.

»I say, I do, that yonders big Griddle; if it arn't, I'm bound to be a liar, that's all.«

Mounted on a tall horse, that took strides of Gargantuan dimensions, a horse of more bone than flesh, and which wheezed perseveringly as it came along, sat a man who, in his whole attire, presented a strange and anomalous appearance. His steed, like the Rozinante of Manchian renown, seemed fitted to the rider, and rider to the horse. The master wore @ tall steeple-crowned white felt, bedizened with tugs and tatters:

*»And his horse, dear creter, it prances and rears,
With ribbons in knots at its tail and its years.«*

On the rider's shoulders was a variegated mantle, that had saved all the stray patches which otherwise had been undoubted rags, the play of circumstance; while his steed had a saddle-cloth so multifarious in its hues, he seemed to have endured more cud-gelling than kindness, if colour were to be taken in testimony; the rider's bouts were a six good inches above the knee, and had seen many a year of service; in this the horse's legs resembled their master, being encased in a thick coating of mud, of much similar colour to his rider's splatter dashes; on they came, so glued one to the other, so compact, or completely one, so Centaur-like, that all who looked on without knowing the man were amazed and puzzled.

Whiz went bullets from the nearest cover. But neither horse nor man increased his pace one jot, appearing to treat the hostile missiles with philosophic contempt.

»Who, in the name of wonder,« said Edward Blake, »is this strange arrival, who appears so anxious to gain shelter here?«

»Which he shall have, and welcome; down with the drawbridge,« said Philip.

»Are you quite sure he is no enemy?« said Jones, with much caution.

»Faugh!« replied Philip; »an he were, why fears solitary man? a dozen might alarm you.«

»A dozen?« said Jones, slightly pale; »heaven forbid. I would not have a dozen ———«

»No, not a dozen rats,« interrupted Philip; »they would fright you more than a dozen men, me.«

Jones replied not, but turned sullenly away.

»And you arn't hearn tell o' Joe Griddie, Big Griddle, Griddle the pedlar,« said Cephas Doyle, answering Edward's question; »why he's a nataral born carakter. He

is the best hand at a yarn in all west country, and will whip more cats, tell more lies, and eat more pork, than any fellow in Texas.«

»He must be a curiosity,« observed Edward, with a smile, in which he was joined by Alice and Margaretta.

»An't he jist, though?« continued Cephas; »why he'll swar he can smell a hog a mile off; he's rare, jist the chap, and no mistake. He's seen the elephant, I imagine, a little more nor twice, I expect.«

By this time the object of this lucid description had reached the Nest, and was in the act of crossing the narrow bridge, without dismounting.

»Roast pig in the larder, good people,« said he; »just what I smelt, inviting me to dine, as I came through the wood. It's a fact, but I swear them thieving vagabones have sucking bacon for their breakfast, and I had—nothing for mine.«

»There is plenty here,« replied Philip, helping him to dismount, and bidding a man take his horses to the coral, where the cattle had almost consumed every article of food; while Jones eagerly looked to the closing up of the entrance.

»Well, I reckon you're above a bit soft,« said big Griddle, whose saturnine visage somewhat belied the merry, hearty tone of his voice, »to tell me there are plenty. But as you don't disguise it, just hand it out yar, for I jist want to enjoy the open air, a rare sauce for appetite, good people.«

»Why, big Griddle, my bey, are you bin in the wars that you look so black, or are you caught a cold that your voice is so almighty soft?« inquired Cephas Doyle, looking curiously at him, and bent, it seemed, on drawing him out.

»What brute speaketh?« replied the pedlar, irately, and even impatiently. »Big Griddle arn't in the habit of wars, no, nor of catching -cold neither. He should like to see a cold catch him, that's all; he'd be like a dirty, sneaking, pig-faced Yankee I know, and pretty glad to let go.«

A roar of laughter greeted the eccentric pedlar's reply.

»Who are you speaking to?« asked Cephas Doyle, somewhat angrily.

»To you, my sharp-eyed, butter-eared friend.«

»Do you know who I am, or have you forgotten me?«

»What! big Griddle forget the bandylegged tailor of Houston, who made him a waistcoat out of seventeen pieces, each big enough for a coat?«

»Tailor!« thundered Cephas Doyle, amid another volley of mirth; »I, Cephas Doyle, a tailor! Big Griddle, I am a freeborn American, I am; and I arn't no tailor.«

»Many free-born Yankees is, I expect, or the worse for decency, I reckon. I do conclude, howsomever, that if all tailors were like you——«

»Big Griddle, you're drunk,« said Cephas Doyle.

»You're another,« replied the pedlar, nodding at the same time to Norah, who had placed before him a wooden tray, covered with eatables and drinkables, roast pork and spruce beer forming the principal ingredients.

»Big Griddle!«

»Yes.«

»You are a liar!«

»Don't be alarmed, I've got a job for you,« said the pedlar, with a laugh; »and you shall do it, as sure as my name's Griddle.«

»But it arn't,« said Cephas Doyle, in a cold sardonic tone, which drew the whole party, including Edward and the two women, hitherto standing aloof, around the tonguey combatants.

»What are the fool arter now?« replied the pedlar, still eating his meal, but casting @ wary eye around.

»I tell you,« said the Yankee, with a gleam of horrible satisfaction, »you may have robbed, most likely have murdered, big Griddle, but you arn't him, though you are in his clothes, and do about a bit make him up.«

»Then who am I?« said the other, insolently.

»One, I expect, everybody will be very glad to see,« exclaimed Cephas DoYLES tearing, at one grasp, wig, beard, and hat, from the false pedlar.

»THE BLOODY BLACKHAWK!« said one or two of those around.

»Harry!« cried Philip.

»Murder!« exclaimed Jones, who turned perfectly livid.

»Captain Coulter!« said Edward Blake, coldly.

»Heaven have mercy on him!« faintly exclaimed Alice, who nearly fainted and fell to the ground, while the bandit chief fixed a look of peculiar meaning and sneering familiarity upon her.

»So I am found out,« said the bandit, with a cold sneer; »I must say I thought myself a better actor. That blundering fool Doyle must betray me too. Well, it cannot, I suppose, be helped. Glad to see you, Philip; and you, Jones; and you, Alice dear; ah, my little water spaniel, whom I picked up on lake Sabine, Mr. B-B—«

»Brown,« said our hero, biting his lip.

»Brown was it?« replied the bandit; »I thought not. But of course you know best.«

Philip and Jones had retired slightly from the group, while this colloquy took place, and for the first time for days spoke together with anything like confidence. They appeared, by the glances they cast at Blackhawk, to be discussing the prospects of some proposed measure with regard to the bandit. The face of Philip

was stern and pallid with passion; that of Jones white with fear, and scowling with hate.

»Harry Markham,« said Philip, advancing, »alias Coulter, alias Blackhawk, for if appears you are that bloodthirsty hound, who has been thirsting these da 's past for our blood, you are now in our power.«

»I rather think I am,« said the other.

»And as surely as you are in our power, so surely must you pay the forfeit of your folly.«

»Why, what the deuce are you prating about?«

»In New Orleans I owed you a grudge; there you robbed me at the hazardtable —«

»Fair play—fair play, by Jove,« said the bandit.

»Here you have, though I knew it not, stolen my cattle and horses, and killed one of my men,« continued Philip Stevens, sternly; »am I to let you live?«

»You won't kill me,« replied the other, quietly.

»Nay, take not the law into your own hands,« said Edward Blake.

»There is no law, here, young man,« exclaimed Philip, »but the law of self-preservation. It is he or I. If he lives, he will take my life; to prevent that, I must take his.«

»Yes, his,« repeated Jones; »he's a raging wolf; kill him, kill him.« And the arrant coward crept behind Cephas Doyle, as he uttered these menacing words.

»He's a bloody varmint, he is,« put in Cephas Doyle, with a solemnness of manner which was strongly in contrast with his usual levity; »for if he arn't murdered big Griddle, and stole his fixins, my name arn't Cephas, I'm bound to swar.«

»You'd swear a man's life away mighty cool,« replied the robber, quietly. »Big Griddle's better off than I am this minute. I tell you, Yankee, I never kill unless to serve a purpose, end then in fair fight The pedlar will ride on his way as soon as he finds his horse and trappings, which, it seems, I have been foolish enough to borrow.«

»Well, if big Griddle ain't dead,« said Cephas, much mollified, »and how so you'll send him up yar, why I don't care if I swap you agin him, which arn't quite fair nether, seein' he'd make three of you.«

»But I have nay to say to this, Cephas Doyle,« exclaimed Philip; »for the present, he stays with us. Yonder woodhole will be his prison, until better men than he decide his fate.«

»Thanks!« said Edward, who saw in this middle course a submission to his influence; »let him at least have a fair trial.«

»He shall have fair trial before all here,« replied Stevens, solemnly; »here, on this spot, in an hour hence, I, Philip Stevens, will array him as a thief and murderer.«

»Murderer!« repeated Blackhawk, fixing his now cold and impassive glance on the other's face.

»If not,« said Philip, cowering before his glance, »at least one who has killed many.«

»None in cold blood, Philip Stevens, save one who would have brained me yester morn,« replied Blackhawk, quietly.

»Cease this parleying, away with him to his cage,« cried Stevens, hoarsely.

»Yes, away with him,« said Jones, in a shrill voice, the voice of fearful but terrible passion.

Cephas Doyle and the rest seized the bandit, and dragged him to the small block-built outhouse, that was to serve for his prison, in which thrusting him, he was left to his meditation.

Pale, with eyes resting fearfully upon the daring outlaw, with bosom heaving, and hands clenched convulsively, Alice had remained a spectator of the above scene. To casual and unobserving looker-on, her emotion would have appeared nothing more than the natural terror of a maiden, brought suddenly in contact with so notorious and daring an outlaw. But careful observer (and on the present occasion Edward Blake was one of these) might have noted something of more painful interest in her manner. There was terror at the man, but still greater terror manifested at the idea of his punishment, and an inexplicable look of sympathy, which the young sailor vainly endeavoured to explain to himself.

»Thank heaven!« she muttered, as she lost sight of him, by his entrance of the cell.

»Now.« said Philip Stevens, »we have work but for men. Alice, take your guest to your chamber; this is no place for women.«

Edward Blake was standing with his back to the speaker, and he noted a scornful smile on Alice's lip, as she advanced to obey his mandate. As to reach the garden she had to pass between our hero and his host, the young sailor expected a word of salutation, and turned to receive it. What was his surprise to see the gentle Alice, standing with sparkling eyes, and menacing mien, before her father.

»Philip Stevens,« said she, in whispered tones, tones clear and distinct, which reached, however, but one more ear than they were intended for; »lay one finger on him at your peril, I, Alice—«

»Hush, not that name, girl,« replied Philip, who was ghastly pale.

But she had said it, and Edward Blake, who alone had heard it—for Stevens turned away too abruptly to catch the words—stood as if rooted to the spot, chained, as it were, by some mysterious fascination. All was now clear to him as noon-day, and the warm blood ran cold and chill in his veins, and he walked to the walls to hide his deep, his awful emotion.

The blood-made orphan, the fortune-robbed child, stood in the presence of the secret of his life, to fathom which he felt a degree of coolness and courage, and even of dissimulation, was necessary, to which, though one week before he might not have been equal, yet now he could, he knew it, exert. The undefined dreams of his first night in the Eagle's Nest, the strange visions of his sleepless couch, now took body and shape, and Edward Blake vowed in his inmost heart to unravel and detect the mystery.

Alice meanwhile had left the terrace, and betaken herself, with Margaretta, to the solitude of her own chamber.

Philip Stevens then sternly addressing the whole party, summoned a council of war, or rather of death.

^[1]See description of this remarkable place in »The Enchanted Rock,« a Comanche legend.

Chapter XV.

THE PRISONER.

»_ _ _ Reassembling our afflicted powers, Consult how we may henceforth most offend Our enemy, our own loss how repair, How overcome this dire calamity; What reinforcement we may gain from hope, If not, what resolution from despair.«— Milton,

»Blackhawk is now in our power,« observed Philip Stevens, as soon as the whole party, Edward Blake excepted—Don Juan had some time since been carried to his bed—had congregated around him; »and it is for us to consider how we may best rid ourselves of one who is the scourge of the frontier, who steals our cattle without mercy, and who makes the woods not only unsafe for the women, but for the hunter in search of game. Jones, what say you?«

»Dead men trouble not the living,« replied the coward, who believed in no safety from an enemy but death; »let him die. We may never have another chance.’

»I thought as much,« said Philip, with a sneer; »and you, my hearties?« addressing the men.

»Kill him! kill him!’ was the unanimous answer.

»Cephas Doyle, what advice give you?«

»Why seein’ he arn’t an Ingin or a niggar, I arn’t for cuttin’ him off in this are cool style, if so be as he arn’t killed big Griddles. If he are, I’m bound to strangle, I say. Only think of the varmint, with his roast pork; but he was out. He warn’t a gwine to take in Cephas Doyle, not by no manner of chalks.«

»Then you are not for his death?« said Philip.

»Sartin not.«

»Nor em I.«

Edward Blake turned full round, and gazed in surprise on his host, near to whom he advanced.

»You look astonished, Mr. Brown?«

»Not at all. I heard what she said,« replied Edward.

»Who?« whispered Stevens, hurriedly; »my daughter?«

»Miss Alice,’ said Edward, with emphasis.

»What mean you?«

»Nothing; my words are very clear,« replied Edward, with a cold shudder as he spoke, for he could that instant willingly from his heart have raised his hand, and struck the man he spoke to dead to the earth.

»Well, whatever it means, we can discuss it anon; in the meantime, how purpose you finding if big Griddle be dead or not?«

»I'm bound to go and see,« replied Cephas Doyle.

»What, venture out among the vermin?«

I tell you, Capt'n Stevens, if so be Blackhawk have killed big Griddle, I'm bound to kill him; and when I says it, I reckon I mean it. You know as how I don't poke fun in these locrums."

»I do know.«

»Well, it arn't in natur' to believe he an't killed big Griddle, on his own word; seein' his word arn't above s bit good. So I say, Cephas Doyle will go and spy for hisself.«

»Be careful, Doyle,« replied Philip; »once in the hands of these knaves, it may be hard to get out.«

»It will soon be dark, I guess; and I'm sartin the varmint will be on the look-out for signals. Blackhawk arn't slipped his head in the noose for nothing, I expect. Well, I leave these diggens, and I go to the wood, and if I don't ferret out big Griddle, if he are alive, he never smelt roast pork, that's all.«

»A wilful man will have his way, Cephas,« replied Philip; »and since you will, you will. Meantime, do you, Jones, sve that Blackhawk is safe; and if he have killed this pedlar in cold blood, he shall die, though he were twice her——" This was said in a low, muttered tone, of which Edward alone caught the import.

»Her what?« said Edward, hastily.

»You seem deeply interested in the girl, and watch all she says and does with marvellous care,« continued Philip Stevens, with a smile, as they moved apart.

»I do,« replied Edward, deeply gratified to find the other on the wrong track, when his own indiscreet words might have led him on the right.

»You are frank, at all events, Mr. Brown,« said Philip, with a quiet smile; »and Alice may well be proud of such a suitor.«

»I said not I was her suitor; I could not be, while so much of mystery hangs about herself and you.«

»Mystery, Mr. Brown?«

»Mystery.«

»In what way?«

»She is not your daughter, and yet she passes as such.«

»Not my daughter, sir?«

»She said as much just now,« replied Blake, firmly.

»True! true! poor thing, she never knew a parent's care,« said Philip, mournfully; »but if she be not my child, can you blame me for taking a parent's place?«

»Certainly not,« replied Edward, with a choking sensation in his throat, a tingling of the eyes, and a stern dilation of the nostrils; »but why call her Miss Stevens, when her name is——«

»What?« asked Philip, in a low, hushed, sad voice, while his face for a moment borrowed the fearful and terror-stricken expression of Jones.

»Blake«, replied the young man, in as careless a tone as he could assume, and pretending to light his pipe, in order to conceal his intense emotion.

»Blake!« said Philip, in a hushed whisper, glancing fearfully around into the nooks and corners of the building, where the closing darkness had already taken up its abode; »how came you to know that?«

»Said she not so?« replied Edward, calmly, though what was hid beneath his calm, he alone could tell.

»Ah, did she say so? But, young man, why these questions?« asked Philip, sternly, almost menacingly.

»Said you not I was her suitor, sir? if so, excuse my questions; they have meaning.«

»Mr, Brown, I know little of you, save that you carry a good letter of recommendation in your face, which, I knew not why, excited at the first glance my sympathy.«

Blake shuddered fearfully, and curbed his tongue only by a violent effort.

»You appear to like my ward; I dote on her. Yes, sir, though, as you may one day learn, she be no relative even of mine, and though from reasons between her, myself, and our God———«

»And I,« thought: Edward.

»She likes me not; I would fain see her happy. It is my one hope; to bring that about I would peril life, fortune. She has perhaps to thank me for much suffering, mental and bodily. No sacrifice that I can make shall be too great to make up to her for whatever fault she has had to find in me.«

Edward gazed in surprise on the owner of the Eagle's Nest, and a glance of pity stole upon his face, followed, however, on the instant, by a glance of scorn and undying hate, which Philip Stevens, wrapped in gloomy thought, saw not.

»Did she love you, and you her, you should know the history of my fortunes—you should be my confessor. and in your hands should be the means of reparation.«

»There is then guilt?« said Edward, sternly.

»Are we not all guilty, Mr. Brown, in this world?«

»Aye, more or less; but some more than others.«

»Of these,« said Philip Stevens, speaking more to himself than to the other, »I have been, and yet 'twas he that urged and did the deed. But, Mr. Brown——«

»Mr. Blake!« said, or rather hissed, the young sailor, in his ear. »I, Edward Blake, or rather Sir Edward, son of Sir Hugh, who by your hand——«

»God of heaven!' cried Philip, pale, white, trembling; »have mercy on my guilty soul.«

»You said just now that 'twas he that did the deed. If so, there is yet pardon. But, mark me, Philip Stevens, this secret is between you and. I have my reasons for remaining sometime concealed. You have time yet to think of what to do. If you be not wholly guilty—if the accursed deed were nut yours—you can clear yourself.«

»How?« asked the other, gazing horror-struck on him.

»Let me, as a stranger, win her confidence; let me hear from her lips the story of that night.«

»That night! oh, God of mercy.«

»And if, from mere confidence in one she loves, she tells me all, and you are exculpated, the guilt falls on other heads.«

»Sir Edward, you shall hear it from her lips—she best of all can clear me, not of guilt, but of the damned, accursed deed.«

»Until she does, Philip Stevens, I must look on you as guilty.«

»So be it«, groaned the other, whose resolution had wholly departed.

»Then let us be as before. I, Mr. Brown, to you and all. You, my host.«

»As you will.«

»Here comes Cephas, bound on his wild expedition. My brain is on fire, action is needed, and I will accompany him.«

»Just as you will.«

»Captain Cephas,« said Blake, »I am curious to see this pedlar, who must be quite a character.«

»Rather, I calculate,' replied Cephas; »spry and active as a painter, and cute as an Albany needle.«

»When start you?«

»In about ten minutes. Lord, Lord, won't I and Griddle have a talk, I expect, when we two gits together. Darn my old skin but it will be no mistake.«

»You have known him long,« cried Edward Blake, while Philip Stevens walked away towards the room where the party usually congregated at night.

»I reckon he seed me first, for I warn't above a fut high, and he wur the doctor as assisted me into this univarse, I'm bound to say, seein' my old grandmother's

told me so ever so many times.«

»Doctor!« said Blake, endeavouring to be amused, in order to draw his mind from the wild and startling thoughts which filled his soul; »why he has many professions.«

»As many, I reckon, as there are hairs in a bull's tail,« replied Cephas; »an' considering all thin's, that's a deal, I reckon.«

»What is he, besides a doctor?«

»He'll tell more fortunes in a day, nor a Spanish pedlar in a month.«

»What else?«

»Why, thin he's a mighty tall clockmaker, most as good as Sam Slick, as you Britishers bin poking fun about.«

»So Sam Slick is a real character?«

»Real, arn't he jist? Why he's in a book.«

»That is no proof; many men invent characters.«

»Well, I hearn tell of that before; but I ain't availed it can be true. Thir are so many busters of characters, rigilar good ones, as ud kill a crocodile with laughing. I can't account it true any man ud be sich a Rhode island jackass as to invent one.«

»Certainly, if there were many big Griddles,« said Edward, smiling in spite of himself, »I expect romancists would require little invention. They would have but to copy nature.«

»As I see'd a born fool do down east. He showed me a daub of paint jist like a broom, and swar it was a tree. Lord, I could see with half an eye he was poking fun. I reckon nobody ever seed a tree sich a size. Why, my hand was bigger.«

Much amused with Cephas Doyle, and perceiving that there was stuff in the man worth bringing out, Edward Blake, whose mind was of that elastic character which could accommodate itself to circumstances, went to his room, and, arming himself with rifle and other necessary weapons, prepared to accompany the Yankee in search of big Griddle, whose acquaintance the young sailor promised himself much satisfaction from making.

Chapter XVI.

BIG GRIDDLE, THE PEDLAR.

*»I'll have no glittering gewgaws stuck about you
To stretch the gaping eyes of idiot wonder,
And make men stare upon a piece of earth
As on the star-wrought firmament.«—John Tobin.*

*»With vigilance and fasting worn to skin
And bone, and wrapped in most debasing rags.« Robert Pollock.*

In the very heart of the forest facing the Eagle's Nest, and near a purling and pellucid stream, where at nightfall came to water the sandhill crane or stork, and where tasteful deer, wandering through the woods during noontide heat, would slake their thirst, and where all travellers who wended their way through the neighbourhood at night were wont to camp, is an aged tree, a sycamore, whose huge branches made pleasant shade in sunny weather. Its roots, gnarled stumps, peeped forth above ground, as if scorning to be buried beneath the green sward, though quiet and pleasant enough looked the grave. Some even, more disdainful of mother earth than common, peaked their points a foot higher than others; and to one of these, tied by stout cords, the tether of his own horse, was attached a man of somewhat colossal dimensions.

Six feet high, thin, gaunt and yellow as any guinea, or as his own leathern breeches, his only garment save and except his boots and red flannel shirt, he sat up in the twilight the very ghost of the tree against which he leaned, to all appearance gloaming on all arboriferous nature. Near his right hand was a bottle, whence escaped at the same time a faint odour of recent brandy, and a secret worth knowing. To that huge vegetable excrescence—for it was a gourd that had served its turn as brandy case—the delinquent owed, imprimis, that he went to sleep in a strange place, without keeping one eye awake; secondly, that teing thus asleep, he suffered the loss of his hat, coat, waistcoat, and cloak, to say nothing of his jargon, which men could only borrow, and that further loss which was common to himself in Upper Texas, and to Sancho Panza in the Sierra Morena—the stealing away of his beloved dapple.

Big Griddle—for it was this renowned pedlar—had, during his tour out west, heard tell, sometimes as a thing believed, sometimes as a thing doubtful, that the Eagle's Nest—so called from its position by all wandering hunters—was inhabited by a bold squatter, and a numerous family. Now as men and women were, in big Griddle's eyes, but so many animated hedges whereon to hang his peddling ware,

or big eyes to look at his clocks, or if women, as persons who brought forth children, and who therefore might want his attendance—for he regarded all mankind medicinally, as mere viaducts for the conveyance of his medicines.

»Which whoever took is dead since,«

he determined that the in-dwellers in the habitation that bordered on the Cross Timbers should no longer suffer from the want of his visit.

Strapping an extra bale, taken from some well-contrived cache known only to his beast and himself, upon the back of his faithful animal, doctor, alias pedlar, alias big Griddle, started accordingly in the direction of the region which he supposed likely to turn out a good investment. As he went, his bale became lighter and his purse heavier, for no corner, no nook, no cranny, where house or hut could perch or sit hen-like, and hatch melancholy in the shade, was too remote for him. His nose was as acute for a customer, as it was sharp for roast pork—sharp enough, as he would often playfully and facetiously remark, for vinegar sauce to his favourite dish, a pig at nurse—or rather unnaturally deprived, cut off from lactial nourishment.

Months therefore ensued between Griddle's coming to the decision, and being able to carry it into effect—months which rendered three distinct voyages to replenish his bale necessary. He had reached the very verge of the prairie in which was situated, the post it was his ambition to gain, when, fatigued with his journey, and having mercy on his beast, towards which he entertained a perfectly Pyladian friendship, he halted at the spring to drink, and perchance to discuss his morning meal, when his nose and eyes were at the same time irresistibly assailed, and the double garrison of sight and smell carried by storm.

»By my father's old huckleberry stump, sweet pork by —; a remnant, a fag-end, a sample, the leavings of some dainty mortal, more nice than wise, though I say it that should not say it, who am benefited by it; but still roast pork, by the head of the immortal Van Buren, General Jackson, and the army of the U—ni—tid States,« continued he, using his favourite oath, or expletive, as the moderns have it, as he dismounted, and opened a carefully corked gourd accidentally left by one of the banditti; »brandy, by —.—.«

This was a nasal asseveration, in a double sense, because he judged by the odour, and spoke through the nose; but before he proceeded to make assurance doubly sure by the employment of any other faculty thereupon, he acted in some particulars with his accustomed circumspection. Tying the bridle of his horse to a long rope, and having removed saddle and bale from his back, he allowed him the range of the lasso, which sufficed near the fructifying stream for some hour or so's consumption. The bale and purse were hoisted by a leathern thong thrown

over a branch into the very thick of the boughs of the tree which thong was then concealed behind the parasitical plants which crept up the huge trunk of the sycamore.

»Now I reckon I can eat,« said big Griddle, with frightful grin, quite ogrian in its intensity. Gen'ral Jackson and the army of the U-ni-tid States, but this pork is good. By mother's distaff—poor Mrs. Griddle—but it is not long enough though—talking of old Mrs. Griddle, puts me in mind of my Mrs. Griddle, she did used to fry a pork chop spry. Darn my old horse's sack-cloth, but I should like to know how she gets on in the north. She must have increased the population of New Jersey since I left; by, and I not there. I suppose they sent that for darned old Whiffles Ugh! the brute. There's a state of things, one's own family supporting the opposition. But these women are so obstinate. I told her I'd be home on purpose, if she'd wait until next Christmas. Oh, my! that brandy is first chop; French, I conclude. Well, I do think that are tree's winking at me. Gen'ral Jackson and the army of the U-ni-tid States.«

In this mumbling, incoherent manner, the old pedlar went on until he had consumed the whole of the animal portion of his supper, undiversified by any of the vegetable; he then applied himself to the brandy bottle, and to that universal weed which King James hath counter blasted with such determination and vigour, and not being generally habituated to other liquids after supper, speedily found himself in that delightful state, when a man, if he has any remnant of reason left, begins to have an acute perception of his being first cousin to that antiquated female pig, who, in the days of one David—a Welch David, we opine—originated by some improper conduct the vulgar proverb.

In this agreeable state was big Griddle found by the rambling Blackhawk, when scouring the woods in search of Chinchea and the other fugitives, and knowing the pedlar well, having cheated him more than once, he resolved to purloin his clothes and horse, and thus obtain an entrance into the Nest. As he felt convinced the pedlar had money and goods near at hand, he bound him fast to the tree, determined, as soon as the capture of the Eagle's Nest was effected, to return and force from the unfortunate huckster the confession of where was his pack.

Big Griddle, when introduced to the reader, just as evening was drawing in, had just awoke, the somniferous and stupifying effect of the quart and more of brandy he had imbibed, having hitherto bound him in heavy durance. Uttering a volley of oaths—for big Griddle was, if a Christian at all, a cast iron one—he struggled violently to get loose.

»Darn that old horse,' he cried, half inclined to laugh at first at his mishap, »he's bound to have walked round me until he's bound me to the tree; I'll swar the

brute was brought up in a mill, I do. Joe you varmint, won't you walk back agin. Gen'ral Jackson and the army of the U-ni-tid States, but thar knots, I'll go bail. Oh! old hickory, I'm cotched. What coon's in the woods to deep for old Joe Griddle? Darn that brandy, as my poor old father used to say—oh, his old huckleberry stump—its the fertile river whence many sources of evil spring. But wars my horse? Oh, Billy Power, where are ye? Joe, Joe! name sake, whew! And my pack, oh, by the head of Martin Van Buren —and considering all things that's a big oath—that's safe, anyhow you can fix it. But Joe Griddle, my boy, this sarves you right, drinking that catankerous brandy. Darn it's old stockin. Well, I'd give the best clock out of Maine—though that ain't offerin' much—to git loose from this here state of moral petrification, I would. And my coat, lud! there's all the pieces I've carried about as samples for this twenty years in that old coat; and the hat, my go to meetin' hat, though go to meetin's neither here nor there. And old Joe, my poor horse, here's a fixin. I only wish I had the varmint, the unchristened coon, I'd make him suck his fingers without molasses. Talking o'lasses puts me in mind of pork, Pork and 'lasses is a rare drink. I smell pork; ah, it's only the odour.«

»You're right, Griddle, my boy; I knew I was bound to find you. Well, I never did expect to see you taking it cool ater this fashion.«

»Jist look out. I'm savage. If you've bin poking fun at me you're bound to pay for it.«

»I,« cried Cephas Doyle; »why, big Griddle, you're drunk.«

»Don't,« said the pedlar, »I ave bin, but I arn't jist. But I smell a rat about these diggins; your Captain Cophas Doyle as was at Saba.«

»I am.«

»Thin jist operate.«

Cephas Doyle, assisted by Edward Blake, who could not, despite his far from agreeable humour, repress a smile, now quickly unloosed the knots which bound the pedlar, during which operation the huge specimen of humanity who followed this useful occupation, received an account of the way in which the Nest had been imposed upon. Cephas Doyle, who loved a joke dearly, made the most of the scene, and Joseph Griddles was wondrous irate at the use made of his person.

»Gen'ral Jackson and the army of the U-ni-tid States, but I'll pound his jacket, I will. To ask for roast pig too; why, he might have deceived poor Mrs. Griddle herself,« and the pedlar's hair actually stood on end at the bare thought of such an enormity.

»Oh, but he ain't so tall as you, Joe, and then Mrs. Griddle's ain't like strangers, you know.«

»Martin Van Buren and the electoral college! I don't know; women make strange mistakes; there's Mrs. Griddle—« and the pedlar narrated, with strong emphasis, the disagreeable support which he supposed a rival to have received during his absence.

»But I think we had better regain the Nest,« observed Edward, quietly.

»Young man, I expect you're right,« and whisking his pack upon his shoulders, having removed it from its elevated position, the gaunt pedlar, side by side with Edward and Cephas, went rejoicing on his way, and advanced towards the Eagle's Nest, to reach which had cost him so adventurous a three months.

Walking along, the eccentric huckster excited the risible faculties of Cephas to the utmost by the droll account of all his wanderings, which he narrated with infinite relish and humour, as if he, as much as anyone else, could appreciate the fun which existed in his own character.

»That Blackhawk 's a rare brute, I expect; I should like to have his portrait taken, and send it to Mrs. Griddle, I do think.«

»Perhaps she would fall in love with it?«

»Fall in what? Martin Van Buren squeeze me into eternal atomy, but you're poking fun at an almighty big rate, Mr. Cephas.

»Women are mortal«, said Cephas, drily, »and there's no accountin' for taste.«

»Gen'ral Jackson and the army of the U-ni-tid States, you're about right, I guess,« replied big Griddle, with a huge grin, »or else you'd never git a wife.«

»What, you're at that game, are you?«

»What game?«

»Why, a makin an almighty big donkey of your own private self.«

»Captin Cephas Doyle,« said big Griddle, solemnly, »do you reckon who I am?«

»I conclude, big Griddle; Griddle the pedlar.«

»You do?«

»I'm glad to hear it.«

»Because pedlars ain't generally called donkeys without speaking their mind.«

»But we were calculatin' that are fellow, Blackhawk,« said Cephas, who saw that Griddle was a slight degree offended.

»Oh, he'd smell roast pork, he would,« replied his companion. »I expect you'll hang that chap.«

»No!«

»Not hang him?«

»Sartin not.«

»Then, Cephas, you're a brute.«

»A brute!«

»Yes; ain't that plain? You want something stronger, I expect.«

»No!«

»Then jist explain the cause of not hanging that are brute.«

Cephas Doyle accordingly, with many a hearty laugh, narrated the account of the trial, during the progress of which the whole party reached the Eagle's Nest, and the true and false Griddle were brought into familiar contact.

Chapter XVII.

THE TOWACHANIE LAKE.

»There was a frosty rime upon the trees, which, in the faint light of the clouded moon, hung upon the smaller branches like dead garlands. Withered leaves crackled and snapped.«— Battle of Life.

The Leaping Panther and his six companions were unable to perform the whole extent of the journey they had expected to complete during the day, by reason of the inferior character of their horses and the many tangled thickets and muddy streams which intervened, retarding their progress; and it was dark night even when they reached the proposed camping ground, which was made the goal of their wishes for that day, instead of the picturesque and romantic village of the Comanche Indians, pitched at the foot of Spanish Peak, and tenanted by thousands of the brave Arabs of the American desert. As is often the case in the northern provinces of Texas, a warm day was succeeded by a chill night, that made the whole party desirous of a warm shelter, which was the more difficult to find as they were compelled to resort to a grove, at no great distance from a position generally occupied by a party of Towachanie Indians, who, though friendly enough to the Comanches generally, were by no means unlikely to avail themselves of the smallness of a party, in order to cut it off, and take the scalps of its members.

About an hour after sunset, however, the Leaping Panther, who rode at the head of the party, drew rein and halted by the edge of a pine grove, that offered both fuel and shelter. Dismounting and hopping the wearied horses where they could take proper nutriment after their fatiguing and harassing journey, he led his companions some twenty yards through the thicket, until they stood upon the borders of a tiny lake, whose dreamy waters trembled beneath the moon's pale light, and whose tiny waves made hollow murmur on the shores. It was one of those exquisite bits of American scenery, where wood and water, grove and lake, seem to vie with each other in picturesque and scenic effect—a spot, where silence, and peace, and quietness appeared to brood over all.

»Camp here,« said Chinchea, addressing himself to the white man, the loquacious Benjamin Smith, introduced so unceremoniously to our readers.

»First-chop,« replied Ben, with a huge grin, »it ave got jist all four wents; wood, water, sky, and arth. Lug out somethin' a feller can jist dig his teeth into, and I'll swar it immense.«

»Look,« continued the Indian, pointing with his outstretched arm to the other side of the diminutive lake, where a black mass of rock rose perpendicularly; »good camp. No eyes see fire.«

This was true.

The trees formed a crescent round a little bay, completely shutting out all observation of the camp, except exactly on the opposite side, and there, by the light of the pallid moon, could be discovered a perpendicular rock, rising from the water. The Indian knew it well, and had selected the position because least likely to attract the wandering Towachanie on so cold a night.

Every necessary disposition was rapidly made, much to the satisfaction of Ben Smith, who appeared once more in his element, for camping out was as natural to him as sleeping in a down bed to the luxurious dweller in towns, who know not the pleasure and delight which are experienced by the woodland fire, with no roof save the heavens, no walls save the surrounding trees, no bed save mother earth, and the green sward above her.

The fire was lit, the supper was being prepared by the hands of the lovely Rose of Day, and all proceeded eminently to the satisfaction of the whole party.

»This are pleasanter than outlying, with the Bloody Blackhawk,« remarked the huge specimen of animated nature who answered to the name of Smith; »he's a varmint I don't half like.«

»Then why did the white man join him?« said Chinchca, drily.

»Don't rile me,« replied Ben, warmly, »for I can't jist say. I'm a real fevert boy, I am, and no mistake; and, somehow or another, I fell in with thim fellows-but I have found 'em out in time.«

»Hugh!« said the Indian, laying his finger on his lips.

All was still as death in an instant. Ben listened with all his ears, but could catch no sound.

»What is it?« he whispered in cautious tones.

The Indian made no reply, but pointed to the lake with his raised finger.

Ben and Chinchca were seated some yards in front of the fire, and near the water's edge, and could see, despite the glare of light which rose from their fire.

»I can see nothing,« observed Ben, still, however, in a low whisper, for he knew that the Comanche's caution was the result of experience, and that it behoved him, as a backwoodsman, to take the necessity of the motion for granted.

»Did my brother ever see two moons?« asked Chinchca, after another brief and silent pause.

»Never,« replied Ben, half indignantly; »nor no other man.«

»Bat he will see two lights streaming on the lake,« continued the Comanche, without noticing the indignation of the Yankee at the lunar supposition.

Ben now clearly perceived the reason of the Indian's caution. 'The halo cast by some blazing fire spread its influence on the lake, and seemed to cross the rays of the moon, which poured its light towards the party, being high in the heavens, over the rock before mentioned.

»It moves,« said Ben, after some minutes of careful observation. »It's thim Towachnies fire-fishing.«

»Good,« observed the Indian, approvingly. »My white brother is quite right.«

»Thin, we may expect rale warm work,« said Ben, nodding; as much as to say, »I'm obliged for your guod opinion.«

»Ugh!« replied the Comanche, sententionally.

The whole party, aware of the probable proximity of an inimical force, now moved silently away from the fire, und concealed themselves within a few yards of its glare, where they could see all without being seen themselves.

Chinchea, accompanied by Ben Smith, skirted the edge of the little bay, and, gaining one of its points, discovered she exact position of the cause of alarm, at the same time that they became aware of its precise character.

»Rale jam,« whispered Ben, but whether he meant thereby to apostrophise his own acuteness, or to praise the scenic effect of their cause of alarm, will probably be never known.

»Towachanies!« said Chinchea, after a moment of quiet examination.

About two or three hundred yards distant on the pellucid waters of the lake, were congregated some dozen or more of bark canoes, filled with Indians engaged in the exciting and engrossing occupation of fishing. In each boat were two women, one seated at each var, directing with their paddies the motions of the canoe, while two or three men stood up, with long spears in their hands, ready to strike their scaly foes; which, attracted by burning torches, pine linet saturated with native pitch, rushed in hundreds to the arms of death. The waving torches making linked light upon the water, and casting their fitful glare into the deep and tranquil bosom of the lake, the naked Indian, with excited mien and brandished spears, the almost motionless canoes, and, above all, the utter silence of the actors, made the picture a striking one indeed, and one which even Ben and the Comanche gazed on with no little curiosity.

»What is to be done, Ingine?« said Ben, after a few moments of hesitation.

»Hist,« replied Chinchea, quickly, »they come this way.«

At the same moment, the tiny fleet, by one impulse, was impelled forward to within less than half their former distance.

A low and angry growl—that of the panther—again made Ben sturt, but a moment's reflection made him aware where it proceeded.

One by one, cautiously and stealthy, the whole party collected round Chinchea.

»Must we fight?« said Bon, calmly, at the same time cocking his long Tennessee rifle.

»Hugh!« replied Chinchea.

»Jist pass the word then.«

»Hist!« again said Chinchea, with a low laugh; »Chinchea has lost his eyes—he cannot see.«

And he said a few words to his companions.

A combine yell, fearful and horrible beyond all hope of description, except it were compared to the dying howl of hundred wolves, rent the air.

»Heaven and 'arth;« cried the astounded Ben, »is hell broke loose?«

It was the awful Comanche war whoop.

The effect was magic.

The lights disappeared, every Indian vanished, and the whole that remained were the canoes, sleeping like logs of wood upon the still waters.

Again did the party on shore raise their voices, but in song, and the cadence they sang was the war-cry of the Leaping Panther.

Up rose the Indians all; cheerily burnt the lights; on came the canoes, for the combined party of Comanche and Towachanie fishers had recognised the presence of the favourite warrior of the former tribe.

Chapter XVIII.

ALICE AND BLACKHAWK.

A deep and heavy silence had for hours hung over the whole of the Eagle's Nest—a silence which extended over the prairie and wood; trusting to the watch-dogs, not even a sentinel has been placed upon the walls. The weather too seemed some protection, for though there was a blue sky above, dark and sombre clouds were coursing on from the north-west, with hasty and hurried speed; pile upon pile of black vapour, pregnant with thunder and storm, were rearing their hydra-heads, and a shrill whistling wind came by fits and starts, gushing over forest and plain. It was a goodly night for the tempest to rage and howl], and for no man to be abroad save such as were forced by imperative duty—a night when men might expect to see the Black-Riders of the forest riding forth, and when ghosts and goblins made holiday time.

About an hour after midnight the door of Alice's room opened, and she herself came forth, followed by the ever-faithful Norah. In her hand was a small lantern, the light of which she shaded as much as possible, anxious, it seemed, to attract no observation. Her step was reluctant and slow, but still firm and decided, as if it were a duty, though a disagreeable one, which she had to perform, Poor Norah came behind, in a state of considerable alarm; though, despite all her fears, nothing could induce her to desert her mistress. A few steps brought them both in close proximity to the door of the wood house, which was fastened without by two heavy bars let down across clamps of iron, rivetted in the door itself. No precaution had been lost to secure the bandit in his primitive place of confinement.

»Hold the light, child,« said Alice, in a hushed whisper, and not without a suppressed shudder, »while I unbar the door.«

»Oh, miss, dat ugly nigger in dar, him eat us all up, I snore,« replied the dusky domestic, in a state of great alarm; »I 'spec he most too many for us.«

« Fear nothing, girl,« said Alice, kindly, yet firmly; »if I am not alarmed to face him, why should you fear? He is but one unarmed man.«

»Oh, but him de berry debble. Norah hear all manner ob horrid tales 'bout dat mossa ugly nigga. Him hab no bowels of conscience at all.«

»Norah,« again repeated Alice, »I tell you once more there is no cause for fear here. He is bad enough, but he would harm any rather than us. Hold the light, then, while I open the door.«

»Berry well, miss, berry well, Norah say no more,« sighed the negress, who could not resist the determined tone now assumed by her mistress, whose

character for firmness she too well knew to offer any resistance.

»Hold it up high,« continued the fearless girl, who was gently lifting up the bars, thus opening the robber's prison, and leaving free egress for his escape.

»Oh!« sighed Norah again, as she saw the barrier between her and Blackhawk thus gradually removed. »Oh!« she repeated; and she looked much as if she had seen an alligator about to spring forward and devour her.

»Now give me the light, and follow,« exclaimed Alice, still in a whisper, as, gently pushing open the gate, she entered the woud house. »Speak not a word, lest you wake him suddenly.«

»Oh!« and this time Norah groaned in the full conviction that her last hour was come, and that she was about to die an unhappy martyr to her domestic devotion.

»He sleeps,« said Alice; »wretched man, with such a fate before him, and such crimes upon his head. Can he know the reality of his position?«

»Him just say,« whispered Norah, »him desprite coon and him massa say him look a right doun bad one. Him not so berry ugly do; amost ansum as one color genl'man.«

»Silence, Norah; hold the light, and bend it over his face. Let me look; let me see and know that it is him,‘ she muttered rather than spoke, with a convulsive shudder.

On a pile of Indian corn husks, and wrapped in an old Mexican poncho, lay Blackhawk, to call him by one of his many names. Naturally pale, perhaps the solemn fact that he was about to die by the avenging hand of man had made him paler; but there was a clammy ghastliness upon his face, the eye could feel as well as see. His hair, long, black, and matted, wss damp with perspiration; while his two hands, folded fiercely across his breast showed the hands nervously clenched, if in a deadly struggle. A casual dilation of the nostrils, and oft-repeated up-curling of the superior lip, with a sympathetic quivering of the lower, showed that his dreams were neither pleasant nor soothing. In sleep too his brows exhibited their constant scowl; the waking thoughts of the day were running on into the deep stillness of the night.

»Harry,« said Alice, in a low but distinct whisper.

»De debil!«

»Hush, Norah,« exclaimed her mistress, sternly; »listen, but speak not a word.«

»Good,« and Norah with a sigh retreated into a corner.

»Harry,« repeated Alice, this time laying her hand heavily on the unconscious man, if one so gentle could be said to lay a heavy hand at all.

Still no answer, no motion on the part of the sleeper.

»Strange,« said Alice, musingly; »innocence itself could scarce sleep more securely. »I fear,« she added, »the conscience is too hardened even for the worst to trouble it.«

She shook him again.

»Him wake dis time,« said Norah, retreating in considerable alarm; »him wake, and den lud hab mussy—«

»Silence!« and Alice raised her finger menacingly. »I tell you, girl, I will have no word spoken.«

»Hist! hist!« said the waking man; »where am I? What sounds are those that catch my ear?«

»Not a word above your breath, if you value your life;« and Alice laid her finger with caution on her lips.

»Alice!«

»Yes, Alice; Harry Markham, Alice is here for once.«

»For what—why are you come?« exclaimed the bandit, rising.

»To save, to save you from death-death, I fear, too richly deserved, though it is not by their hands you should fall.«

»To save?« cried the robber. »Good, kind, generous Alice! Ever the same.«

»Much changed,« said the girl, quietly; »but not so changed as you.«

»Changed in what?« said Markham, his eyes resting admiringly on her.

»Changed in heart,« cried she, unmindful of his glance; »changed from a little prattling innocent child, as you knew me once, in the old country, to a stern and resolute woman.«

»You are not twenty, Alice,« cried the other, with a smile.

»Young in years, and old in heart,« repeated she, sadly; »the few summers which have passed over my head have been bleak and stormy; time and trouble have laid a heavy hand upon me.«

»Not worse than upon myself,« said Markham, moodily.

»But your ills, Markham, have been of your own seeking, and to you in part I owe the troublesome scenes which have chilled and blighted my bright hopes—hopes, perhaps, by far too bright to be realised.«

»Then why seek to save me?« said the other, with something of a sneer on his lip.

»Because I do not wholly shut out what you once were to me, and to all those who knew you.«

»But you no longer look upon me then as little Harry, who once called you his——« and the robber gave a meaning smile.

»One word of that,« said Alice, sternly, though a rich blush mantled on her cheek, »and to your fate commit you. It is not womanly weakness that brings me here, but I told him he should not slay you, and slay you he shall not.«

»No matter why I am saved, if saved I am to be, Alice,« exclaimed Markham, with levity.

»Now then to the block,« said the girl, sadly; »you must escape through my room. It is your only chance.«

»As you will.«

»Lead the way, Norah,« exclaimed her mistress, returning her the lamp.

»Eess, mess,« replied the astonished negress, who was now for the first time discovered by Blackhawk; and holding up the lantern, she with stealthy step moved towards the block.

»Philip Stevens,« said the bandit, looking round the Nest as he proceeded, »has well chosen his lair, although it must be but a dull place for you, Alice.«

»There is a bright day coming for us all,« replied the girl, in tones that somewhat belied her words.

»From whence?«

»I know not.«

»Perhaps mine may come too—who knows?«

»When you will.«

»How?«

»Seek repentance, and with repentance will soon come peace,« said Alice, gently.

»Folly!« cried Blackhawk; »it's far too late, I fear, for me.«

»Tis never too late,« whispered the young girl, as, crossing the threshold of her room, she turned and faced her companion.

»There is but one thing could tempt me to repentance and a change.«

»And that is——«

»You.«

»Me?«

»Yes, Alice, you,« and the robber spoke in sad and solemn tones.

»Harry Markham, when I was a mere child, some nine years since, you called me wife. I laughed at you then. Were you as innocent as in those days, I should laugh at you still; but as you are --«

»Say no more,« exclaimed the man, moodily; »it is but justice. Let us part.«

»To meet no more, I hope,« replied Alice.

»That depends on fate.«

»But how am I to escape?«

Alice, still accompanied by Norah, now led the way by a narrow passage to the room where Chinchea had descended, and the bandit soon succeeded in effecting his escape in the same manner.

As soon as this was done, and all signs of a flight had been effaced, Alice returned to her chamber, there to meditate on the consequences of what she had done, while the bandit sped on his way to rejoin his companions.

Chapter XIX.

A SORTIE.

It was somewhat late ere the garrison, on the morning after the evasion of Blackhawk, was on foot, and as the young sailor happened to be one of those who overslept himself, he found that he, Alice, and Margarita, had to breakfast alone, the rest being already scattered around the walls on the look out. Alice was pale, while her eyes showed signs either of much weeping or a long and sleepless vigil. Blake, who for many reasons now watched Alice with more attention than he had previously bestowed upon her, remarked the circumstance, nor could he keep what he saw a secret.

»You seem unwell,« he said, with much tenderness.

Margarita looked fixedly at him, while her colour came and went. Alice without noticing this smiled languidly.

»This unhappy state of things presses on my spirits, truly; I was not formed for war and bloodshed.«

»No,« interfered the Mexican, »but this bold bad man they have taken, will not his death put an end to this struggle?«

»They will not take his life,« replied Alice, sadly, »they dare not, and they cannot.«

»Why?« asked Edward, curiously.

»He is far beyond their reach, Mr. Brown. I told him, Mr. Stevens—that is, my father, it must not be, and in the night I opened his prison door.«

»You have acted more boldly than wisely, I think Miss—Miss Alice,« said Blake, »but why such interest, may I ask, in this robber ruffian?«

»I take little interest, Mr. Brown, in the bandit. He deserves death, I fear, but not at their hands. But excuse me, if I am not confidential. I own I have other reasons—they will be spoken, they must, but not yet.«

A loud cry from without now caused the trio to rise from table.

»Catankerously cleared out, I snore.« cried above all the voice of Big Griddle. »A riglar coon, I conceive. Sloped like a Kentucky John—behind a pretty considerable slick set of keepers, he had, I expect, play'd 'em possum, and no mistake. Never waited for papers, I'll be bound, but cleared out like a corsair, I calculate, and no mistake. Warnt there be doin's down in the lower parts. I pity the pigs, I do. Ha! ha! roast pork, i' the wind by the Lord.«

»Treason«, squeaked the shrill tones of Jones, »treachery. Find it out, and hang the traitor. No mercy, I say, no mercy.«

The whole party was standing round the open door of the robber's prison. On the threshold was Stevens, his eyes flashing with passion, his face colourless, his thin lips quivering with emotion. His hand clutched his gun, and he was wrapped in thought; the thought, however, more black than words.

»Gone!« he said, without paying attention to the exclamations of Jones, whose look of disappointed malice, mingled with fear and trembling, was pitiable.

Before this man Alice paused, and turning to him with a firm but stern and menacing brow, she touched him lightly on the shoulder.

»Well,« he said.

»Would you hang me as well as kill my —?«

»Hush, in the name of God,« cried Jones, Teeling and nearly falling, »who would hang you?«

»I gave freedom to Harry Markham, and I therefore am the traitor.«

»You, girl?« cried Stevens, on whom Blake fixed his eye with warning.

»Well, I am steel-trapped, chewed up, and arn't a leg to stand on,« said Big Griddle, »if you arnt the very spirit of Mrs. G. by ——. If I only wanted pig for breakfast, [had it for supper. It's jist the way of the gals, You'd have made a corpse of Blackhawk, darn his skin, and the gal saved his bacon. Hal ha! good idea that. Ha! ha! jist kick me, or I'm bound to bust a larfin. Its pokin' fun and no mistake.«

»Well,« said Stevens, who had caught the expression of Blake's eye, »perhaps 'tis all for the better. This man's blood at all events will not be on our hands.«

»So ho there,« cried a look out from the summit of the block.

»What nows?« replied Stevens,

»Ingins,« continued the look out.

The whole party sprang towards the terrace, which overlooked the prairie, and there, on the edge of the forest, in rich panoply of war paint, and mounted on their small but sturdy nags, came a hundred warriors of the Comanche tribe, and Chinchea in advance, guiding their steps. Their spear heads flashed in the morning sun, their gay plumes waved, and tinkling rang the little bells that hung everywhere on their cumbrous harness, as they galloped forward in all their savage bravery.

»Give them welcome,« shouted Stevens; »quick to the block, and up with the red flag of England; and you, Jones, hoist out the white here. Make haste. Open the gates, lower the bridge. Now, then, blaze away, my hearties, and try your lungs.«

A rattle of musketry and culverins followed, with o hearty shout that re-echoed again and again from the dark and gloomy forest.

The savages halted in some astonishment, and then comprehending through Chinchea the meaning of all, dispersed, and came galloping with many a halloo and many a yell towards the fort, within a hundred feet of which they halted, a few chiefs detaching themselves, and making with Chinchea for the gate.

The whole garrison received their welcome deliverers with alacrity, and every form of Indian etiquette being observed, they were ushered into the principal room, and a feast laid before them, while a small barrel of whiskey was sent out to be distributed among the many.

The greeting between Blake and Chinchea was sincere and hearty. They sat together at the board; and after some ordinary discourse, the Indian drew his white friend aside, and related his many adventures on the road towards the camp of his friends.

»And what has happened to my white brother?« said Chinchea, when, having concluded, this conversable Indian had listened to his friend's remarks.

»Many things, Chinchea; more than I can tell you now. But I shall want soon the advice and counsel of a brave.«

»Chinchea is ready,« said the Indian, naively. He knew his own virtues, and thought of them with pride, without any of the false shame so often affected in the World. If our virtues or vices be worth anything, or if we be not mere animals of the earth, the class which eats, and lives, and drinks, and sleeps, and die~, because others have eat. and lived, and drank, and slept, and died before them—we know them well, 1f our virtues predominate—they never wholly prevail—we know it well, and know too the innate feebleness of our souls, though never whisper pass our lips. Gnothi Seauton is far oftener obeyed in secret than the world knows of. Discerning reader, are we not right?

»His brother knows it,« continued Blake, »and will tell him all when the time comes.«

»Good,« assented the Indian. »My brother likes not this place. Will he go to the wigwams of his red friend?«

Now Blake knew that Chinchea was finding an excuse to return to the side of his dusky love, and celebrate the wedding so long desired; and certain emotions within himself made him anxious to second his friend's wishes. Nothing makes us more generous to our friends than when serving them is also serving ourselves,

»Chinchea is right. I like not this place. The air to me is close and unwholesome; it smells of the charnel-house,« replied Blake, gradually growing excited; »for days doubts and fears have filled my mind; now there is no doubt, and I must stay and find out the secret of innocent blood being foully taken, and most base wrong being done, Chinchea, the secret of my life is here. Providence

led my footsteps hither to unmask the evil doer, and its will shall be accomplished.«

»Who has taken the scalp of a friend of my white brother,« said Chinchea; »the tomahawk of the Comanche shall take his in 'return.«

»No, no! Chinchea, I will not have his life taken. In the hands of those who have right to judge will I place him, if my suspicions prove just. I may want you yet, my friend, and you will not fail when the time comes.«

»Let my brother speak, and it is done,« said the Indian, calmly; »until then, Chinchea is dumb as the ring-snake. He is not a woman—he can hold his tongue.«

»I know it, my good friend, and have no doubt,« replied Edward, taking his band, and pressing it warmly.

Philip Stevens approached.

»Well, Mr. Brown, are you for a sally? We propose scouring the woods in search of the enemy, who will now, doubtless, beat a retreat.«

»I am ready at a word,« replied Blake.

»The white man is hasty,« said Chinchea; »let the scouts move first, and see that the enemy lie not hid in the grass, to fly up and bite like snakes.«

»You are quite right, Redskin. Whom will you despatch?«

»None yet. Chinchea will wait until the night is come, and then will go himself.«

»You will take a white man with you?«

»Yes, him.«

»I am quite agreeable,« responded Blake, the person selected; »but let us go at once. Your cavalry can easily pour down to the rescue at the least alarm.«

»Good, my white brother is very wise, and Chinchea will go.«

The party was now arranged in proper order, The whole body of Indian horse were drawn up close to the Nest, while the' whites were dispersed amongst them, leaving Big Griddle, Pietro, and the Mexicans, with the women, to guard the cattle of the outlaw. The next requisite was for the two spies to gain the wood where it was entered by the stream, without being detected by any of those who might be watching their movements from the edge of the forest.

Chinchea at once devised a plan, and having given full directions to Blake, proceeded to put it into execution. Selecting a dozen of the very fleetest horsemen, and those most gaily caparisoned, he and Blake, having stripped themselves of every unnecessary article of clothing, mounted behind two, and standing in the rear of the troop, so placed themselves as to be unseen. These men, properly instructed, then swept madly down the slope, taking various

directions, and skirted the wood as if in search of enemies, The two who bore the burthen of the outlyers, constantly darted in and out of the thick brushwood, as if suspecting proximity to those they sought, but presently the whole gang, at a given signal, darted back and rejoined their companions.

Chapter XX.

THE ONSLAUGHT.

On an old log, covered with Spanish moss, and thickly studded at bottom with fungi, and in a spot surrounded with thick brush and tall waving trees, close to the shallow waters of the running stream, sat Chinchea and Blake, about five minutes after the departure of those who had safely deposited them at the point selected by the keen eye of the war chief. Slowly at their feet, rippling in the still sunshine over its golden-coloured sandy bed, and bearing by light loads of dead leaves and grass, flowed the stream. Warbling birds were heard on every side, while the hot sun suffused the atmosphere with burning light, that of itself made buzzing sound in the ears. All else was dead. Not a voice broke the calm of that spot.

»This serene and grassy spot, my brother,« said Blake, »would make me faint think that the pirates have fled, and that we shall no more be troubled.«

»The bad man hides when braves are near, but he comes back with droves, like the wild horses of the prairie. Blackhawk is not gone.«

»Have you any proof of this, or is it a mere conjecture?«

»My brother will see; but it is time to move.«

Making a sign to Edward to follow him, he entered the stream, whose pellucid waters, however, but slowly hid the trail as they swept over their footsteps in the sand. In this way they advanced some hundred yards, when Chinchea halted.

»Hugh,« he said, »good! They are found!«

Edward followed the direction of his finger, and saw a canoe drawn up on the shore, the paddles of which were yet wet with their recent work. The chief, after cautiously eyeing the whole of the surrounding brush, approached and examined it with attention. In an instant the flashing of his quick eye, the dilation of the nostril, and the calm air of satisfaction, proved that he had made an important discovery.

»What is it?« said Blake.

»Blackfeet,« said Chinchea, »the squaws of the hills have joined the white thieves. A foot comes; we must hide.«

Quick as thought the two friends disappeared behind a bush, just in time to avoid being seen by three Indians, who were just returning with a fat buck on their shoulders to the boat, which had been their former means of transit. Two were full grown warriors, the third a lad of some twelve years, Ere the Blackfeet could throw down their load, their enemies were upon them, cutlass and

tomahawk in hand, to avoid the discharge of firearms; and taken by surprise, the struggle lasted not a minute. The warriors tell lifeless, the lad was a prisoner.

»We will eat of the venison,« said Chinchea, entering the canoe, »in the camp of the enemy. They cannot be far off.«

The chief stood up in the stern of the frail boat, while Blake and the youth propelled it forward. The warrior's eye was fixed on every point. Roving from side to side, it pierced through trees and bushes, and close indeed must have been the ambuscade which escaped his keen observation. No discovery, however, for some time rewarded his diligence, and at length entering a small but deep basin, where the water lay in a natural cavity of rock, with a small island in the midst, they halted.

»My brother will stay here until night,« said the Indian; 'we shall then find the enemy. We will burrow like prairie owls.«

The island was a mere tufted stone of large dimensions, on which a little stray earth had served to support a few thick bushes, which sufficiently served the purpose of concealment. Several huge pieces of rock, piled up in rough confusion, made on one side a kind of rampart, and an inlet of some few feet in width, between these and the main stone, served to draw the boat out of sight. Blake remained in the canoe, as sentinel over the lad, whose arms, as a further precaution, were bound behind him, in case an attack, when attention might be drawn off.

About an hour before sunset, a tramp-ling sound was heard below the diminutive lake, proclaiming the presence of both horse and foot, Blake and his Indian friend raised their heads, In an instant they saw how fatal had been their selection of a place of concealment. The enemy they sought were about to camp within twenty yards of their position. On one side of the stream came a dusky column of red skin warriors in the hideous and even horrible war costume which peculiarly distinguished the treacherous Blackfeet; on the other (for they could not trust themselves together) came the motley gang of Black hawk's.

»It's all over with us this time, Chinchea,« said Blake, sinking beside his friend into the canoe.

»We will escape,« replied Chinchea, calmly. »The Blackfeet are squaws, they will smell a warrior, and think it but the Tesin from the pine trees."«

Having looked carefully to their arms, and threatened their captive with instant death should he betray their presence, not a word was spoken until nightfall.

The sun went down to rest amidst an unearthly stillness; there was not a breath of wind; the very air seemed influenced; the sky was veiled by a milky whiteness that seemed to reflect the heat; and though there were no clouds, so thick was the

haze not a star shone in the limpid waters of the rocky basin; the forest trees were motionless, as if they had been painted on the hanging curtains of the night. Their summits moved not, not even beneath the weight of chanting birds; even the natural motion faintly distinguished on ordinary occasions without wind, was not to be seen. The long moonlight shadows fell damp upon the earth, and upon the waters, while far off rose in a straight column the smoke of the Eagle's Nest.

The effect upon Blake was painful; he seemed to live amid fire; the glare of noontide heat was upon him, though the sun had long been down.

»We shall have a heavy storm, Chinchea,« he said.

»Thunder,« was the calm reply.

A splash in the water made them both start. Their captive had, while they had been examining the signs of the night, though bound, rolled himself out of the canoe, and was making for the shore. The Indian, with a stern brow, at once seized his rifle, and prepared for the deadly struggle which he knew must now ensue; Blake did the same. A sudden idea seemed to strike the Indian, for seizing his tomahawk he drew the bark canoe on the rock, and, to the great astonishment of his companion, began hacking it to pieces. Placing them where a blaze of light would not fall upon them, and betray their exact position, Chinchea added some dry bushes and the paddles broken into bits. Beneath all he placed a little loose powder, and dry moss torn from the rock, as well as a small piece of paper, which Blake had round his supply of food handed him by Alice.

Scarcely had these preparations concluded, when a sudden bustle in the two camps proclaimed that the news was spreading. Voices were heard distinctly in the deep and sombre silence, and lying low upon the rock, the two friends saw dense masses collecting on the nearest shore. This was about eighty yards away, while the other was two hundred, and too deep to permit the chance of the enemy wading.

»My white brother will shoot after me,« said Chinchea, quietly, »then the Indian will load. Watch the water, they will swim if they dare.«

»I will,« replied Edward, who could not forbear a bitter smile at the idea of combatting two hundred men.

But the Indian himself was not more determined. At this instant a very low and irregular sound came from the opposite shore. Chinchea started, and raising himself gave as lowly the well-known growl of the Panther. Four dark figures at once plunged into the water, while the Indian, quietly turning the other way, discharged his rifle at the crowd who stood in council on the strand. A shrill cry and a dozen balls flying over their heads showed that the shot had told, and several, pushing out a canoe, made furiously towards the rock. The night was

clear enough to distinguish ten men in this boat, and the lad who had betrayed them standing up.

»Shoot one of the rowers,« said Chinchea, quietly, »and then load.«

Edward Blake acted as directed, and the canoe, the oars-man being wounded, whirled half round.

Ere they could again start fair, the five dark figures stood in the narrow gap beside the Indian and Blake. It was Smith, Captain Doyle, and two Comanche warriors, who having left the Eagle's Nest at nightfall, had penetrated to the enemy's camp, and overheard the discovery of the fugitives, whom they immediately determined on joining. This reinforcement gave renewed courage, and Chinchea resolved on availing himself to the full of the advantage thus gained.

Every gun was levelled at the boat; but ere they were discharged, the Comanche fired the train leading to the fire-beacon, and then the united volley was poured upon the canoe. Petrified at the unexpected force on the rock, and the greater part wounded, two being killed, the boat's crew fled, and landed amid furious outcries at the deceit which they accused the lad of having put upon them. It was in vain that he protested having told the truth; he was not credited, and killed by his revengeful countrymen after lingering tortures.

Meanwhile the bark fire sparkled high, and the blaze, unimpeded by the wind, rose curling and wreathing, as if about to follow the upward flying smoke, and the little band knew it must be seen at the Eagle's Nest. To distract, therefore, the attention of their enemies, they kept up a constant and running fire of three, which was answered as steadily, the artillery of heaven soon joining in the action. In the far off-and on the prairies, the thunder storm howls at a tremendous distance—they could hear the rumbling of the thunder, and see the flashing of the lightning. But more immediately the besieged noticed the storm around them.

After a short conference, the besiegers divided themselves into six columns, and seeking various spots where there were fords, they entered, and advanced steadily, in all cases headed by white men. Stern and steady was the fire of the little band, as they crouched upon the sand back to back, and side to side; not a word was spoken; nothing was heard but the pouring of powder into their guns, the driving home the ball, the click of the cock, and then the belching forth of the fire flame, pregnant with death. They were all calm, though their fate seemed sealed, and awaited the approach of their enemies in a sullen silence. But they came slowly. Six times they reached the centre of the stream, and six times fell back before the steady and coolly delivered fire of its defenders.

Suddenly this ceased, and a stillness, as of night itself wrapped in shady slumber, wrapped round the huge rocky fragments. Believing the enemy's powder exhausted, on came the whole gang, gaining unopposed the so much wished for goal, in time to catch the figures of the retreating garrison rising from the watery way by which they had fled.

»Back every man of you,« shrieked rather than said Blackhawk, plunging with' an almost superhuman leap into the depths of the lake, »back, or ye are dead men.«

All obeyed or sought to; but at that instant the match burning nearly at a level with the water, and dependant from a hastily closed up cavity, which had alarmed the outlaw chief, took effect, and the contents of six large horns of powder sent the rock in ten thousand fragments into the air, with a terrific and awful report, Shrieks and yells rose too upon the night, and then all was still as death. Hastily surveying the damage done, it was found that more than twenty men had been killed, while as many more were wounded. Meanwhile the bold knot who had thus terribly punished their enemies, were too far off to make attempt at capture of any avail.

»Stand to your arms, Lads,«' cried Blackhawk, »and round me quick.« His gang congregated close.

»Listen and act. In five minutes the Comanche hawks will be on us. Let the Blackfeet bear the brunt, you disperse secretly as if gaining your camp, and meet me at the blasted cedar on Skull Creek.«

In another instant the survivors of the robber gang were apparently dissolved into thin air. Not one was to be seen.

Scarcely had this base desertion of their allies been effected, when the thunder roaring above, and with the lightning flashes filling with electric heat the before hot air, until all nature seemed a huge oven, there came bursting, like black riders of demon clouds, the Comanche band upon the devoted Blackfeet. Giving a re-echoing warwhoop, these rallied boldly, and being desperate, they made the storm more horrid still with their loud cries and desperate courage. On pressed the Comanches and white men, all cry for parley from these being answered with insults.

Retreating slowly, the thinned band of Indian warriors reached the edge of the lake, fighting all the way, and leaving many a mark of their redoubtable valour, But the God of battles was against them, and overpowering forces broke every hope of escape. Blake was the first white man to withdraw from what was becoming a massacre, and his example soon led his countrymen away. But the red-skins had no such feelings; their glory was not so much in victory as in the

extermination of their enemies, and not one Blackfoot escaped to tell the tale, save one or two prisoners saved by the interference of the whites. This interference had however an object in view.

Chapter XXI.

SKULL CREEK.

By a low and carefully concealed fire sat the gang of Blackhawk, now reduced by desertion and death to twenty men, but the leader was not among them. For hours had they waited his arrival and he came not, until at length they began to fear some misfortune had befallen him. At this none would have grieved, but that they felt the loss of a head. Brute forces, they knew only how to act; to think, to contrive the plan, is a labour for the many—a labour they gladly avail themselves of those who take the labour off their hands. Hence Cæsars, Napoleons, and other scourges of the earth. They who would do good in the world, would do so by making men think and act for themselves; hence the difficulty of their mission. Man is a lazy animal.

Two men alone seemed not to partake of the general feeling of regret which the absence of their captain caused the rest to manifest.

These men, of course, were his trusty and confidential lieutenants, Pedro and Careassin,:

»Caught at last, ma foi, I always said his time would come. Poor dear captain, he was so very headstrong,« said Carcassin, in a mock grave tone.

»By our lady he was a brave fellow though,« replied Pedro, »but somewhat tyrannical.«

»Pedro, you are right. Decidedly he was tyrannical; we must elect a chief who will be more indulgent.«

»One born in a warmer clime,« said Pedro, proudly, »and who has commanded men of honour in his time.«

»Pshaw. One who has learned by experience and study how to rule men.«

»One would fancy you still in your cassock,« said Pedro, sneeringly.

»Do you mean to deny my right to take the lead, now that Blackhawk is decidedly gone?«

»I do,« replied the hot blooded Mexican, »but let this decide.«

Drawing his knife, the outlaw sprang to his feet.

»Done,« said Carcassin.

The whole band, however, interposed, and insisted on the captaincy being decided amicably, while the friends of both appeared pretty equal.

»Let us toss,« said Carcassin.

»No,« replied Pedro, »let us leap, let us shoot.«

»Bah,« said the ex-priest, »let us play at ecarté.«

»Done.«

»Done.«

»How?«

»Three in five wins.«

»Agreed.«

»Produce the cards,« continued Carcassin; »you, lads, keep counts.«

»Cut for deal,« exclaimed Pedro.

»Mine,« said Carcassin, and Carcassin, turned up the king.

»Two to one on Carcassin,« exclaimed an old robber who leaned over with anxious eye, Gambling had made him what he was.

»I take you,« said Pedro. »Dollars of course.«

»What do you do, mon ami?« asked Carcassin.

»I propose,« replied the Mexican in a vexed tone.

»How many?«

»Five, and curse them,« continued Pedro.

This time Carcassin counted ten. The next hand he won the game. Pedro counted not one. The robbers all betted on Carcassin, Pedro took them.

»Now then,« he said.

It was Carcassin's deal.

»I propose,« said the French robber, with a disappointed look.

»Play,« replied Pedro, with a merry laugh.

»Mon Dieu!" cried Carcassin, »you are in luck.«

Pedro won this game.

»Equal. How about your bets?« laughed the Mexican.

Again they played, and this time the run of luck changed again. Carcassin was one a-head.

»Will you bet again?« said the old gambler.

»Two and two,« said Carcassin.

»King,« replied Pedro.

»The game,« answered Carcassin, moodily.

»Equal,« continued the other. »Now for the conqueror.«

»Mordi! you are right. The conqueror.«

»Save yourself that trouble,« laughed Pedro.

Despite his apparent light-heartedness the Mexican was pale with excitement, as was his companion, while the whole party of bandits looked on in a dense circle. The game was played on the ground before the little fire, which, slight in

its lustre as it wag, left all else in obscurity. As they dealt, the cards were laid on one side to separate those which were left from those rejected.

»One point for me,« said Carcassin.

»My deal,« replied Pedro. »Cut.«

The Frenchman cut.

»King,« said the Mexican.

But Carcassin made two points: they were equal.

Two more hands were dealt, and each remained with four points.

»This is close; my deal,« said Carcassin.

»Who gets the king, wins,« said the Mexican in reply.

Carcassin had a nine of spades turned up.

»I propose,« exclaimed the Mexican.

»How many?« replied the lieutenant.

»Four.«

The Frenchman took four himself.

»Who gets the king, wins,« he said.

Neither had it.

»Shall we deal again?«

»Yes.«

Again each took four fresh cards.

»This time it is settled,« said Carcassin, breathlessly. »You must have the king.«

»No.«

»Then where is it?«

»Here!« exclaimed Blackhawk, laying it quietly between them.

The gamblers rose to their feet with a look of mingled astonishment and rage.

»Here!« repeated Blackhawk, whose pale face, and stern angry countenance, alarmed the players for his part.

»Long live our captain,« cried the robbers with one accord.

»So you were playing for my rank«, said Blackhawk, solemnly, but clear moved by some other influence than that which, at first blush, would have been thought to make him angry; »but you were right; you will have to do it one of these days.«

»Well, there is one comfort,« said Carcassin, with a small short laugh, »it was a very good game.«

»Very,« replied Pedro.

»It will keep you in practice«, laughed Blackhawk,

»But where have you been, captain?« inquired the Frenchman.

»At the Eagle's Nest,« replied the bandit, moodily.

»Ha! and have you made a prize,« cried Pedro.

»I came as I went—empty-handed,« continued Blackhawk; »but come, let us to council. Something must be done. These wild Comanches are raging through the forest for our blood, and are in too great numbers to be defeated. They have slain every man of the Blackfeet.«

»Every man! the sanglant varmint.«

»Santa Maria,« cried Pedro, »but they are pagans.«

»True, they are not such Christians as us,« said Blackhawk, with an involuntary shudder.

The ex-priest laughed, but made no reply, and the bandit council continued.

Next morning not a trace of Blackhawk or his gang was to be seen in or near the Nest.

Chapter XXII.

A PICTURE OF THE PAST.

The mission of the Comanche warriors ended with the defeat and slaughter of the Blackfeet, which had equally dispersed the gang of Blackhawk, and after receiving a suitable reward, they started back on their journey to Spanish Peak. Chinchea, however, remained, as his friendship for Blake had hourly increased, and he resolved not to leave him until his return to the settlements.

It was two days after the events depicted in the last chapter, and early in the morning, when Phillip Stevens called a council of his friends, or rather of his companions, the subordinates, and the servants of Don Juan de Chagres, being alone excluded.

The council was held on the terrace which overlooked the long slope that swept down towards the forest, and which might not inappropriately be termed the glaxis. Blake, the Mexican refugee, whose health was restored, Chinchea, Big Griddle, Smith, Cephas Doyle, with the Lord of the Nest, and Jones, formed, in addition to the two girls, the members summoned to a discussion, which, from the serious demeanour of the wanderer, appeared of importance.

»My friends,« said Stevens, after a short pause, »I have not called you idly together, but to learn what you will do to render me some assistance in the matter. I am about to abandon for ever the Eagle's Nest.«

A murmur of surprise, in which all joined, save the Indian and Jones, the former from long, habit of restraint, the other from dislike to the proposition, arose from all around.

»Yes, I cannot any longer hope »to remain here in peace, many of you are shortly about to depart, and once the garrison weakened, the relentless Blackhawk will attack the fort, and not only rob, but put every soul to the sword.«

»Hugh!« said the Indian, approvingly.

»I have, therefore, determined to pack up all my traps, and turning my back on the wilderness, to seek once more the settlements. It will be far more suitable to one no longer young, while I must think something of Alice.«

»Humph,« grunted Jones, his eyes glaring, but his tongue tied by fear.

»What I assemble you for,' continued Stevens, »is to learn who amongst you are willing to accompany me in my journey towards the settlements. To go in small force will be safe for none, while together, we can journey safely and with case. Besides I am not unprovided. You are all aware that the Brazos river is within ten

miles, and on that I have a skow well enough concealed to make sure of our finding it still, 'To begin. In this matter how shall you act, Mr. Blake?«

Our hero started at hearing his real name thus inadvertently mentioned, while Jones looked round with a scared and horror-struck expression, without, however, volunteering a word. Alice too was agitated, a flood of hopes and reflections rushing on her mind; but she too was far more prudent than to betray, in words, what her sparkling eyes, and heaving bosom, however, would have fully told to any observing eye.

»I for one,« said Blake, coldly, »am ready to accompany you on your voyage down the Brazos.«

»Thanks,« replied Stevens, and turning to the others, he received answers equally encouraging, so that in half an hour the departure was fully arranged. As Stevens believed the retreat of Blackhawk to be wholly connected with some project for obtaining assistance, he hurried the arrangements, appointing the hour of one for the start, and then all dispersed to see that their things were duly collected.

Edward having scarcely anything but his arms and the clothes he wore, had concluded all that he had to attend to in five minutes, and then being in a mood for thought, wandered out upon the terrace, now deserted and silent.

Leaning on the stone wall, which formed the parapet, Edward was about to give himself up to dreams of the past, which were both bitter and painful, when a graceful form glided to his side, and looking up he beheld Alice.

»You, too,« he said, »perhaps feel sorrow to quit this place, which combines so much sublimity and grandeur, with the pleasing sense of being away from the corruption of towns and cities.«

»Ah!« replied Alice, shaking her head, »this is but a selfish philosophy; if we looked to mere personal gratifications, with the surety of food and raiment, solitude would be every well; but I feel we were born for society, to do all our little mite in the great cause of human progress, and that we owe as much to our fellows as to ourselves, But this preamble ill becomes that with which I am about to conclude.«

»On what wish you to speak, Alice?» said Edward, adopting by some mysterious influence this familiar style, without notice --and as he spoke he sat down by her side on a rude bench.

»I scarcely know why, but, a few simple acts of yours; your starting so strangely once, when you saw certain armorial bearings in a book of mine, your coldness towards Jones and—and Mr. Stevens,« she said, hesitatingly, »have combined,

with your having been addressed by him as Mr. Blake, to make me resolve on confiding to you the mystery and secret of my history.«

»Thanks! thanks!« cried Edward; »I was about to ask this favour, but scarcely knew how.«

»I have powerful reasons for what I do, and no second opportunity may occur. Now even we may be interrupted. I must therefore be brief.«

»I think,« said Edward, moodily, »I shall want but few words to make me understand all.«

»In justice to one criminal, but not so criminal as others, I must be explicit. Be therefore patient.«

»I am, as long as you wish to speak. I listen.«

»I was born as far as I can recollect, in a remote part of the north of Ireland. My father was a man who owned much property, in fact was one of the gentry of the county; but having lost his wife in early days, to whom he was devotedly attached, he retired to his country seat, and dismissing nearly all his servants, lived on the tenth part of his income.

»The house in which we lived was situated in a lonely corner of open land, at no great distance from some hills, over which came occasionally, riding on his shaggy pony, a little cousin, a lad of about ten, while I was about eight, who was my constant playmate. Son of my father's only brother, a poor country parson, my father,« here Alice blushed violently, »always encouraged the prospect of an union between us, and often spoke of it, though we were mere children.

»Suddenly, however, he fell ill, and so severe was the sickness, as to in some degree impair the powers of a naturally strong mind. Taking advantage of this circumstance, a family of upstarts, who were distantly relative to my father, contrived by great assiduity during his illness to gain his favour, and presuming on his temporary mental weakness, ventured to hint at reports injurious to my mother. So vile were their arts that they succeeded in getting him to make a will, entirely disinheriting me, and erecting them into his successors.

»Gradually, however, his health and strength returned, and with it his mind, and that love and confidence in her he had espoused, which without inquiry made him dismiss the calumniators, and at once revoke the will by another, which made me his sole inheritor. As an instance of the power of human credulity, as my poor father used to say, he kept the extorted will, with its signatures all legal and straightforward, in his possession, quite content with the one of later date which revoked it.

»A year passed, when my father's malady returned more violently than ever, and the physician pronounced his recovery impossible. But this time nothing for a

long while undermined his intellect, until at length, a few days before his death, he became unconnected and incoherent in his discourse.

»The day of his awful death— oh, I see it as yesterday—is still before me. It was a lovely May day, The doctors had called, and decided that he had not twenty-four hours to live. He was now very weak, and yet his mind was more clear than for some days. I slept in a room close to him, and about nine, after I had been in bed an hour, I rose to go and look at my dying parent. They told me I should see him in the morning, but I feared they were deceiving me. Creeping along the passage on tip toe, I reached the door, and pushed it gently open. There he lay, bis eyes open, but fixed as it were on vacancy, while the nurse snored loudly in an arm chair, ‘as nurses I fear always do, when gold-hired. and not led by affection and love. I crept softly near, not wishing to disturb him, and hiding behind the curtains near the wall, between which and the bed I squeezed myself, I gazed with awful and agonising interest, child as I was, on the ebbing life that was to rob me of a parent. I think he knew I was there, but his spirit was in communion with God, and every moment he expressed a wish that the minister of God, his brother, had come, Somewhat careless in life, he felt, on that dreadful hour, how balmly and glorious is the picture of another world, and hope in the everlasting mercy of a great God.

»Suddenly, I saw a shadow fall in the moonlight on the floor, and then another, as if two men were entering the window. I held my breath, and perceived that, indeed, two men, their faces covered with crape, and armed with knives and pistols, bad taken advantage of the necessity for air, which had left the window unfastened, to ascend to the room and clamber into the apartment. One of the men was much taller than the other, who was short even to dwarfishness, Dreadfully alarmed, I would have shrieked, but my tongue refused its office, and I saw the two men approach the bed.

»Is that you, dear Hugh?« said my father, in a faint voice—he thought 1t was his brother, you will soon be Sir Hugh, I fear, I forgot to mention that my father was a baronet.

»No,« growled the dwarf; »it is not Hugh.«

»Who then?« said my father, rousing himself.

»Harkee,’ hissed the dwarf, standing close by the bed, while the other gagged and blindfolded the sleeping nurse, fastening her in the chair; ‘our business is short. You have in your possession two wills, where are they?«

»What want you with them?« said my father, rising in the bed by a powerful effort. »Ah, I see; you come from those vile Parkers, who hope to rob my child yet.’

»Now, Sir William,« said the dwarf, savagely, and holding his pistol cocked, »no palaver. We have come here to earn a thousand pounds. We risk our lives, but the bait is tempting—the wills or death!«

»Pshaw,« replied my father, faintly, »I am dying; you can but send me an hour sooner before the judgment-seat of God.«

»Fool,« said the dwarf, in a bitter and sardonic tone, 'do not tempt us. Ab, Stevens, see what is behind there!' and the dwarf trembled like a leaf.

»The latter man darted to the end of the bed and dragged me forth, placing his hand coarsely on my mouth to prevent my shrieking. Despite my struggles I was securely gagged and brought to my father's bedside.

»Sir William,« said the dwarf, with a grin, drawing me within my poor father's sight, »the wills in five minutes, or I put this child to death before your eyes.«

»My father looked inquiringly at the man, and in his cold, savage, and brutal, but cowardly face, he saw that he could murder an innocent child.

»Better let her be robbed,' he groaned, 'than deprived thus of life so young. Besides, Hugh will protect her,' and he pointed out a drawer in a room near at hand, where the wills were deposited.

»Go, Stevens,' exclaimed the dwarf, »I will guard the prisoners.«

»The tall man, who was all along silent, and seemed little to relish the affair, moved away slowly, and we were left with the cold-blooded man who was torturing my dying father.

»The dwarf sat by the bed-side, with me closely clutched, while his eye wandered round the room in search of some suitable plunder. Suddenly his glances fell, as well as mine, on a mirror opposite, where plainly could be seen my poor father's hand rising cautiously to the bell, which hung by the bed-side, and communicated with the servants' hall at the other end of our large and old-fashioned house.

»Like a tiger he turned upon his prey, and rage and fury, I suppose, acting on his ferocious nature, he sprang to Sir William's throat, and the wretched daughter saw her father murdered before her eyes——«

Alice paused, deeply overcome, while Edward, pale and ghastly, listened with charmed ears.

»Alice! dear Alice! go on,« he whispered in a voice, which was awful in its intensity: »I pity, I sympathise with you; but there is another deed to tell!«

»I will proceed,« said Alice, faintly. »At this moment the taller man entered, and discovering what had been done, a scene of violent altercation ensued. The tall man declared that he washed his hands of this deed, and would have no more of the affair.

»I joined in this foul business at your temptation, fiend, to gain a rich reward, But I engaged only to frighten an old man, while you have shed his blood.«

»He would have alarmed the house, idiot,« said the dwarf; 'but have you the will?«

»Yes! But I will none of this more.«

»Stevens,« muttered the dwarf, 'if you retreat and betray me, you will betray yourself, The old man is dead, and Harry Markham is outside, who can prove you alone entered, if I but say the word.«

»Harry Markham,« said Edward, interrupting, 'the son of Mary Markham, who nourished you at her bosom—your foster brother.«

»Yes,« continued Alice, whose pale and agonised face denoted her self-inflicted suffering; 'it was him they spoke of. But let me conclude.«

»The taller man seemed to think of this, and a conference was held. I discovered by this, but more afterwards—for I lay on the ground nearly insensible—that they were to receive one thousand pounds on condition that the will of Sir William, in favour of his vile relations, was alone found, and two hundred pounds a year as long as they lived, they keeping the will in my favour as security for the payment. The murder having been accomplished, their plans were much changed, and they at once determined to take me with them.

»They accordingly lifted me up, still in a half state of insensibility, and lowered me into the arms of Harry Markham, who waited below. His junction with them was curious; lurking about on one of his lawless and profligate expeditions, he saw them secretly attempting to enter the house, and cried shares of the plunder. They at once agreed, and he kept careful watch, smiling at his own good fortune.

»Leaving the will behind, which was in favour of my enemies, they brought with them that which secured me, and much ready money and jewellery. Their place of concealment was at no great distance. It was a lonely hut on the sea coast, where awaited a small but swift sailing lugger, in which they were about to venture a journey to a French port, having procured the necessary papers as a vessel trading in wine. This cost the plotters, who were compelled to be thus liberal, in consequence of the fatal necessity of securing the safety and goodwill of men who held the adverse will, two hundred pounds, The night, however, turned out dark and stormy, and they could not get away. Next morning the murder was universally known, and Stevens and Jones, both men known as strangers—they were English—and as desperate smugglers, were suspected. It seems that Sir Hugh, my uncle, instituted a rigid search, which drove the murderer and his companions to hide in a cave on the coast, in sight of the vessel, which lay unsuspected and quiet on the sea, Strict orders were, however, given for it not to

leave, as, with the money stolen, the authorities suspected they might bribe the lugger. It was quite unknown that a month before the men had provided themselves with passports for France.

»One night, about ten days after the awful event, they took me by the hand, and after warning me at the peril of my life not to breathe a word, led me down towards the beach. We descended in safety. Markham, who accompanied them, as he dared not spend his booty in the neighbourhood, at length carried me in his arms. A boat waited for them. I was placed in it, then the taller man entered, and Jones was about to follow, when a dark figure sprang forward and seized him by the throat.

»I hold you, murderer, assassin, ho cried. It was my uncle.

»Let go,«said Jones, trembling in every limb.

»Never,« responded my uncle, who was wild with passion.

»Then take it, since you will,« and again I saw his murderous knife raised and pierce the bosom of my uncle.

»For—oh—for a long—long time, I had no sense of what had happened. When I recovered consciousness, we were in & French emigrant vessel, bound from Havre to Texas. I had been a whole month delirious. I would have exposed the villians, but no one spoke a word of English, and even the tall man threatened my death if I dared to betray them.

»We arrived in Texas, and at once proceeded here. The money of my guardians enabled them to have great assistance, and they erected this fort; and the tall man, who, after my solemn pledge to reveal nothing until he gave me leave, treated me kindly, bought me books, music, a slave, and when we visited New Orleans, did everything in his power to compensate for his fearful wrongs. But the assassin was ever before me.

»At New Orleans, where the two hundred pounds was regularly sent, they quarrelled with Harry Markham, who, not being in the secret of this remittance, cared not much for their company. For two years he has—having passed through every stage of crime—exercised the trade of open robber, associating with the vilest of the vile, the refuse even of Texas. You know the rest.«

»And Jones it was who killed my father,« groaned Edward.

»Yes, Sir Edward,« said Stevens, who now discovered himself, having heard all unseen, unnoticed, so wrapped were both speaker and listener; »it was Jones who killed your father. My hands are free from blood. May I dare hope for pardon?«

»Edward, my dear cousin, was I then right?« exclaimed Alice, upon whom this news came without much surprise.

»Mr. Stevens,« said Sir Edward Blake, pressing his cousin's hand for all reply, and speaking with awful calmness, » you shall be forgiven, nay, rewarded; and may in penitence ask pardon of God, in your own land, for your sins, on one condition.«

»And that is—?«

»The blood of my father must be revenged; the murderer of my uncle and my parent must die by the law, and you must be the witness.«

»I!«

»Yes! But you need have no apprehension. We will sail for a French port, there you can remain, while I will drag this ruffian to England. Arrangements can then be made securing your free pardon on your turning king's evidence.«

»It shall be done,« exclaimed Stevens; »and this wretch, who tempted my poverty to crime, and who made me the part accomplice of his fouler deeds, shall receive no mercy from my hands.«

»And the will of my uncle?«

»Is safe.«

»You must appear too against these still viler fiends, who paid for murder to compass their foul ends.«

»Any atonement I am ready for,« said Stevens, humbly; »I see in your coming here the visible hand of God. I thank him that I die not without undoing that which I have so foully done.«

»Continue in sincere repentance,« replied Sir Edward, »and you may atone to society and to heaven. But I see the party is ready. Stevens, I travel with this fiend but as a caged tiger.«

»As you will, sir,« repeated Stevens.

The young baronet, in whom English origin had not escaped the fiery contact of Irish warmth, advanced rapidly towards the large party, which, armed to the teeth, and waiting but for a signal to mount, was collected in the court. Stevens and Alice followed.

Edward advanced into the centre of the troop, and selecting Jones at once, seized him by the collar, while Stevens dexterously disarmed him.

»What means this violence?« said the ruffian, his very legs yielding with terror.

»I, Sir Edward Blake, son of Sir Hugh, and nephew of Sir William, arrest you for the murder of my father and uncle, Struggle not, it is vain. The hour of retribution is come.«

Jones trembling, horror struck, his whole coward soul revealed, made no answer for a minute, and even suffered himself to be bound before he spoke.

During this interval, Stevens rapidly narrated the crimes of which he had been guilty.

»Citizens,« exclaimed Jones, glaring with tiger hate at the young baronet, »I am in a free country, and I appeal to you all to free me from this maniac.«

»Well, I do expect it are about the freest diggens I know of,« said Captain Cephas Doyle, »but still it arnt free enough for a bloody varmint like you. I do convene to a fair stand up fight, and ginrally carry the documents to do it, Ido; but a cowardly sneak as kills a dying man in his bed, arnt no better nor a catamount. So do you see, Sir Edward, if you're agreeable, the first oak we come to we'll string this crittur up.«

»By the immortal smash,« cried Big Griddle, »I do think I'm about as actyve a friend to liberty as any man, and always vote the Locofuco ticket, I do—none of your anti-free trade Whigs for me—a fig for protection to natyve industry, I say, seeing we can't make everything, and must swap—but thars no liberty in taking two old men's lives in cold blood, so I'm ready to lend a hand, as Captain Doyle has it.«

»Thanks! thanks! my worthy friends,« cried Sir Edward, warmly; »but this man must have fair trial in his own land. I know that it will be difficult to take him there, but I can charter a ship for money. If he appeals to the authorities, and they decide against me, I will kill him with my own hand.«

Jones at these words bowed his head. He saw that his hour was come.

»Well, I'm not the brightest chap in creation,« said Cephas Doyle, »but my idee is, not to take him into the settlements at all, We shall gain the open sea by the Brazos, and worse men than us have navigated the Gulf in a skow. Two days will take us to Galveston, and there he can be put, I reckon, on board an English vessel.«

»Excellent,« said Sir Edward: and all arrangements being now complete, the long stream of horses and mules left the Nest.

Cephas and two American youths rode first, armed to the teeth, and surveying the ground before them with wary eye; then came the mules and horses laden with goods and luggage, and Jones bound upon his steed, presenting the appearance of sullen and abject fear, not unmixed with hope that never deserts the human bosom, and hate of the most intense description. Next came Don Juan de Chagres, his wife, and the cousins, who rode side by side, Alice, dwelling with subdued delight on the meeting with her young and handsome relative, tempered by the memories which clouded her fairer thoughts, while Sir Edward, his whole soul yet filled with the fresh horror of Alice's narrative, scarcely yet admitted a gentle thought into his bosom.

Last came Philip Stevens, who left the Nest full five minutes after the rest of the party. Just as he joined them, Blake, turning round, saw by the smoke which curled along the side of the block that he had fired the place.

»You have determined to burn your old place,« said Sir Edward.

»Yes,« replied Philip, »I have so arranged wood and straw that in half an hour the whole will be in flames. It shall never serve as a retreat for Blackhawk and his gang.«

»You are right,« exclaimed the young baronet, and again he relapsed into silence.

It was not long ere the forest was entered. But just as the party were about to conceal themselves beneath the leafy surface, they halted to give one gaze upon the Eagle's Nest. But it was no longer to be seen: a dense cloud of smoke arising from damp wood, thick and half green logs, and bark roof, alone marked the spot, while the roar of the flames was distinctly audible. With a feeling of sadness scarcely expressible in words, the party pursued their way.

Chapter XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

About sunset the retreating children of the wilderness found themselves within a hundred yards of the Brazos river, and emerging upon a soft and velvet plain of green of some fifty acres, where the trees had either not encroached, or where, probably, a fire had destroyed the growth. At the edge of this plain, and close to the river's bank, was a thick line of high bushes, the roots starting from the soil, while the hanging boughs fell, by their own weight, into the stream. Towards this they all advanced, and agreeably to a suggestion from Stevens, the whole party halted.

The first duty was to unload and so arrange the horses as to afford them a fit opportunity for grazing their fill; the next, after placing Jones apart with the baggage, his legs so fastened as to render his escape hopeless, to prepare the evening meal. The Mexicans and Big Griddle, aided by Norah, rapidly executed this part of their duties; during which interval Stevens took the rest down to the water's edge, and after loosening a padlock that bound a chain to a tree, the skow was drawn forth upon the muddy waters of the long-flowing Brazos.

It was a long and wide flat-bottomed boat, drawing but little water, a circumstance absolutely necessary for the proper navigation of Texan rivers. Its dimensions were large, and a hundred men could have found place and shelter in it. Towards the stern, a small cabin, low, but sheltered, on the roof of which was the helmsman's place, afforded promise of accommodation for the women, and here it was decided they should pass the night. A huge mast with one sail, and eight heavy oars, were the means of propulsion which were offered. To all those who had not before seen it, the skow was a matter of great gratification, as for a party encumbered with baggage, and having women also, it was far preferable to a long journey through tangled woods, over bogs and morasses.

As soon as the supper was concluded, the Mexicans, and the men hired by Stevens, occupied themselves in loading the boat, while the rest, seated round a low fire, discussed various matters connected with their journey. Jones had previously been placed beneath a small deck, in the very bows of the vessel.

»And now,« said Stevens, »the mules and horses, what is to be done with them?«

»Oh,« exclaimed Don Juan de Chagres, »the boat will bear them all.«

»It might,« replied Stevens; »but not more than one, to use in scouting, will I have on board. It will barely pass the shallow as it is; besides, the skow is unhandy if too heavily laden. Indian, what is your advice?«

»Hugh,« said Chinchea, rising; » the Path is long to the wigwams of the pale faces. Horse good for warriors, make long way; but water best for plunder and Squaw. Leave nv trail Best kill the horses.«

»A hard measure, but a necessary one,« cried Stevens,

»Not quite necessary,« continued the Indian; »pr'hps tie all together, and one man start now—directly—long the river; save them all, and make trail. If attacked, can leave the animals and join us.«

»Excellent,« said Don Juan; » Pietro, come here.«

The Mexican approached, and his master briefly explained the proposed plan, offering him the dangerous honour of conducting the long string of horses to the settlements. But Pietro, who knew the country well, having hunted over it many times, made no objection, and being used to the duties, simply consulted the Indian as the best trail to follow, and then supplying himself amply with powder, and taking care to have double-barrelled gun as well as a rifle, the horses were strung together, and the gallant half-bred started boldly on his solitary journey.

Every care was now taken to avoid a surprise, the men lay round the fire, at a sufficient distance to avoid being seen, the women retired to their cabin, Doyle mounted guard on deck, concealed by the unshipped mast and sails, while Chinehea, calling Blake to his side, and entering the small bark canoe which belonged to the skow, departed on a scouting expedition.

It was a still dark night, and everything was already wrapped in the thickest gloom. The course of the two friends was up the river, and though aware of no danger, every precaution that Indian prudence could suggest was resorted to, For about a mile their progress was unrewarded by any discovery, and Chinchea determined to sweep downwards, when the crackling of some dry stick on the bunk—that occupied by the party of Stevens—made the Indian gently urge the canoe into the deep shadow of the bushes, beneath whose overhanging boughs they halted.

»I could swear I heard a paddle,« exclaimed, in a low tone, a voice on the other side.

»A fowl, a canard,« replied Carcassin, for it was he.

»I suppose it must have been,« said Blackhawk; » but as caution is necessary, I shall keep along the bank, as we descend, while you continue to lead the party. But send me the two Crow Indians.«

»The Corbeaux are good scouts,« observed Carcassin, retreating into the wood.

»I am sure I heard a paddle,« muttered Blackhawk, endeavouring to penetrate the gloom by a glance of his searching eyes.

Neither Blake nor Chinchea seemed to breathe; the latter, having placed both the paddies in the canoe, was drawing the frail vessel still nearer the shore by means of a bough. The bank was here almost perpendicular, and a huge tree which had fallen from old age and decay, lay up and down stream, about two feet above the water; its roots on one side, the upper branches on the other, preventing as yet, its greater emersion. Gently pressing Blake's arm, and showing him that he was to lie down in the canoe, Chinchea set him the example, and then the Indian noiselessly drew the frail bark beneath the tree. Rising up they found themselves in a basin, so narrow, the boat could not have turned, but dark and impassable, as no human being could penetrate the dense prickly growth on the steep bank; no entrance, indeed, being possible, but that by which they had come.

Resting their rifles on their knees, they now clearly saw Blackhawk standing with the Crow Indians on the bank, and after a short conference, they saw these latter enter the water, and wade across exactly in their direction. One whispered request that Blake would not fire until the Indian gave the signal, with a silent nod of acquiescence, and both sat as it were living statues rivetted to their boat. 'The Indians approached, their guns ready, their tomahawks glittering, and their eyes examining every sign. As was natural, they peered cautiously beneath the bushes, and even struck the tree, which alone saved them both from death, whatever the fate of Blake and Chinchea, with the butt end of their fusils. Then as if quite convinced of their captain's error, they proceeded slowly and cautiously down the river, still wading on the same side as the two scouts, while Blackhawk kept on the opposite bank; sometimes walking on the edge, sometimes entering the water, according to the nature of the ground.

»Chinchea will outwit them,« said the Indian, quietly.

»Quick then, my friend,« whispered Blake, who was agitated by two terrible emotions. Fear for the safety of Alice, and dread that the murderer might escape.

The Indian made no reply, but in two minutes more, the canoe was gliding—still beneath the bushes, on the track of the two Corbeaux. Blake sat in the rear, while Chinchea occupied the centre, his gun across his knees, his hand cautiously urging the paddle. In this manner they proceeded, until a turn in the river brought them in sight of the encampment, just as Blackhawk and the Corbeaux effected a junction within rifle shot of where the men lay. Chinchea, who knew that to cross in face of the enemy, was certain death, dropped down until he lay athwart the skow, on the other side, when steadying the canoe against a snag, they both waited the course of events.

Presently, their eyes fixed on the movements of the enemy, they discovered Blackhawk and his gang stooping low along the edge of the forest, and close upon

the encampment, which lay in the stillness of death. They were collected in fact within pistol shot. At this instant the low and angry growl] of the panther made Blake start, as he heard it close to his elbow, but recollecting the cry of Chinchea, he watched the consequences of his warning. A head, that of Doyle, was slowly raised from the skow, and a hasty sign exchanged with the Indian.

»Now,« said Chinchea, taking aim.

The rifles of Blake, Doyle, and the Indian spoke simultaneously, and a yell from the robbers told the fatal effect of the discharge. Revenge, however, seemed the uppermost feeling; for, darting forward, they were about to advance to a hand in hand conflict, when a heavy discharge from the bank, near the skow, broke their impetuosity and drove them to cover.

The Crows, however, bad, unobserved by even Chinchea, crossed the river, while the friends were loading, and were only discovered when close at hand, creeping stealthily along the bushes. A little over eagerness betrayed them, and a second discharge from the canoe sent them yelling to the bank; next minute the body of one swept by upon the blood-stained surface of the stream. The Indian coolly drew the corpse close to him, and took the scalp, while Blake loaded; and then the other Crow being seen returning to his comrades out of gun shot, they crossed the stream, and entered the skow, which now sheltered the whole party.

»This will be a hot night of it,« said Stevens, » though I fancy they will scarcely dare to charge us here. Still unless destroyed, or weakened thoroughly, the wretches will waylay us all along the river, and cut off some of our best men, from some close ambush. I am, therefore, for attack not defence.«

»Good,« replied the Indian; » the white man is right. Let us go.«

»I must stay to guard the women and my prey,« said Sir Edward.

»I am glad you keep the castle,« said Philip; »I will leave the Mexicans and two whites; with these you can keep the ruffians at bay, while we shall be close at hand.«

Without another word, Chinchea, Stevens, Doyle, Smith, Big Griddle, and four other white men, dropped over the side next to the river, and crouching on their hand and knees, gained the forest on the opposite direction to the enemy, apparently unperceived, while Blake remained in command of the skow. With his rifle firmly clutched, he stood leaning against the cabin which contained Alice, peering cautiously towards the wood, while every now and then his glances would wander to the fore-castle, where Jones lay fuming and raging in his helplessness. The other men were scattered about the boat, carefully concealed, and all on the watch.

»Dear Edward,« said Alice, »is that you? Why this noise and bustle? Is it hear morning?«

»No, cousin—but rest in peace, I watch over you.«

»Is there then danger?« exclaimed the girl, rising and stooping forth into the open air.

»Back! back! Alice!« said Sir Edward, gently pushing his cousin; »a rifle will not spare your—«

»Think you us such weak creatures as never to share men's danger?« replied the rich voice of Margarita.

Ere Blake could answer, he received a stunning blow upon the head, from one who appeared suddenly above him on the deck, which made him reel, and a second would have followed, when close behind the young man was poured forth the hot flame, and the intruder fell headlong into the river. Blake, whose faculties were not obscured, and whose fall was momentary, crying to Alice to close the cabin door, levelled his gun and fired, just as a crowd of ruffians ascended the deck, and prepared to inundate the vessel. They were more than thirty in number, and some came tumbling furiously down the steps, which led from the short upper to the lower deck. Blake, however, was now surrounded by his five dauntless comrades, three of whose guns were loaded, and sent forth their murderous discharge from behind a rampart of bales. A dozen muskets and double barrelled guns were at their feet, all loaded, and next minute the whole party fired, amid yells of fury from the assailants, who, momentarily terrified, sprang all to the summit of the cabin as if about to fly. Fresh arms were seized by Blake and his men, but one of whom was wounded; and again the air rang with the awful volley, this time followed by a discharge as terrible from the land.

Taken between two fires, the bandits turned, but blood had been shed, and even Blake rushed forward to cut off their retreat. Every rifle was again loaded, and the contents poured upon the fugitives, not three of whom escaped from what now became a massacre. The victors then sternly turned to examine the results, while Chinchea glided about like the spirit of evil, proudly collecting the awful trophies of success. Eighteen dead men were found, and seven so severely wounded as to leave no hope. Among these were Blackhawk and Carcassin; the Mexican had perished, Not one of the other party had escaped without a wound; but so dreadful had been the power of superior arms and the attack on the robbers in the rear, while Blake and his men were hid behind a breastwork, that the victory had been earned without one death on the part of the defenders, though Big Griddle vowed that he was maimed for life.

The bodies were hastily tumbled into the river—not one of the borderers interfering with the terrible privilege of Chinchea—and when the vessel had been hastily washed of the bloody stains, but three men remained alive of the wounded, the other four had died in the brief interval, and been cast into the river.

»Where is Alice?« said Harry Markham, feebly; »if, indeed, she will speak to him, whom, as Blackhawk, she has so much dreaded.«

»You are dying, wretched man,« replied Alice, stepping forth from the cabin; »and death is too awful not to make us forget even crime.«

»Mine has, indeed, been a sad career,« groaned Markham.

»You are, methinks, fully avenged, Sir Edward,« muttered Stevens; »there is but my death wanted to have all the three destroyers of your early hopes crushed.«

»Who speaks of Sir Edward?« said Markham, faintly.

»I am Sir Edward Blake, nephew of him you aided to rob and murder,« replied the young man.

»Ah,« cried the other, gazing with terror on him, by the light of flaring pine torches, »something whispered me you were no stranger. But murder —no- had no hand in it—that was all Jones's doing.«

»It was all me—all me,« shrieked that person, in a thick voice, »but here I am, dying—give me water.

Blake, accompanied by several others, rushed to the end of the boat, and there, lying on the ground, his cords cut, his clothes riddled with shot, lay the dwarf, bleeding to death from wounds received from the discharges intended for those whose cover was too complete to be assailed. On examination it was, however, found that no one wound was mortal, and Blake sternly insisted on their being bound up, which was done, and the growling dwarf laid upon a bed, after his other wants had been satisfied.

In another half hour not one of the bandits remained alive, and at the earnest request of Alice a grave was dug, in which her foster brother was placed, far away from the land which gave him birth, without stick or stone to mark the spot.

This solemn duty discharged, the whole party, wearied, fatigued, and exhausted, both mentally and physically, lay down to snatch that repose which they so needed. A sentinel was placed, as a matter of precaution, but no sound again disturbed the stillness of the night.

At dawn of day, ere the morning meal was taken, the skow moved from the scene of so much carnage, where the turkey buzzards already were congregating, attracted by the scent of so much blood.

Jones had received a shock; it was clear he could not survive, though probably months would elapse before his dissolution. The wretched man seemed aware of

his awful state, and volunteered a full confession, which was taken down in writing, all witnessing the deed. He lived, however, to reach Galveston, where the document was read to him in the presence of the several consuls, and having been acquiesced in by the murderer, the officials affixed their signatures; and at the end of a month Alice and Sir Edward sailed for England, accompanied by Philip Stevens, and every document necessary to eject the unjust and unprincipled family who had robbed the orphan inheritance.

The parting between Blake and Chinchea was hearty and sincere, with a pledge that the former would return within three years, and within a month of the end of that date, the Comanche promised to be at the mouth of the Brazos river, on the very spot indeed where they parted. Meanwhile a keg of fine powder, a handsome rifle, and the horse he had saved by the instrumentality of Pietro, were handed to the redskin, and he went on his way rejoicing.

The young Mexican wife, careless of hiding feelings which she could not smother, became senseless when the vessel which contained Blake left the American shore; but, recovering herself, she turned proudly to her husband—for however truant had been her thoughts, she had restrained her emotions until the stranger had departed for ever.

The voyage of the cousins was long, but not wearisome, and in nine weeks they were in London.

The next day Sir Edward Blake visited a lawyer; and, within ten days a letter, fully explaining all, with copies of all documents, was deposited with the utterly unprepared family, who had defrauded Alice, and caused the murder of her father.

Sir Edward was stern. His terms were awfully severe, as he wished to punish them, as well as right Alice. They were, the restoration of the property, one half of the annual revenue for eleven years in & lump. and a public confession in the public press of their fraud and crime.

They resisted. But the alternative of a trial was too much, and they at length consented to all, leaving the country for ever, under assumed names, almost ere the terrible advertisements which, far and wide, proclaimed their shame, and the mercy of the injured appeared.

Alice and Edward were then united; and, taught in the great and trying school of adversity, their union was happy indeed.

Stevens, who had atoned, as far as in his power, and whose penitence was sincere still lives, and accompanied Sir Edward on his yacht voyage to Texas, to meet the Indian according to appointment.

Of this journey, of Margarita's fate, we may speak at some future time; but the Chronicle of the Eagle's Nest is at an end.

[THE END.]

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