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THE YOUNG RANCHMAN

OR PERILS OF PIONEERING IN
THE WILD WEST.



BY
CHARLES R. KENYON



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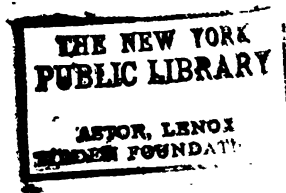
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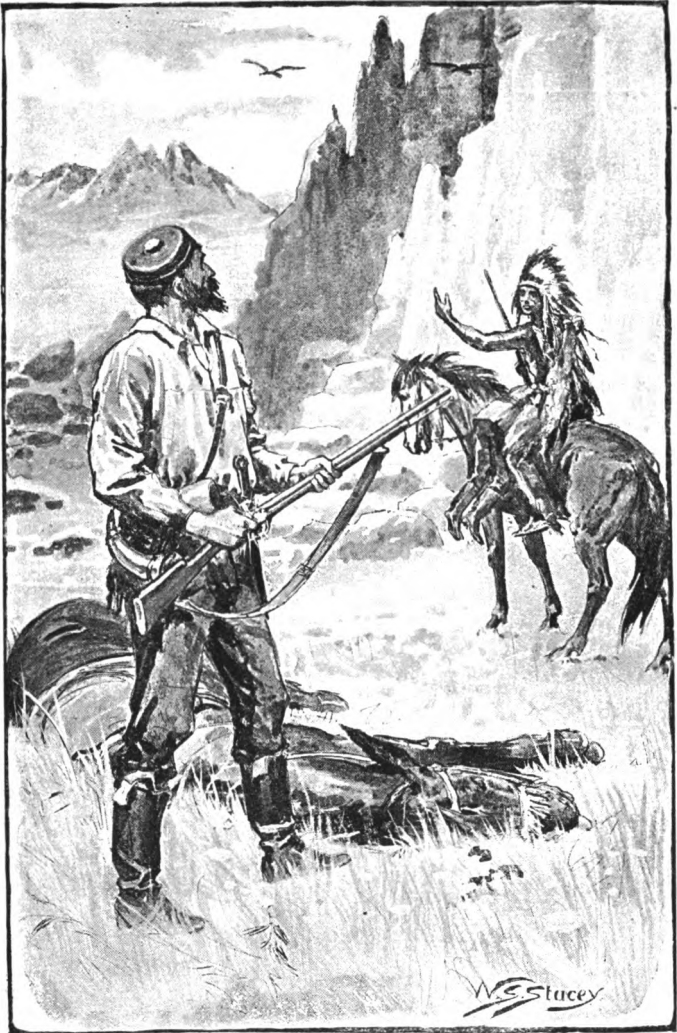
THE YOUNG RANCHMEN

OR

PERILS OF PIONEERING IN THE
WILD WEST



May Cousins.



'Ugh!' exclaimed the Indian, 'does the pale-face think he can awake his long-eared pony?'

PAGE 131.

THE YOUNG RANCMEN

OR

1

PERILS OF PIONEERING IN
THE WILD WEST

By CHARLES R. KENYON

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER S. STACEY

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THE YOUNG RANCMEN.

CHAPTER I.

AT HOME IN CANADA.

“Ah, Robert, my good fellow, is that you? I was beginning to think you were lost in those interminable forests. We expected you home weeks ago,” exclaimed Major Weston, turning from the pretty girl with whom he was conversing in the verandah of a low, snugly-built Canadian farm-house, to greet a stalwart man of forty years of age.

The sun was setting in a blaze of golden light over the distant waters of Lake Huron, and its rays rested upon the man's dark hair and shaggy cap of racoon skin, with the tail of that animal hanging down behind, and lighted up the outline of his oddly-clad figure.

“I hope my long absence has not been any inconvenience to you, sir,” he said gravely, making a military salute; “but, owing to the very severe winter

and consequent late breaking up of the ice, it was impossible for the lumberers to float their timber-rafts down the river as early as usual, and if I had left them and attempted to find my way back to the settlements alone, I should most certainly have got lost. For, much as I have learnt by my stay in the backwoods, it is still a mystery to me how the hunters and trappers succeed in finding their way through such bewildering solitudes."

"Well, Robert, I am glad you did not attempt anything so rash as returning across the country alone. But come to the house; I am sure you must be ready for supper after your long tramp. I daresay the lumberers would not be able to spare you till they reached Hamilton or Toronto?"

"Right you are, sir. I got my discharge at the latter city, and, except for a lift now and then in some farmer's waggon, I have walked every mile of the way here. But where is the missis? Pardon me, sir, but I begin to fear that something has happened, for I notice that both you and Miss Constance are in mourning."

"Yes, Robert, your dear mistress 'fell asleep' within a month after you left us last autumn. She drooped and died like the tender vine-leaf at the first chill blast of winter." Major Weston sighed deeply as he spoke. He was a fine, soldierly-looking man of about fifty years of age, who, after serving with distinction

through the Crimean war, had at its termination retired from the army on half-pay. Having a delicate wife and young family, with but small private means, he then determined to emigrate, as so many of his brother officers were doing, to Canada, where a small income would go very much farther than in England.

Accordingly, the Westons had come there the summer before, accompanied by Robert Lazenby, who had been with the Major in the capacity of soldier-servant throughout the war with Russia, and who, on obtaining his discharge from the army, had gladly re-entered the service of his old officer, to whom he was much attached.

However, soon after Major Weston and his family were comfortably settled in Canada West, or Ontario as it is now called, Robert asked and obtained permission from his master, who really had not sufficient work to keep him profitably employed during the winter months, to join a party of lumberers who were going beyond the settlements to cut timber.

Being a green hand, as they termed it, Robert's wages were small; yet the wild, free life in the depths of the Canadian forests, and the cheerful society of his rough but good-natured comrades, who were mostly French Canadians, was just what the ex-soldier enjoyed, and, being a handy fellow, he soon became quite expert in the use of the American axe.

Now, in the spring, he had returned to his master,

with much experience and skill thus acquired as to the various shifts and expedients of camp life in the backwoods, all of which was to prove of the greatest service to himself and the family he served.

"Where are the young gentlemen, Master Frank and Master Harry, please Miss?" asked Robert, when, in a very short time indeed, Connie placed a dish of fried ham and eggs before him.

"They went off to the river early this morning, with gun and fishing tackle, and provisions enough to last until evening. I expect them home at any minute, as they promised me they would return for supper."

Constance Weston, the Major's only daughter, was a tall, graceful girl of eighteen, with large dark blue eyes and curly golden hair. Her nose was a Grecian one, and her mouth and chin were prettily shaped. Moreover, she had a remarkably sunny smile; so that altogether she made a picture which once seen was not easily forgotten.

"Connie, Connie, where are you? Come here, Connie, and see the spoils of the chase," shouted the merry voices of two boys from the stable-yard at the back of the house.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come," answered their sister, as she ran to meet them, closely followed by her father and Robert. "What a load for poor Daisy to carry! Is that large animal a deer?"

"Yes it is," replied the younger boy; "Frank shot it with his rifle."

"And here," said Frank, pointing to a curious animal, something like a fox with the head of a dog and a round bushy tail," is a racoon which Harry shot while I was fishing; its fur is very valuable. But, hillo! Who is this with a racoon on his head? Why, Robert; have you come back, old fellow? I'm very glad to see you." And, seizing the honest servant's hand, he gave it a hearty shake.

"Oh! how jolly!" exclaimed Harry, springing forward and following his brother's example. "I had been wishing you were back again to accompany us on our hunting expeditions. What fun we shall have!"

With many exclamations of pleasure and surprise, the whole party set to work to unload the old pony. Major Weston looked much pleased at the success of the young huntsmen, and remarked that they had obtained enough game to stock their larder for at least a fortnight. Besides the deer and racoon, there were a couple of wild turkeys, three wild geese, two brace of ducks, half a dozen pigeons and a musk rat (valuable for its fur), also a fine salmon in Frank's basket.

"A very successful day's sport and no mistake," said the Major, with a glance of pride at his fine, handsome sons.

Frank, the elder of the two, was about seventeen, tall and fair, with light curly hair, blue eyes and finely-chiselled features, of which the mouth was perhaps the most remarkable, its thin lips, together with a strong, square jaw, giving an expression of determination to the frank, open countenance. His lithe, graceful figure was not calculated at first sight to give one the impression of great strength, but appearances, we know, are often deceptive, and some of the boy's schoolfellows had already experienced, to their great discomfiture, the truth of this saying in his case. So beautifully proportioned was the rather spare but well-knit muscular frame as to completely disguise the boy's tremendous strength.

Harry, who was two years younger, formed a striking contrast to his brother and sister, for he had dark hair and eyes, and a swarthy skin. He was withal a handsome boy, though his beauty was of a different type from theirs. Firmly built, with deep chest and broad shoulders, he gave promise of great strength should he attain to man's estate.

During supper that evening, Robert and the boys related their several adventures and experiences, and they carried on an animated discussion until far into the night.

At last, however, the Major intimated that it was high time to retire to rest; and, after conduct-

ing the usual family devotions, he bade them each "Good night," with the remark that he intended to hold a cabinet council, or, as it is called on the West Coast of Africa, a "palaver," the next day after breakfast.





CHAPTER II.

THE PALAVER.

THE next morning, as soon as all were assembled in the little parlour after their early breakfast, Major Weston considerably startled them by announcing his intention of quitting Canada and joining a large train of emigrants, which, he learnt from the papers, was shortly going from the Missouri to the new Eldorado—California.

“You see,” said he, “the great drawback to this colony is the long and severe winter, which, although in some respects beneficial, as affording opportunities for social intercourse, mental culture and relaxation from the severer and more urgent labours of the other seasons, yet has, on the other hand, in my opinion, more than counterbalancing disadvantages in the fact that a great part of the exhausting labour of the spring, summer and autumn is rendered necessary solely on account of the protracted rigour of the Canadian winter. In other words, six months of the

year are laboriously spent in providing sustenance for the farmer's family, and more especially his live stock, during the other six: just, as of old, the seven years of famine ate up the seven years of plenty. In California, on the contrary, the settler's horses, cattle, and sheep can pick up their own living out of doors all through the year, and thus save the vast amount of labour required, both here and in the Eastern States of the Union, to provide sufficient hay and other fodder to carry them through the long winter months. Consequently, the farmer in such an equable climate as that of Upper California may be said to have the whole twelve months in which, not only to produce enough food for home consumption, but also a surplus for the market, while he saves the wear and tear of having to crowd the work of twelve months into six. Much of that work, in the case of the Yankee and Canadian farmer, is necessarily unremunerative, as it merely goes to sustain his live stock during the dead season."

"Hear! hear!" exclaimed Frank and Connie.
"Hurrah for California!" shouted Harry.

"Order! order!" said the Major. "I believe Robert wishes to make an observation, if you will only give him an opportunity of being heard."

Silence having at last been restored, Robert arose from his seat, looking not a little confused at suddenly finding he had concentrated the thoughts and eyes

of the whole conference upon himself, and that each member of it was waiting in silent expectation for what he was going to say.

Robert was a brave man, and had faced death many times on the battlefields of the Crimea and in the trenches before Sebastopol; but, as he afterwards declared to Frank and Harry, he never felt half so foolish and "scared like" in his life as when he got up to speak then, amidst such profound silence. "And to think," said he, "that I had got very little to say, and did not know how to say that properly; for you see, young gentlemen, I am no scholard, and there was the Major looking, as you may say, right through me. I just wished the floor would open and would let me sink out of sight."

However, with an effort, Lazenby recovered his self-possession sufficiently to say, "Please, sir, I was only going to ask you if there are good markets in that country you speak about—Californy, I think you call it. I hope you will excuse my taking the liberty to speak to you as knows so much better than myself; but it seems to me, from what you have said, that it is further from England than what we are now, and the markets here are very poor to what we had in Warwickshire. Only think of them selling wheat at three shillings or four shillings a bushel, when at home as good a sample would have fetched seven or eight shillings. I don't pretend

to know, but it strikes me that the further we are from England the poorer are the markets; and what is the use of having a lot of stuff to sell if there is nowhere to sell it for a fair price?"

As Robert sat down, with a sigh of relief that he had overcome the little difficulty of making a speech, his master replied, "There's sound common sense in what you say, my man. I have carefully studied the question of markets for home produce, and if you will pass me that map beside you, Frank, I will point out the principal towns already existing in California, and also show you that, near the part where I think of settling, there are known to be considerable deposits of gold and silver. Mines, too, are being opened on every side, so that there will no doubt soon spring up a brisk local demand for wheat, oats, maize, beef, dairy produce, hay, and other things for the use of the hardy miners and their teams of horses and mules.

"Here, you see, to commence in the north-east, is Sacramento, a thriving town, situated on the river of that name; while nearly due west is San Francisco, the queen city of the West, with its magnificent harbour and beautiful bay. Proceeding south, along the coast we find, besides places of less note, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, San Bernardino more inland, and San Diego, &c. So that, you see, I am not thinking of taking you to an absolute wilderness, by any means, but to a country which—if only

a part of what is said about it be true—possesses in its fertile plains, pleasant climate, and valuable mineral deposits, unlimited capabilities of development and wealth.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Robert; “I am now quite satisfied as to the market prospects, and a milder climate will well repay the long journey.”

“When do you propose to start for Missouri to join the emigrant train, father?” inquired Frank.

“As soon as I can get off—probably in a week. What little furniture and other bulky articles we have must, of course, be sold by auction; but we can talk matters over at some other time. I must now be off on old Daisy to the town, to arrange with the auctioneer and transact other business. I therefore declare this meeting at an end.”

“I beg to propose a vote of thanks to you as chairman, dear father,” said Connie.

“And I beg to second it,” exclaimed Harry, jumping to his feet; “and I wish we were going to sell off to-day. What fun it will be travelling over those immense plains and mountains, hunting all kinds of game, and having occasional brushes with the wild Indians, both of which are said to abound in those distant regions.”



CHAPTER III.

THE OUTFIT.

A FEW weeks afterwards the Westons reached St Louis, the chief city of Missouri and great commercial metropolis of the Central Mississippi Valley, where they at once set busily to work to procure the necessary outfit for the formidable journey of two thousand miles which lay before them. Perhaps no place in the world affords greater facilities for the purchase of the thousand-and-one articles indispensable to the emigrant, miner, hunter, trader, or traveller than this important city, so famous for its extensive trade and various manufactures.

The first purchase our emigrants had to make was a roomy but light and well-constructed two-horse waggon, with the usual white canvas cover—in fact, the emigrant waggon so familiar to all who have sojourned any length of time in the Western States of America—a somewhat confined but by no means uncomfortable combination of carriage and dwelling-

house in one. Fastened behind the vehicle was a wooden trough or manger, out of which the horses could eat their feed of maize or oats whenever a halt was called for the purpose.

At the repository of one of the best known horse-dealers in the city, Major Weston, who was a good judge of horse-flesh, bought a pair of fine chestnut horses, or rather mares, five years' old, and standing about fifteen and a half hands high. They were well bred, active animals, short in the leg, deep in the chest, with round full barrels, well ribbed home, high withers and crests, and well set-on shapely heads. They were such horses as delighted the eyes of the Western farmer, combining as they did the qualities of speed and endurance, strength and activity. When they were decked in their new harness and placed abreast (as usual in America) in the light canvas-covered waggon, the whole presented such a smart and serviceable appearance that Robert and the boys could scarcely refrain from an enthusiastic shout of admiration and delight.

A magnificent saddle-horse was purchased of the same dealer. It was five years' old and about fifteen hands and a half high. This superb and well-bred animal was coal black, without a speck of white anywhere about him; while his large, fiery eyes, dilated nostrils, shapely head, and noble carriage, unmistakably showed his Arab descent.

As Robert led the beautiful creature out in front of the hotel for the inspection of those who had not been with Major Weston when he bought him, Connie, who was naturally most enthusiastic in her expressions of admiration, enquired the horse's name.

"The Black Prince," answered her father.

"Oh! I don't like that; it is too long," exclaimed the girl. "Let us re-name him Saladin!"

"Yes. Saladin! that's the name," shouted Harry.

"Very well," said Major Weston; "Saladin shall it be. But, now, lead him away, Robert, to the stable, and then return to us, for we shall need your services in helping to choose and carry many other equally interesting, useful, and necessary things."

"Fire-arms, for instance," said Harry, as Robert led away the horse.

"And a small tent, with poles and ropes complete, for you and Frank and myself to sleep in," said Major Weston. "Connie must have the waggon, and Robert will have to be content with as comfortable a sleeping-place as he can arrange for himself beneath it."

"Connie can sleep on my tool-chest," said Frank; "for, of course, I must have a chest of carpenter's tools, father."

"Of course," said the Major; "I imagine we shall find you a very useful man, Frank."

"It is well he learnt to be such a skilful joiner," said Connie, adding to her brother; "you will feel glad

now that you devoted so much time as two hours a day for two years to the business, and that father paid for you having lessons from a first-rate workman. Why did you do it, father? Did you anticipate such a time as this?"

"I have always thought it well for a youth to learn some handicraft thoroughly, as well as to go through the usual routine of school and college education," replied Major Weston. "I may have got the idea in the first place from some of our Continental neighbours. It is said that in the palmy days of Poland every youth above the labouring class, even to the highest noble in the land, was obliged to learn a useful trade or handicraft, so that, in case of a reverse of fortune (that proverbially fickle dame), no man need be reduced to helpless want, or forced to live on the charity of his friends and neighbours. That was true and manly independence. No wonder Poland once held such a proud position among the nations."

"I was always glad you let me be apprenticed for a time to a clever machinist," said Harry; "it gives me such a sense of power to be able to take the most intricate machinery to pieces and to put it together again, after it has been cleaned, without any difficulty. Besides, one always feels one might invent alterations or other machines for other purposes, which might be equally useful."

"'Knowledge is power.' What does not the world

owe to its great inventors?" said Major Weston; "and when I saw your genius was a more inventive one than your brother's, I determined you should have every advantage."

"That was a good working-model he made of a steam-engine," said Frank, with generous admiration of his brother's talents.

"Yes; but I like the water-wheel he made at uncle's large farm in Warwickshire best," said Connie, "for it turned the great churn so beautifully, and was so very useful."

"You will find all that you learnt on your uncle's farm most useful now," said Major Weston to his sons. "How little I thought, when I had to leave you and your mother so long there during my absence from England, that it was the very spot and the very training that would prove most beneficial to you in your future life!" Then, laying his hand affectionately upon Connie's shoulder, he said in a low voice, as if he were thinking aloud, "I did not plan it all, for I could not foresee what was to be. A higher Hand shapes and moulds our lives, and leads us by a way that we know not."

Often afterwards, Connie thought of her father's words, when the vicissitudes and dangers of their wandering life seemed at times to be almost overwhelming; and the gentle, tenderly-nurtured girl found inexpressible comfort in doing so.

But now Harry was saying what a good thing it was that he and Frank had assisted in all sorts of farm-work ever since he could remember, and that under their uncle's tuition they had become practised and fearless riders, able to follow the fox-hounds over difficult country with skill and boldness.

"It was so good of uncle, too, to give us those active little Welsh ponies when we were quite small boys," said Frank; "nothing else than a 'bullfinch' would daunt them and cause us to have to make a detour."

"What is a bullfinch?" asked Connie; "I used to think it was a bird?"

The boys laughed merrily as they explained it was a thick, high bullock-proof hedge. "Your own riding ought to have told you that," said Frank.

"You forget that, though I often accompanied you and uncle on your rides, he was always careful not to take me into such difficult places as your term 'bullfinch' would express," said the girl.

"And quite right, too," said her father. "But here is Robert. Now we will go and make our purchases."

It would take far too long to describe all the articles our travellers had to procure. A few, however, from their importance, must be mentioned.

First, there were the fire-arms, which Major Weston bought at the best gunsmith's in St Louis. Some of

them could not at that time have been supplied in any other country in the world but America.

Two of these were splendid little repeating rifles, which, when once charged, could be fired thirteen times without removing the weapon from the shoulder; or, if desired, they could be loaded and used as ordinary breechloading rifles, the twelve cartridges in the magazine situated in the butt of the rifle being held in reserve for any sudden emergency. These splendid weapons were perfectly reliable up to a distance of five hundred yards. Then there was a couple of first-rate long-range rifles, sighted up to one thousand yards, and four six-chambered Colt's revolvers. The proper belts for carrying these and the sheathed bowie or hunting knives were procured at the same place. Thus, each of our adventurers was provided with a rifle, revolver, hunting-knife, and belt, in addition to the useful shot-guns and a light sporting rifle which they had brought with them from Canada. Even Connie had been taught to use the latter with considerable skill.

Of course, a good supply of ammunition was laid in; also the small tent with its pole and ropes, which Major Weston had mentioned as the future sleeping apartment of himself and sons, and the tool-chest, which was to make Connie's bedstead and to contain Frank's well-assorted tools. Amongst these latter were axes of different sizes, from the small hatchet

to the heavy felling-axe ; also all the other numerous articles with which a well-fitted tool-chest is generally supplied.

Major Weston also purchased an oil cooking-stove, with the necessary utensils—kettle, steamer, frying-pan, and a good-sized sheet-iron oven to place on the top of the stove for baking purposes ; for a good part of the emigrant's contemplated journey lay through so desolate and dreary a region that even wood enough for fuel could not always be procured.

In the capacious waggon were also stowed away many necessaries, such as bags of flour, oatmeal and rice, tin boxes, cups and plates, knives and forks, and a few buffalo robes and blankets ; and, lastly, two or three waterproof sheets to throw over the ground beneath the blankets at night to prevent the damp from striking through.





CHAPTER IV.

A BRUSH WITH THE RED-SKINS.

AT length all was ready, and the long train of emigrants, with their canvas-topped waggons and drivers, horses, mules, cattle, &c., set out on what seemed an almost interminable journey. They could only proceed at a slow pace, on account of the cattle and other live stock, which some of the emigrants took with them to form the nucleus of future herds and droves in the fertile vales of California, the native cattle of which State were known to be of a very inferior and diminutive breed.

The party was altogether too strong to be attacked openly by the roving bands of Indians during the weary journey across Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado, although the latter sometimes harassed their march in hope of picking up stragglers, or carrying off horses or cattle. But Major Weston, who had by general consent been made commandant of the party, kept so strict a watch over the train while in the Indian

country, throwing out mounted scouts in front and on each flank by day, and setting sentries at regular distances and keeping mounted patrols constantly encircling the encampment by night, that the only surprise which was attempted was easily beaten off. This adventure might have ended most tragically for some of the party if it had not been for the cool courage and adroit action of Frank Weston. It occurred about a week after crossing the upper reaches of the Republican Fork of the Kansas River, in what subsequently became a part of Colorado territory.

The train had halted for the mid-day rest and meal, when the ever-watchful commandant, who was surveying the prairie through his glass, fancied he saw something unusual in the movements of what appeared to be a drove of wild horses or mustangs a long way off across the plain. Calling Frank, who was scouting on that side, to him, he told him to ride cautiously in their direction until he got near enough to ascertain clearly whether they were only mustangs or a party of mounted savages trying to approach unobserved. At the same time another scout was despatched to warn some of the women and children, who were herding their cattle and horses along a small stream of water in that direction—its verdant banks offering a tempting bite to the hungry animals—to head them back towards the camp, for fear of an Indian stampede.

Scarcely had the order been complied with, and the stock turned in the direction of the waggons, when Frank was observed galloping back, hotly pursued by a score or two of yelling savages. The latter were mounted on their nimble ponies, which they urged to their utmost speed. At once there was a scene of the wildest confusion, the women and children running madly towards the camp, with heartrending screams and cries for help; while the men hastily seized their guns and rifles, and hurried to the rescue. They would, however, have arrived too late to save half a dozen of the poor creatures, who, having crossed the little stream before mentioned, had failed to get their cattle over it again when the alarm was first given. These terror-stricken individuals would soon have been overtaken and scalped, or carried off by the blood-thirsty Arapahoes, had not Frank, perceiving their danger, suddenly wheeled his horse round, and, at the risk of his life, made a bold diversion in their favour by charging straight at the foremost Indian, who seemed to be their chief. Unslinging his repeating rifle at the same moment, Frank quietly took aim and fired; but, foiled by the motion of the horse and the speed at which both he and his antagonist were riding, the aim proved untrue, so that, instead of striking the chief, the ball entered the pony's shoulder, and both rolled over on the plain.

For a moment the savages were so thunderstruck

by this sudden manoeuvre that they almost unconsciously drew rein. Before they could recover their self-possession, Frank stopped his horse and, raising his rifle, fired two shots, wounding a couple of the Indians, who fell from their horses. This seemed to break the spell, and, shouting out their fearful war-whoop, and again led by their chief, who had meanwhile succeeded in disengaging himself from his fallen steed and leaping upon one of those from which the wounded red-skins had dropped, they all galloped head-long towards Frank, brandishing on high their glittering tomahawks, ready for hurling at him as soon as they got within striking distance. On came the dusky warriors like a whirlwind, the ground shaking beneath the heavy tread of their foaming mustangs. A few brief moments, and their ruthless hatchets would have crashed through the brain of the intrepid young pale-face. But the boy had not waited for them; he had already turned and fled. The gallant Saladin, knowing well what was expected of him, was now coursing over the plain at such a pace, that, in spite of their efforts, the Indians soon found themselves completely distanced. Changing their course, therefore, they once more guided their ponies in pursuit of the screaming women and children. These unfortunate creatures had made such good use of the time gained by young Weston's devoted efforts to shield them and draw the enemy's attention on himself, that they were now within a couple of

hundred yards of the party of men hastily collected and headed by Major Weston, who were hurrying to their assistance.

Bravely and fiercely as the North American Indians will fight when the advantage seems to be on their side, and the victory practically assured, they will, on a sudden change in the situation of affairs or a discovery that they had miscalculated the strength of their enemy, at once retreat with the utmost precipitancy.

Perceiving the approach of a well-armed body of men, the Arapahoes would doubtless, under ordinary circumstances, have turned and disappeared until, perchance, a better opportunity for murder or plunder presented itself. But, maddened by the loss they had sustained, and panting for revenge, they seemed determined that their prey should not escape them when almost within their grasp. In vain did Frank's rifle ring out, as, galloping parallel with them, he fired shot after shot into their ranks. Two or three more ponies and their tawny riders came down with a crash; but the wild career of the others was not stopped for an instant.

On swept the yelling mob. Fifty yards more, and their nervous fingers would have clutched the hair of their frantic victims; but, hark! what is that?

"Halt! steady, my men; make ready! present! fire!" shouted out the Major's clear voice.

Observing the imminent danger of the fugitives, and having got his men within a hundred yards or so of the Indians, he knew no time must be lost if the lives of the former were to be saved.

As the scattered volley rang out, several of the foremost warriors bit the dust; and to complete the discomfiture of the rest, both Frank, who had come up, and Major Weston discharged their revolvers into the wavering mass. This had the desired effect, for the whole band wheeled suddenly round and fled as fast as it had come. From beginning to end the whole affair only occupied a few minutes, and but for the unlucky red-skins who lay dead or wounded on the ground, it would have seemed almost to the startled emigrants more like a frightful dream than a real incident of life.

The scene which followed was most touching: wives and children, rescued from the very jaws of death, were fondly clasped in the arms of husbands and parents, with cries and tears of gratitude and joy; while, now and then, a half-suppressed sob broke from first one and then another of the sympathetic crowd of bystanders, the most callous of whom were seen to brush away a tear.

As for Frank, the hero of the hour, he was quite overwhelmed with thanks and praises; and, conscious that he was getting very hot and red in the face, he was looking about for some loop-hole of escape from

his embarrassing position, when fortunately he espied one of the riderless Indian ponies careering about the plain. Blurting out something to the effect that he was glad if he had been of any service, he gave his horse the rein and dashed away in pursuit of the excited animal, which, finding itself followed, tossed up its head, and, giving one or two terrified snorts, was soon scampering over the prairie at its uttermost speed.

The mustang, a dark chestnut nearly fifteen hands high, with long flowing mane and tail, proved to be one of the finest specimens of the breed. Frank soon became aware that, unencumbered as it was with any burden, it would put even Saladin's speed and endurance to the test before its capture would be effected.

Again and again, as the noble thoroughbred brought his rider almost within reach of the trailing bridle, the active little chestnut shot aside, and, doubling like a hare, he was a quarter of a mile off in another direction before Frank could get his larger horse round and continue the chase. At last, however, he managed to seize the embroidered reins before the mustang could repeat the manoeuvre, and returned with the now submissive animal to the camp.

Meanwhile, Major Weston had given orders for the bodies of the dead Arapahoes to be buried and the wounds of the living to be attended to, after which such of the latter as were not much injured were at

once dismissed, and the remainder as soon as they were able to walk.

This merciful treatment seemed quite incomprehensible to the poor creatures, and it was with difficulty they were made to understand that they were free to depart wheresoever they wished to go. They had evidently expected to be put to death, if not tortured into the bargain.

“Bravo! Master Frank,” shouted Lazenby, as soon as the youth approached, leading the captured mustang—“that will make a good horse for Master Harry to ride; he is always wishing there was another saddle-horse for him, so that he could ride about as much as he likes. And, between ourselves, sir, I believe that would be for sixteen hours out of the twenty-four if he could only obtain a mount.” And the good-natured servant indulged in a hearty laugh at his own jocosity.

“Where is my brother?” replied Frank, smiling.

“With Miss Connie in the waggon, I believe, sir.”

“Then, lead this horse gently there, while I ride over yonder to report my capture to the commandant; then I shall follow you home.”

When Frank reached their waggon a quarter of an hour later, he found both Harry and Connie still admiring the proud little chestnut. The former had mounted and was riding the mustang about to show off its paces to the delighted girl.

"Well, how do you like your new horse?" asked Frank.

"Oh! he's perfection itself. But, say, am I really to have him for my own? What says my father?" eagerly questioned the excited lad.

"I have just been asking him, and he says that, as I captured the animal, he belongs to me to do as I like with; and therefore I make him over to you, trappings and all."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Harry, making his new charger plunge and rear by tossing his cap high into the air in the exuberance of his spirits. "You are a brick and no mistake;" and then, bursting into song, he continued, in the inspiriting words of the well-known musical toast—

"For he's a jolly good fellow!
For he's a jolly good fellow!
For he's a jolly good fellow!
Which nobody can deny," &c.

Robert and Connie laughingly joined in the chorus.





CHAPTER V.

BUFFALO HUNTING.

ABOUT a week after their memorable encounter with the roving band of Arapahoes, the emigrants reached the south branch of the Nebraska, or Platte River, which they crossed by a rather difficult ford. The stream is here more than half a mile wide, but, owing to the dry summer weather, its waters were fortunately low—in some parts not more than a foot or two in depth, and nowhere at this spot more than three or four feet deep; otherwise, its treacherous quicksands and irregular bed would have made it a dangerous as well as troublesome object in their path.

The greater part of a day was spent in effecting the passage of this perplexing river, but at length all were safely landed on its northern bank. Two or three pleasant marches over high, rolling prairies, abounding in traces of buffalo and other large game, brought them to the North Fork.

The country now became broken and uneven.

Steep lofty banks often bordered the river, and obliged the caravan to strike off into the more open prairies. For some days past they had frequently noticed a curiously-shaped conical hill, the summit of which ran up quite narrowly to a great height, resembling a lofty pillar. Some of the travellers who had been on trapping or hunting expeditions to the Rocky Mountains on other occasions, and who now acted as guides to the expedition, said this curious phenomenon was known by the name of "The Chimney." It is quite a landmark, and can be seen thirty or forty miles away in clear weather.

As the emigrants approached the base of this towering column, Major Weston held a consultation with the heads of the company, and it was decided to form their camp there for a few days, in order to try and replenish their scanty stock of fresh meat by organising a buffalo hunt on a somewhat extensive scale. The same evening Major Weston ascended to the base of the "Chimney," in company with his younger son and two or three experienced hunters, or, more strictly speaking, emigrant farmers, who had once been on hunting excursions into the neighbourhood in the service of one or other of the rival fur companies.

This was in their younger days, when the competition between the American Fur Company and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company for active young

frontier's-men, to assist in conveying supplies to the different trading centres or points of rendezvous amongst the mountain ranges and remote valleys of the backbone of America, raised the scale of remuneration to a tempting sum. After returning from one such enterprise, some would again settle down quietly to the comparative monotony of the ordinary farmer's or backwoodsman's life; but many became so enamoured of the wild, free life of the hardy trappers as to join their ranks permanently.

There must be something really very fascinating and enjoyable to some natures in the rough untrammelled existence of these intrepid mountaineers. The very dangers and hardships to which they are constantly exposed, and to which they not unfrequently succumb, seem only to increase their thirst for more adventures, and to animate them to deeds of greater daring. Enchanting the life must be, indeed, to induce men to forego all the comforts of civilisation for the discomforts and adversities of a half-savage and perilous career.

The small reconnoitring party having gained the summit of the mound at the foot of the chimney-like shaft by dint of hard climbing, sat or reclined upon the jutting rocks which formed, as it were, the foundation of the column. Exhausted and well-nigh breathless as they were from the precipitous nature of the ascent, a simultaneous exclamation of astonishment

and pleasure burst from their lips as their delighted eyes beheld the magnificent panorama spread out beneath and around them. Far away to the north, in the midst of the vast plain, rose the dark and ponderous group of mountains called the Black Hills. These looked like some massive and detached outwork of the grand stupendous barrier formed by the Rocky Mountains to the westward.

Though the lofty peaks of the former reached to the height of 6700 feet above sea level, they were quite dwarfed by the exalted snow-clad summits of their tall neighbours—Fremont's Peak, on the opposite side of the wide tract of prairie, mounting skywards to an altitude of 13,570 feet.

South and east of their elevated stand-point extended level or rolling prairies as far as the eye could reach, intersected by numerous rivers and creeks, and, most important of all to our hungry travellers, dotted here and there with herds of buffalo, some roaming over the short dry grass of the plain, while others were feeding or lying down in the vast natural pastures around.

Westward the ground was more broken and elevated, rising gradually to the Cheyenne Pass and the Park Mountains; while beneath them flowed the broad waters of the Platte River, widening out into an imposing stream below its junction with the South Fork, and threading its way eastward like a huge

snake gliding silently over the grass-covered plains. Having become satisfied of the proximity of large herds of buffalo, and lingered a few minutes to admire the lovely rose-coloured tints thrown across the snow-tipped peaks of the Rocky Mountains by the setting sun, Major Weston and his companions quickly descended to the camping ground.

The next day was spent in preparations for the hunt and in resting the horses, so that they might be in good working order on the following day. Fire-arms of all descriptions were cleaned, and hunting-knives sharpened. Large flat stones and smooth boulders from the river-bed were brought to be ready, in lieu of mortars, for pounding the meat when making pemmican. This article may be called the trapper's staff of life; on it he often subsists for months, with scarcely any additional food. It is prepared by first cutting the meat into thin slices and drying it, after which it is bruised in a mortar, or between smooth stones, until thoroughly disintegrated; the fat is then melted and poured over it, and the mess tightly compressed into small bags made out of the buffaloes' skins. Thus preserved, pemmican can be kept for several months without spoiling, and it is said that half a pound of it is equivalent to two pounds of ordinary meat. As may be imagined, Frank and Harry were in a lively state of excitement at the prospect of taking part in a buffalo hunt, and when at last the eventful

day arrived, both were quickly equipped and stationed in the place assigned to them at one end of the line of horsemen. Robert Lazenby rode one of the chestnut harness mares, in attendance on his young masters. Altogether there were twenty well-mounted hunters, under the command of two experienced borderers and former trappers, named Sanson and Indian Bill.

Major Weston remained in camp with the rest of the men, as a precaution against Indians, they being now in the neighbourhood of the warlike Sioux.

The scouts who had been sent off to discover the exact whereabouts of the buffaloes having returned, the whole party proceeded cautiously in the direction indicated. As soon as they reached the summit of a low bank of hillocks they perceived a fine herd of the huge animals roving slowly across the valley below.

From the way in which they stopped every now and then to turn their heads in the direction of the hunters, and to sniff the air, it was evident that their suspicions were already aroused. This, however, was rather owing to the keen sense of smell possessed by these unwieldy creatures than to any lack of precaution on the part of the hunters. The latter had been careful to approach from the leeward side, so that what wind there was blew from the buffaloes towards themselves, and only a few of the men had peered warily over the bank, after first dismounting from their

steeds and advancing on hands and knees. The leader, having thus reconnoitred the game, briefly cautioned the younger members of his troop to be careful not to shoot one another in the excitement of the chase, and then, giving the word to charge, the whole party set spurs to their horses, and clearing the ridge, galloped down the opposite slope at the top of their speed.

The whole herd at once took to their heels and scampered off in headlong flight.

"What glorious sport!" shouted the excited Harry, as his active mustang bounded gaily along.

"Wait a bit," said his brother, "until we get into the thick of them; only mind you do not come to grief. A wounded buffalo is a most dangerous animal."

"Never fear," replied the boy; "Chieftain seems to understand the business well! I've no doubt he has taken part in many a buffalo hunt before to-day."

"Hark, that was a rifle-shot!" said Robert; "someone is already at work."

"Well, here we are just on their heels. Poor brutes, how they are straining every nerve to escape!" cried Frank.

"Each single out a beast," said Robert, "and get close alongside before firing."

"All right," exclaimed the boys, as they guided their horses to the side of a couple of the fattest and

youngest-looking cows, while Robert himself singled out a huge bull.

All was now the greatest confusion and uproar, the reports of rifles and pistols, the shouts of the hunters, and the bellowing of wounded and infuriated buffaloes, together with the heavy tramp of many hundreds of hoofs, creating a deafening tumult; while every now and then a dull heavy thud announced the sudden downfall of one of the huge creatures.

Both the young Westons soon succeeded in slaying their first victim, and having dropped a handkerchief or cap to identify their booty, continued in pursuit of fresh spoils.

Flushed with success, Harry next essayed to bring down a magnificent bull. Frank shouted to him not to be rash, but only received a wave of the hand in reply; and the next minute both the buffalo bull and Harry disappeared over the brow of some rising ground in front. Frank's first impulse was to dash after them, in order to keep his brother in sight and render any assistance that might be necessary, but at that moment a loud shout from Robert arrested his attention.

"Look out, Master Frank!" roared the man, in tones of the greatest alarm and excitement. And not without reason, for, on glancing hastily back, Frank perceived, to his horror, a huge bull charging straight towards him. The white foam was dripping from its mouth and down its flanks, where it mingled with the

blood gushing from numerous bullet-wounds in its neck and shoulder, while its dilated nostrils and fierce glaring eyes showed it to be mad with pain and fury.

Frank had slackened his pace to a canter, undecided whether to follow Harry or not; but, aroused to his own imminent danger by the sight which met his eyes on looking round, he set spurs to his horse and urged him quickly aside. The buffalo was within a few feet of him as Saladin leapt forward—a moment's hesitation, and both horse and rider would have been hurled to the ground by the furious onset.

“Thank Heaven, he is safe!” ejaculated poor Robert, who was almost beside himself at the thought of his young master's peril, especially as he was the primary cause of it, owing to his having failed to bring down his prey, although he had fired no less than ten or twelve shots at the beast.

In *Keating's Narrative* a curious instance of the difficulty of killing a buffalo is mentioned, and is as follows:—“Mr Peale fired fourteen balls into the chest of a buffalo before he killed him, and Mr Scott, with a view to ascertain whether a ball fired at the head would break the frontal bone, discharged his rifle at a dead bull within ten paces; the ball did not penetrate, but merely entangled itself in the hair, where it was found. It had struck the forehead and left a mark before it rebounded.”

Frank immediately joined the servant in pursuit of the wounded animal, but just as they came up with it, and were on the point of firing, it sank down exhausted on the ground. The next moment it rolled over on the ground and expired.

In the meantime Harry had overtaken the bull he was in pursuit of, and brought him to the ground by a well-directed shot behind his ear. After which, reining in his horse, he approached the bull in front, with the intention of giving him the *coup de grâce* by a shot between the eyes, supposing that would at once enter the animal's brain and put a speedy end to his sufferings. His sagacious chestnut, however, was better acquainted with the dangerous nature of the wounded buffalo, and refused to approach him; thereupon Harry foolishly dismounted, and quickly hobbling his horse to prevent its escape, advanced towards his huge quarry on foot. He was in the act of raising his rifle to take aim when the bull suddenly sprang to his feet, and, loudly bellowing, rushed straight at the astonished boy.

This was more than he had bargained for, and what wonder if he dropped his weapon, and, paralysed with fear, stood rooted to the ground!

When the tables have been so suddenly and terribly turned upon him, many a full-grown man—yea, many a brave man—has been for a moment unnerved. It cannot, therefore, be a matter of sur-

prise that an inexperienced lad of fifteen years, or rather less, should lose his head at such an awful moment.

The enraged beast was within a few feet of him, and the next instant poor Harry might have been knocked down and gored to death had not a loud shout of "Jump aside!" caught his ears. Instantly recovering his presence of mind at the familiar sound of his brother's voice, he sprang lightly aside, just as the hot breath of the shaggy monster smote his face.

It was a very narrow escape indeed, and for a moment or two Harry stood dazed and motionless; but this was only momentary, and quickly gave place to an ardent desire to retrieve his character as a fearless hunter in the eyes of his brother and Robert, who had now almost come up to him. Springing to where his rifle lay, he snatched it up, and quickly took aim at the bull, which, having checked its pace, was in the act of turning round to renew the charge. He fired and hit the beast in the side, but it only shook itself, and, more savage than ever, rushed madly at its enemy. Harry was now perfectly calm and collected, and calling to his friends not to interfere, manfully stood his ground, firing shot after shot from his repeating-rifle penetrating breast of the advancing buffalo, but with where it had so little effect that both Frank and Robert left a mark at point of discharging their rifles at the

beast. They had dismounted from their horses, and knelt down upon the ground, in order to insure a steady and accurate aim if they found it necessary to fire. With rifles levelled and fingers on the triggers, they followed the bull's course, and perceiving it within half a dozen yards of the determined boy, Frank was about to cry "Fire!" but at that very instant the huge creature dropped down dead almost at Harry's feet. With a shout of triumph the latter jumped upon the carcass of his late formidable antagonist, and, intoxicated with victory, executed a sort of Highland jig on its shaggy body.

Frank and Robert heartily congratulated the hero on his success, and then, finding that the herd were now scattered in every direction, they remounted their horses and returned to the camp.

Meanwhile the rest of the hunters, weary with slaughtering, were slowly straggling back for fresh horses to harness to the rough sledges which had been constructed the previous day ready for hauling in the buffalo meat. The latter was in great abundance, and the horsemen having purposely attacked the buffaloes in such a way as to drive them during the hunt in the direction of the camp, the sleighs had not far to go for the meat. All was now bustle and excitement; while some skinned and cut up the carcasses, others drove the laden sleighs back to the older men, and the women and children, whose duty it was

to cut the flesh into thin strips and dry it on stages erected over large fires. Some of the meat received no further preparation, but the greater portion was afterwards made into pemmican, as before described. Eventually Harry presented his sister Connie with the beautiful skin, or robe, as it is called, of the fine bull he had killed.





CHAPTER VI.

“THE THRESHOLD OF THE ROCKIES.”

“WHAT grand cliffs!” cried Connie, a few days afterwards, with an exclamation of delight.

“Yes,” said Harry, who was riding near her just then; “are they not exactly like fortifications, old castles, and lofty turrets?”

“Exactly. I wonder what they call them; such bold, high cliffs must surely have a name.”

“I should think so, indeed. I will ride on to the front and make inquiries,” said Harry, as he gave Chieftain his head and cantered forward to where his father was conversing with Sanson and Indian Bill.

Left to herself, the girl sat quite still on her favourite seat in the front of the waggon. As she gazed on the wild and picturesque scene before her, she wondered how such curious freaks of nature could have been brought about, and whether there were anywhere in the annals of mankind a record of these crags. She was not destined to be disappointed.

When Harry returned he was accompanied by his father, who had come to tell his daughter all that he knew or had been able to learn about them from the trappers.

Major Weston drew his horse close alongside the waggon as he said, "Harry tells me you wish to know the name of these extraordinary cliffs."

"I do, indeed," replied Connie. "I feel sure they have a history, and I should not be surprised to hear that you have read about them in one or other of your American books of travel."

"You are right, my dear, for Sanson tells me they are called 'Scott's Bluffs,' and, curiously enough, I was reading about them only the other day."

"Oh, how fortunate!—in *Willis's Anecdotes*?"

"No, they do not relate to the country so far west as this. It was in Washington Irving's *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*. The story is, moreover, a very sad one."

"Oh, dear! but you will tell it to me?"

"Certainly. And you must remember, dear child, that sadness and joy alternate in this life like rain-clouds and sunshine, and the one is no less beneficial than the other, in its right time and place."

Connie remained silent; and after a brief pause, in which her father's thoughts were evidently carried back to some fond remembrance of the past, the story was begun.

“It seems,” said Major Weston, “that many years ago a party of hunters were descending the upper part of the River Platte in canoes, when their frail vessels were suddenly swamped. Their ammunition was all spoilt, and they were consequently unable to kill game for food. In these straits they contrived to live on such edible roots and wild fruits as they could find until they arrived at Laramie’s Fork, a small affluent of the north branch of the Nebraska, about sixty miles above these cliffs. Here one of the unfortunate men was taken seriously ill and was unable to proceed any further. His companions, therefore, came to a halt, intending to remain where they were until he had recovered. When out searching for roots, however, they came across the fresh trail of another party of white men, and the temptation to abandon their helpless companion, and by a forced march seek to overtake this party, proved too great for them to resist.”

“Surely they did not leave him alone to die!” cried Connie, with emotion. “They could not be so heartless as to desert a comrade in his hour of need.”

“If they did, they were cowards and scoundrels,” exclaimed Harry, very emphatically.

“Doubtless they thought if they remained with him they might all lose their lives,” said the Major; “but what will you think of them when I tell you that,

when they had succeeded in overtaking the party of white men, they actually concealed their faithless desertion of Scott, and said that he had died of disease?"

"Oh! father; what wretches! Surely they would afterwards suffer agonies of remorse when they remembered what they had done."

"I only hope they did," cried Harry, "and that the poor fellow's ghost haunted them all the rest of their lives, the brutes!"

"Gently, Harry; remember that the only perfect Man has said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' However," continued the Major, after a short pause, "these misguided men must have felt some remorse when, on returning the following summer in company with others, they chanced suddenly upon the bleached bones of a human skeleton, which, by certain unmistakable signs, they recognised as Scott's. This was fully sixty miles from the place where they had deserted him, and they knew that the unhappy man must have dragged himself that immense distance before death put an end to his sufferings."

"How very sad!" said Connie, her blue eyes dim with tears; "and he had not even the poor consolation of knowing that henceforth these cliffs would bear his name and form his imperishable monument. With what despair he must have looked up at their massive proportions and towering crests!"

"Let us hope that he looked still higher to the help that never fails," said her father.

Each absorbed in their own thoughts, the travellers journeyed for some distance in silence. This was at last broken by an exclamation from Harry, who, pointing in the direction of the river, unslung his rifle, and giving the rein to his horse, started away at a brisk trot.

"What's in the wind now, I wonder?" observed the Major, as he watched his son disappear round a clump of alders in some low-lying ground to the right.

"Why, see!" exclaimed Robert; "there they go."

And as the man spoke a small herd of deer emerged, with leaps and bounds, from the opposite side of the covert. At the same moment came the report of a rifle, and one of the graceful creatures sprang high into the air and then fell motionless upon the ground.

"Bravo!"

"Well done!"

Such were the exclamations of Major Weston and his servant Robert, as they witnessed the skill of the young sportsman. "A capital shot, upon my word," continued the former, while a proud look shone for a moment in his keen grey eyes. "Depend upon it, that lad's a born hunter."

The deer proved to be one of the black-tailed species, a very fine variety, which abounds in that particular neighbourhood. Subsequently both Frank

and Harry shot a considerable number of them, and their flesh proved a most welcome addition to the daily bill of fare.

Having now entered upon the peculiar territory of the restless and predatory Sioux, however, the emigrants were obliged to proceed with caution, particularly as the nature of the ground was so very favourable for the purposes of the Indians' favourite mode of warfare, an ambushade.

The scouts were doubled, and made to beat up the country both in advance and on either side of the train, exploring every nook and hollow, clump and ravine, which could harbour a lurking band of redskins. But, with the exception of one or two false alarms, all went well until one of the outermost spurs of the Rocky Mountains was reached.

The travellers had encamped on a grassy strip of land bordering the Laramie Fork, a branch of the Platte River. It was somewhat early in the evening to form their camp, but the pasturage being unusually good at this spot, it was decided to halt, so that the horses and other animals might have the benefit of a good feed before entering on the hardships which they would necessarily have to encounter in crossing the rough and elevated region of the Medicine Bow Mountains and Bridger's Pass. As the next day happened to be Sunday, the poor creatures would be able to make the most of the luscious pasture.

A lovely evening succeeded the somewhat hot and sultry day, and as soon as the usual light repast was finished, Frank and Harry asked their father's permission to get out for a couple of hours' shooting among the neighbouring rocks. They had observed several mountain sheep, or bighorns, as they are called, nimbly springing from rock to rock, or cropping the tufts of scanty herbage which grew here and there amongst the stones and jutting crags of their lofty and almost inaccessible feeding-grounds.

“And may not I accompany them, dear father?” pleaded Connie. “It is so long since I had a good scramble, and this is such an inviting evening for one. But I forgot,” continued the girl, with a slight touch of sadness in her tones, “I should be a drag on my brothers' movements, and——”

“Oh, no, you would not; we should be delighted to have your company—indeed we should,” broke in both boys simultaneously.

As Connie was about to thank her brothers for their kind observations, Major Weston remarked that he had no objection to her going with them, provided that they did not wander far away from the camp, as they had not met with any signs that Indians were in the neighbourhood. At the same time he cautioned his sons to observe the utmost vigilance and circumspection, and on the slightest symptom of danger to return at once to the encampment. The young

people were soon equipped for the chase, and, taking Robert with them, set out for some bold cliffs about a mile off. Here they hoped to meet with some of the beautiful and active creatures called bighorns. This animal is often confounded with another inhabitant of the Rocky Mountains, the *Ovis montana*, or mountain sheep, which is not so gregarious in its habits, more than two or three being seldom found together.

With the exception that both these curious animals have heads like the common sheep, and prefer to seek their food, and indeed to pass their lives, amidst the most rugged and inaccessible cliffs, except when the snows of winter oblige them to descend into the valley for grass, there is little resemblance between them. The bighorn is altogether a finer animal, with the hair and body of a deer rather than of a sheep, and its flesh is said to be particularly fine and delicate in flavour. The horns frequently measure over three feet in length and twelve or fourteen inches in circumference where they emerge from the head. The mountain sheep, on the other hand, is shorter in the leg, and is clothed with a combination of long coarse hair, overlying a thick coat or fleece of short fine wool, the former admirably suited for throwing off wet, the latter for sustaining the animal heat. Some naturalists are of opinion that this animal is derived from the Argali of Asia, found in the Himalayas and the elevated plains

running westward to the Caucasus, and east and north to Kamschatka and the sea, and that it crossed the ice at Behring's Straits. The bighorn answers more to the description of the *Ovis tragelaphus*, or bearded Argali; in size and figure bearing a considerable resemblance to the deer tribe. It frequents the inland steppes of Barbary, and the mountains of Egypt, but, curious to relate, it is the Rocky Mountain sheep, and not the bighorn, which in America possesses the goatlike appendage of a beard.

"Whist! I see something moving on the edge of that frightful precipice," whispered Frank, as they approached the foot of the cliffs.

"Where?" inquired his sister excitedly.

"Just above that solitary bush, which seems to be growing out of the solid rock there," answered Frank.

"Oh! I see it," exclaimed a chorus of voices, in a rather loud sort of stage whisper.

"Hush! not so loud, please. Ah! he raises his head; he has heard us, I fear."

"What a noble fellow he is!" said Connie. "How I should like to sketch him in that very effective attitude! But I fear he would not wait long enough for me to do so. See, he is stamping his foot to warn his family and friends, I suppose, that there is danger about. What magnificent horns he has! I wonder their weight does not make him afraid of over-

balancing himself, peering down at us in that manner right over a sheer precipice."

"Ah! there he goes! What a wonder he does not break his neck, springing in that reckless manner from rock to rock!" said Frank.

"Why did you not have a shot at him, sir?" queried Robert.

"Because, my dear fellow, I should prefer one of the younger members of his tribe," answered Frank, laughing.

"Yes, I should think that would be the venerable leader of the flock, judging by his immense horns and general appearance," observed Harry thoughtfully.

"I think, Connie dear, if you don't mind, it would be better for you to remain here, while Harry and I try to stalk one of these bighorns; the rocks are too steep and difficult for you to be able to keep up with us, and Robert can stay with you until our return."

"Oh! certainly," replied Connie; "I would rather rest here a little. I fancy I shall be able to secure some pretty and rare specimens for my botanical album. There seems to be a great variety of beautiful flowers in the nooks and crannies of these rocky dells, and Robert can mount guard on that pulpit-shaped rock and enlarge on the wonders of Central North America, or, by a stretch of the imagination, fancy he is back in the Crimea, and that the cliffs above

him are the stubborn walls and battlements of Sebastopol.”

“I’ll mount the rock, Miss, and welcome,” said the worthy Robert; “but as for the rest, it will take me all my time to keep a good look-out for prowling Indians. It seems to me such gentry as them are ten times more crafty and dangerous enemies than even the cunning Russians used to be.”

A merry laugh from Connie and a “Bravo, Robert!” from Harry was the only reply that reached the soldier-servant as he clambered to the top of the rock which was to serve as a temporary watch-tower.

Ere he reached the summit the young hunters were speeding away towards the neighbouring highlands, and he watched them until they disappeared behind a shoulder of the nearest cliffs.





CHAPTER VII.

CARRIED OFF BY RED-SKINS.

AN hour had passed, and Connie was beginning to wish her brothers would return, when a shrill but distant whistle, which she immediately recognised as Frank's, caught her ear.

"What is the meaning of that, I wonder?" she said somewhat anxiously to Robert.

"Oh," replied the man, descending quickly from his elevated position as he spoke, "that is for me. Master Frank told me that if they shot one of those big-horned goats that they were going after, and required help to get it down to the bottom of the rocks, he would blow a long shrill blast on his whistle, like that we have just heard."

"Then I shall be left here alone?" said the girl, in tones of alarm.

"Well, Miss, if you are anyways frightened, of course I will not leave you."

"Oh no; you must certainly go and help my brothers;

it was foolish of me to be afraid when there is really no danger," she replied, half ashamed of her momentary weakness. "I know you will hasten back as quickly as you can, and in the meantime I will make a rough sketch of that curious turret-like rock which you have just vacated."

"Then you are quite sure, Miss, you don't mind my leaving you for half an hour or so?"

"Not the least, Robert; now go, and get back as soon as you can, that's a good fellow."

The next moment Connie found herself alone, and her heart sank within her as she glanced round at the desolate aspect of the place. She half repented of her boldness in allowing the servant to depart, and even ran to the top of one of the numerous little hillocks, with the intention of calling him back, but changed her mind when she saw him already nearly half-way to the cliffs; and persuading herself that her fears were groundless, she sat down upon the grassy slope. Then she took out her pocket-book and began to sketch the bold outline of the distant mountains, with the nearer beetling crags and high bluffs, and, as a foreground, the bold pulpit-like rock already described. At first she kept looking up from her work, and casting timid glances in every direction to make sure that no savage animal, biped or quadruped, was near. Presently, however, as her mind became absorbed in her drawing, the uneasy feeling gradually

wore away, and with it her vigilance, until even the rasping noise made by a ground-squirrel as it worked away with its sharp teeth at the shell of a hickory nut close behind her, or the loud whirr of a covey of quails, as they rose from a neighbouring thicket of low bushes, failed to startle her, or to cause even a careless look in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

All at once the girl sprang to her feet with a startled cry. A dark shadow had fallen across her paper, and, looking round, she saw with horror the painted and bedizened figure of a stalwart young Indian standing close at hand, with his keen black eyes intently fixed upon her.

“Ugh! my fair sister is like an antelope surprised by the hunters;—but why does she wander so far from the lodges of her friends? Is she ignorant that these plains and mountains are the hunting-grounds of the white man’s foes, the brave Sioux?”

Connie’s first impulse had been to seek safety in flight, but when she heard herself addressed in such respectable English the thought flashed across her mind that, after all, the savage might not have any bad intentions towards her. She reflected that it would have been easy for him to have killed or seized her at once had he so desired, and in any case it would be absurd for her to attempt to outrun an Indian. Besides, he seemed to be alone, and might she not

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She saw with horror the painted and bedizened figure of a stalwart young Indian.

adroitly engage him in conversation until her brothers or Robert returned? Surely it must already be time for them to be making their appearance. Acting on this conception, she said to the young chief, for such he evidently was—"My red brother certainly alarmed me; his step was so light that I knew not of his approach until his shadow darkened the leaves of my sketch-book; but in spite of his dark words, I trust the Sioux chief comes as a friend; and I heartily invite him to accompany me and my companions—for I am not alone, at least only for a very short time—to our encampment yonder. My friends will welcome a sachem of the famous Sioux, and the pipe of peace shall go round, and love and friendship prevail, as it ought always to do, between the white and red man."

"My sister has a nimble tongue, and her words sound very fair, but there can be no peace between her people and mine when the pale-faces invade our hunting-grounds, and kill and drive away the buffalo and antelopes without even seeking leave. Ugh! the long-knives treat the red men like dogs."

The Indian's eyes flashed, and a vindictive expression stole across his swarthy countenance as he continued—"but Teconsa shall have his revenge. Ah! ah! he will take the golden-haired daughter of the pale-face leader in payment of this trespass on his lands. Come, my pretty one, you must follow

me. Quick, now; you shall be my wife, the wife of the chief Teconsa. What, you refuse? ah! then, I must use force."

So saying, he stretched out his hand to lay hold of the girl, but at that moment he was seized in the grasp of a gigantic young emigrant, named Rigby, who had crept up unperceived by the Indian, so absorbed was the latter in his project of carrying off the lovely maiden.

Ethan Rigby was the only son of a well-to-do farmer of Madisonville, Kentucky, who, being of a restless and enterprising nature, had sold his possessions and thrown in his lot with the emigrants. Ethan had received a fair education, and was in every way superior to the general run of American pioneers, who, though often good honest fellows, are, as a rule, somewhat uneducated and rude of speech and manners. This young emigrant had fallen desperately in love with the fascinating Miss Weston almost from his first sight of her, and although naturally rather shy, he never lost an opportunity of paying her such attentions as he could, or doing her any service which circumstances might require. It was impossible for the object of all this devotion to remain unconscious of the true state of affairs. But unable as she was to reciprocate his attachment, Connie Weston found Ethan's attentions most embarrassing, and being desirous not to cause such a good and

manly fellow any unnecessary pain, she studiously refrained from giving him any encouragement. She therefore let it be seen in numberless ways that she regarded him with no warmer sentiments than those of friendship and respect. Ethan, indeed, perceived this plainly enough, but being of a sanguine temperament, he did not despair.

"I *will* make her love me," he would say to himself; "she must love me, or life will not be worth living. If I cannot win her, then I should like to die for her, and show her how great and true my devotion really is."

Poor young Rigby! he seemed to have a presentiment even then that one or other was to be his fate.

On the present occasion he had noticed Miss Weston leave the camp in company with her two brothers and the servant Robert, and being well aware of the dangerous neighbourhood in which they were encamped, he shouldered his rifle and followed some distance in the rear of the party, determined not to be too far off if anything wrong should befall the light of his eyes, as he delighted to call Constance.

After Robert had left his conspicuous post of observation in answer to Frank's whistle, young Rigby had drawn nearer to the spot occupied by Miss Weston. As he lay, screened from observation by some low wormwood bushes, he had perceived the stealthy approach of the Sioux chief. Grasping his

rifle, he took steady aim at the Indian, with the intention of firing if the latter showed the slightest disposition to injure the girl. He soon found, however, that such was not the design of the savage, and at once decided upon taking him prisoner instead of shooting him.

Like all truly brave men, the young emigrant shrank from shedding the blood of a fellow-creature, except at the last extremity and when no milder measure would suffice. Accordingly he laid down his trusty rifle, and taking advantage of whatever cover the nature of the ground afforded him, stole quietly up behind the Sioux brave, much in the same way as the latter had stolen up behind Miss Weston. The manœuvre, as we have seen, was so far perfectly successful, owing, in some measure no doubt, to the preoccupied state of the Indian, who was quite absorbed in the endeavour to possess himself of the lovely white girl.

Connie gave expression to the glad sense of relief she felt at this timely sense of deliverance by a few heartfelt words of gratitude to her deliverer. Then she sprang to the top of an adjacent boulder to see if there were no signs of her absent brethren and Robert. An exclamation of intense delight escaped her lips as she beheld three distant figures emerge from behind the shoulder of rock previously referred to, and commence to cross the intervening stretch of level ground.

In an instant her handkerchief was waving at arm's length above her head, and in a few moments the signal was answered by her approaching friends. This little incident did not escape the quick eye of the captured Indian, who immediately ceased his fruitless struggles to free himself from the powerful grasp of his huge captor, and suddenly imitated the sharp bark of a prairie dog three times.

The effect was magical. In less time than it takes to write it, a score or two of Sioux warriors suddenly emerged from the shady bosom of a leafy little dell not fifty yards away. It was as if the ground had quietly opened and discharged the motley band of decked and painted red-skins. There was a hurried rush, and the next moment Rigby, who, on perceiving how matters stood, had released his prisoner in order to defend himself if possible from this fresh danger, was surrounded by the fierce mob of excited savages, who, with knives and tomahawks brandished aloft, only awaited a signal from their chief to hack the unfortunate young man in pieces. Surprised as he was at the desperate situation in which he so rapidly found himself placed, and almost unarmed, having only a small hunting-knife, the young Kentuckian betrayed no sign of fear. Placing his back against the large boulder up which Connie had scrambled, and drawing his tiny weapon, he stood like a lion at bay.

Terrible as the situation was, Connie could not help

thinking what a fine subject he would make in that defiant attitude for a clever artist. The splendid physique, the flashing eye, the feet firmly planted, the broad expanded chest, and the finely-shaped head thrown proudly back, displaying the swelling muscles of his massive yet finely-proportioned neck—this, together with the wild and threatening group of savage figures that encompassed him, all combined to form a scene at once grand and terrible. In calmer moments it always suggested to Connie's mind the image of some ancient gladiator standing in the arena of a Greek or Roman amphitheatre, and prepared to battle for his life against the fierce and hungry wild beasts already loosed upon him.

For a few brief moments a deathlike and ominous silence prevailed as the chief contemplated his noble enemy with a look of mingled anger and admiration. Then he motioned to his warriors to stand back, and advancing towards Rigby addressed him as follows:—

“The big pale-face is very brave, he does not know fear, his heart is large; but he cannot fight all my men at once and hope to live. Let him throw away his knife and become my prisoner; he shall not be hurt. Teconsa has spoken.”

“Never!” cried Rigby; “I will never be taken alive or abandon this helpless lady to your tender mercies while I have strength to defend her!”

"But the odds are too great," pleaded Connie, who was anxious to save her gallant champion's life. "I beg you will throw down your knife and submit to be bound; it is the only chance for both of us. Besides, help is near," she whispered.

"I will lay down my bowie-knife since it is your wish," said the young man, suiting the action to the words, "and with it perchance my only hope of making a successful resistance, for, as I said before, I will never surrender to a red-skin, to be tortured and made the sport of all the fiendish tribe. No, I will put no faith in an Indian's promise. Set on your hell-hounds, cowardly chief! What odds if I do lose my life," he added bitterly, "since it is of little value to those for whom alone I would care to retain it, and consequently only a burden to myself?"

At this point one of the Indians rushed up to his chief and whispered something in his ear—no doubt to the effect that the young hunters and their attendant were approaching the spot, for he immediately ordered half of his men to lay aside their arms and secure the now defenceless Kentuckian, while the rest brought up the horses which had been secreted in the hollow dell or ravine. The latter party quickly performed their allotted task, but their comrades were less fortunate. They rushed upon their solitary antagonist with the confidence begotten of overwhelming numbers, but only to be dashed aside, or hurled back again like some

mighty wave when it breaks against a stubborn rock. Once, twice, and yet a third time did Rigby cast them off; and then a fallen Indian seized his legs and clung tightly round them, which so impeded and clogged his efforts that at the next onset he was borne to the earth, bringing down three or four of the savages with him.

Meantime Teconsa had seized Connie, and, assisted by one of his warriors, had placed her before him on his horse and galloped off. He was quickly followed by the remaining Indians, with the exception of two unfortunate wretches. These were unable to extricate themselves from beneath the stalwart frame of their desperate adversary, who lay with one under each arm, thus effectually pinning them to the ground.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE PURSUIT.

SCARCELY had the flying Indians disappeared when the two young Westons and Robert rushed breathlessly up the little mound, and, astonished beyond measure by the sight which met their eyes, stared wildly around, half expecting to be immediately set upon by a host of lurking savages. As they drew near the place where their sister was to have awaited their return, they heard sounds as of horses' hoofs and struggling men, and, almost beside themselves with the wildest apprehensions of what might have befallen her, they rushed madly forward. Had the Indians remained in ambush they could easily have killed or overpowered so rash a party. Older and more experienced travellers or hunters in these dangerous solitudes would, in the same circumstances, have approached with the utmost caution and circumspection; but the suspense of the returning hunters was so terribly keen as to cause them to forget everything

except their loved one's pressing danger. Frank was the first to recognise their travelling companion, Ethan Rigby, in the huge prostrate figure that held a wriggling Indian beneath each arm.

"What has happened? Tell me at once!" cried the excited lad.

"Secure these greasy scoundrels first with some of that cord you carry, and then I will help you to track the other thieves, and release Miss Weston," was the prompt reply, as promptly acted upon.

"Now these rogues are safely bound, back to back, and heel to heel—follow me," exclaimed the young Kentuckian, striding rapidly forward on the track of the vanished war-party.

For some time they pressed forward in silence. The trail was plain and easy to follow until they began to come near the pass that led towards the heart of the wild and lofty mountains. It then began to grow less distinct at every step, owing to the harder nature of the ground and the approach of darkness—for the sun had long since set. At last even Rigby was obliged to confess that he was uncertain whether the whole of the party had taken the route they were then pursuing, or whether they had divided, and half of them gone in another direction in order to baffle their pursuers.

"It strikes me," said Robert, "that it would have been wiser to have made the best of our way back to

camp and procured assistance ; we could then have got together a strong party of well-mounted volunteers, and followed these crafty red men with some chance of success."

"That's what I've been thinking for the last half-hour," said Rigby, "but I could not muster sufficient courage to say it, for I am sure these young gentlemen would, like myself, have preferred at all hazards to attempt the rescue of their sister, rather than return without her. What will the Commandant think of us when we relate the horrid story? He will say, and justly too, not knowing the whole of the circumstances—'Cowards, why did you not save my daughter, or perish in the attempt?'"

"And the worst of it is," said Frank, "we—or rather I—disobeyed my father's instructions, for he particularly enjoined the utmost carefulness and circumspection, and I am most fearfully and inexcusably to blame for leaving my sister without any protection."

"But everything seemed so calm and peaceful, and we all thought there was not the least risk in leaving Connie for a short time, but I wish——" and here poor Harry broke down and wept disconsolately at the thought of the fearful calamity that had befallen them.

"Let us make at once for the camp," said Frank ; "I should be worse than a coward if I allowed any

considerations of personal censure to interfere with my doing all that can be done to retrieve my error; and I feel certain that the plan proposed by Robert is the only one that offers the least chance of success. It is sheer madness to expect to overtake and defeat the Sioux when we are on foot, while they are well mounted and acquainted with all the intricacies of the rugged mountain region before us."

"Hist!" said Rigby sharply, throwing himself down and placing his ear to the ground. "Yes," he continued, "I was not mistaken; there is a mounted party approaching at a canter—Sioux in search of us, I'll be bound. Follow me up these rocks, where no horseman can reach us, and where we shall be able to command the pass. Quick, now, or we shall be too late!"

After a brief but somewhat hazardous scramble they all four reached a kind of natural gallery which overlooked the entrance of the narrow defile through which the cavalcade was rapidly advancing towards them. Rigby directed his companions to take up their positions under cover of some detached masses of rock which had lodged on the gallery in their descent from the cliffs above, and then he cautioned them to examine their rifles, to see that all were right and fit for service after their rough and hurried scramble.

The moon, which was only in its first quarter, had

now risen, and cast a weird and uncertain light upon the wild and desolate spot, brilliantly illuminating the bold masses of grey rock where its rays fell directly upon them, and throwing the densest shadows where such was not the case.

For a few seconds the silence was only broken by the sharp clatter of the horses' hoofs on the hard and stony ground; but as the troop began to emerge from the deep gloom of the narrow pass, Rigby, confident that his surmise was correct, and that they would turn out to be the same party of Indians that had carried off Miss Weston, whispered to the young Westons to take steady aim at the first two horsemen, while he and Lazenby made sure of the next two.

"It won't do," he continued warningly, "to throw away a single shot. Let no one fire until I give the word. Steady now; here they come!"

The riders had checked their steeds and were approaching at a walking pace. The moonlight fell full upon the four who were a little in advance of the rest, and from their garb and accoutrements, and the fantastic trappings of the horses, both Frank and Harry, who were posted behind the same rock, were convinced they were the hated Sioux, so, with their fingers on the triggers of their rifles, they breathlessly awaited the word to fire.

"Now," said Robert, in a hoarse whisper, "had we not better fire before they pass beneath us?"

But his companion, who was staring fixedly forward, suddenly threw up the levelled barrel and shouted out, "Hold! they are friends, or at least white men; and yonder is Miss Weston herself, or my sight cruelly deceives me."

"Hurrah! what joy!" exclaimed Harry, "Connie, dear Connie, is it indeed you? Speak and relieve our anxiety, for we are almost distracted on your account."

"Yes, it is Connie," replied the sweet and well-known voice," and I am well and unharmed, thanks to most providentially meeting with these brave kind friends."

"Thank God!" said Frank fervently.

"Amen!" responded Robert and the young Kentuckian.

Connie's escape had indeed been marvellous. On reaching the mountains, the Indians had divided into two bands, as conjectured by Ethan Rigby, and while half their number turned to the northward, the other, led by Teconsa, with his captive still held in front of him, followed the river, which here threads its way through the narrow defiles and deep gorges which afford an outlet to its waters, and constitute the only pass between a bold spur of the Park Mountains and Laramie Peak.

The poor girl had endeavoured by tears and entreaties to induce the chief to restore her to her

friends ; but neither the promise of a costly ransom, her earnest supplications, nor her final threat of the terrible vengeance of her soldier parent, had any apparent effect on the heartless savage.

Exhausted with grief and fear, Connie would have fallen from the horse but for the strong arm of her powerful captor. At last, finding how hopeless and unavailing were all her efforts to obtain release, she ceased struggling, and endeavoured to resign herself to the thought that, after all, she was under the protection of the Almighty.

The short twilight was now rapidly giving place to darkness, and still the Indians rode silently on, without any sign of halting to form the usual encampment for the night. Suddenly, however, as they entered an open valley, they were confronted by a well-armed and well-mounted party of hunters or trappers approaching from the opposite direction. The red men instantly drew rein and wheeled their horses round the way they had come, but not before their presence had been discovered by the advancing whites. Teconsa alone maintained his ground. He saw that to retreat by the narrow pass, already blocked by his retiring followers, would be to court disaster. Familiar with every path and outlet of the rocky wilderness he knew that there was at a short distance to the right of him the entrance to a similar ravine to that through which he had just passed. Setting spurs to

his horse, the chief raised the loud war-whoop of the Sioux, and made as if he were going directly towards the group of hunters, who formed in line, and with their rifles levelled, prepared, as they thought, to receive a wild charge of Indians. When, however, he had covered half the distance that intervened between himself and his enemies, Teconsa suddenly turned his horse's head and made straight for the passage mentioned. Connie felt that now or never was her chance of rescue, so, with the courage of despair, she raised a loud and piercing cry for help.





CHAPTER IX.

RESCUED.

CONSTANCE WESTON'S wild, half-despairing cry was heard, and the next instant a ringing British cheer resounded through the air. At the same time three or four horsemen started in hot pursuit.

The horse upon which the young Sioux and his captive were mounted was not the usual Indian pony, but a powerful and well-bred animal which had doubtless been stolen from the camp of some luckless travellers or hunters, and, on account of its speed and beauty, had been appropriated by the chief himself. Moreover, the latter knew every turn and twist of the difficult route, and for some time the issue of the chase seemed more than doubtful; indeed, the Indian succeeded in distancing and leaving far behind him all except one of his pursuers.

This last seemed determined not to be shaken off. He was mounted on a splendid grey horse, and its

light colour enabled Connie to see how cleverly it followed their steed's retreating steps over the most difficult country, horse and rider both seeming exempt from fatigue or fear.

At last, exhausted with its double burden, Teconsa's steed no longer answered to the bit and spur, so that the white horse gained rapidly upon them.

Perceiving that continued flight was useless, the chief pulled up, and for a moment seemed to hesitate whether to remain and fight his persistent tracker, or to dismount, leave his captive, and escape on foot. A rapid glance at the determined countenance and flashing eyes of the noble youth who, pistol in hand, was riding down upon him, made the Indian decide in favour of discretion.

In a few moments, therefore, he had disappeared from sight amongst the neighbouring rocks.

The sudden manner in which Teconsa sprang from his steed brought Connie also to the ground, but fortunately she was not hurt; and the next moment her gallant rescuer had leapt from his horse and was assisting her to rise.

"I trust you are none the worse for this perilous adventure. No doubt you have been carried off from one of the frontier settlements," he said.

"None the worse, thank you," replied Connie, "except feeling very tired, although I have not been placed at the tender mercies of these horrid Indians for so

long a time as you suppose. It was only a short time before sunset that I fell into their hands, and my friends are encamped not far from here."

"I am very glad of that," answered the stranger; "we will all push on and join your camp for the night, and thus relieve the terrible anxiety which your friends must doubtless experience on your account as soon as possible."

"You are most kind," said Connie, a slight blush suffusing her pale cheeks as her eyes met those of the handsome stranger earnestly fixed upon her; "and my father will not know how to thank you sufficiently for your noble exertions on my behalf. Indeed," she added with emotion, "we shall both be eternally in your debt."

"Not in the least," he replied, "I count it a great privilege to have been of any service to you;" and he gracefully raised his broad-brimmed hat, displaying a smooth white forehead and a mass of curly dark-brown hair. "But," he continued, glancing anxiously round, "it won't do to linger here. Permit me to assist you on to my own horse; he will carry you safely, while I can lead the other until it has recovered itself sufficiently for me to mount."

Connie quickly obeyed, for it was an easy feat for her to keep her balance on a man's saddle; and as they slowly retraced their steps she could not help admiring the tall athletic figure and easy courteous

manner of her charming young conductor, who frequently glanced behind to assure himself of the safety of his charge, and to utter a few cheerful words of encouragement while leading the way down the rugged and dangerous ravine.

They had not proceeded far, however, before they met some of the youth's companions coming in search of him, and together they soon reached the rest of his party. The latter had become somewhat anxious about Connie's deliverer, especially a fine-looking man of commanding appearance, who seemed to be the leader.

Captain Trevor, R.N., had been sent from England on important Government business to British Columbia and Vancouver's Island, and was now returning home by way of the United States. He was accompanied by his son Ernest, a servant, and some Rocky Mountain trappers and hunters, whom he had engaged to escort and guide him through the Indian country. Some of these latter individuals belonged to a class known as the Free Trappers of the West, who are thus graphically described by Washington Irving in his *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*: "Their very appearance and equipment exhibited a piebald mixture, half civilised and half savage. Many of them looked more like Indians than white men in their garbs and accoutrements, and their very horses were caparisoned in barbaric style, with fantastic trappings." And again: "There is perhaps no class of men on the

face of the earth who lead a life of more continued exertion, peril, and excitement, and who are more enamoured of their occupations, than the Free Trappers of the North-West. No toil, no danger, no privation can turn the trapper from his pursuit. His passionate excitement at times resembles a mania. In vain may the most vigilant and cruel savages beset his path ; in vain may rocks and precipices and wintry torrents oppose his progress ; let but a single track of a beaver meet his eye and he forgets all dangers and defies all difficulties."

This motley escort were themselves proceeding to St Louis to dispose of their peltries, or skins of buffalo, beaver, fox, and other animals, and to lay in a store of ammunition, trinkets, and such articles as would be useful in their occupation, and in bartering with the Indians for peltries. It was after many weeks of arduous travelling through the vast mountain wilderness, and while making a forced march in order to reach good pasturage for their hungry horses, that Captain Trevor and his fellow-travellers so opportunely encountered the party of Sioux who were carrying off Miss Weston.





CHAPTER X.

ROUND THE CAMP-FIRE.

TERRIBLE was the anxiety of Major Weston, and indeed the whole camp, at the prolonged absence of Miss Weston and the hunting-party, including young Rigby, who was supposed to have accompanied them, as he had been observed to shoulder his rifle and leave the camp soon afterwards. Parties of the most active and experienced of the emigrants were organised and despatched in search of the absentees. One was headed by the Major himself, and great was his delight when, on approaching the spot from which his daughter had been carried off, he met a large party of white men, among whom he quickly recognised his beloved children, with Rigby and Robert.

There was a scene of great rejoicing in the camp that night. Major Weston invited the English naval officer and his son and young Rigby to his

own tent, and feasted them on the best his stores afforded. The rest of the strangers were hospitably entertained by the most well-to-do amongst the emigrants.

The stirring incidents of the evening naturally formed the chief topic of the conversation, and were graphically described by some of the participators. Connie gave an eloquent account of Ethan Rigby's gallant efforts on her behalf, and his desperate struggle with overwhelming numbers of the enemy. She also described her terrible ride, the fortunate encounter with Captain Trevor's party, the clever ruse of Teconsa, and the exciting pursuit and ultimate rescue of her by Ernest Trevor.

As she reached that part of her story relating to the latter hero, a close observer might have noticed some heightening of the colour on her cheek and a slight tremor of her voice. Rigby, too, who, with eyes fixed intently on the speaker, had been listening with wrapt attention up to this point, moved uneasily in his place, at one moment half rising from the bundle of faggots which served him for a seat, and the next stirring the crackling and sputtering fire with one of his huge feet. As Miss Weston concluded, he arose, lighted his pipe with a red-hot ember, and paced several times to and fro, as if in deep thought. It was only when Harry began to describe the fearful shock experienced by himself, Frank, and

Robert, on discovering the loss of their sister, and then their hopeless pursuit, with its happy termination at the most critical moment of the ambuscade, that the young Kentuckian resumed his seat and his equanimity.

The night was now far advanced, but everyone's nerves had been strung to such a pitch of excitement that even without the copious draughts of strong coffee, so liberally provided and gladly partaken of, sleep would have seemed out of the question. It was therefore proposed by Captain Trevor that the fire should be replenished, and that each in turn should tell some authentic story of Indian adventure. The suggestion having been received with acclamation, it was immediately acted upon, and first one and then another told stories of the Indians, which showed that the white men had often treated them with great cruelty, and that their vindictiveness and enmity was only a necessary consequence. Finally, Ernest Trevor related simply and pathetically the story of how the famous Cornstalk, Sachem of the Shawnees and king of the Northern Confederacy, was basely detained prisoner when he had gone to the Fort of Point Pleasant to make overtures of peace, and afterwards cruelly murdered, together with his heroic son.

"It is no wonder," exclaimed young Trevor, in conclusion, "that thenceforward, the Shawnees, the most

warlike tribe of the West, became the most deadly and implacable foes of the white man."

Everyone had been listening to the narration with breathless attention, while the young man betrayed by the tones of his voice the generous emotion stirred in his breast at the thought of the cruel and untimely death of such noble warriors. And when he had ended more than one of his hearers brushed away a tear, while the spirited but tender-hearted Connie wept audibly.

The Commandant arose from his seat when he perceived that, and giving his daughter his arm, led her gently away to her own snug quarters in the waggon, and bade her an affectionate good-night.





CHAPTER XI.

CONNIE AND ERNEST.

Most of the wearied travellers slept until a very late hour the following morning.

The other emigrants had long ago breakfasted and occupied themselves in various ways, Sunday morning though it was—for there were works of necessity, such as preparing food, &c., which in their migratory life must be attended to when there was a halt—before Major Weston's party began to show signs of being awake and about again.

Robert rose first, and laying aside the rug in which he had been sleeping, set about replenishing the fire with the great boughs and dry tree-roots which had been collected the evening before. Then he went across to the waggon, and tapped rather loudly at the woodwork of it.

“Well?” said Connie's voice from within the canvas-covered vehicle.

“Miss Connie, might I be so bold as to ask you to

make haste and get up. I should like us to have a nice breakfast for our guests," said the worthy man. "Master was saying to me last night," he added, "that we were to have some steaks of venison and a couple of the buffalo tongues we have preserved. It'll be a power of cooking, though—on Sunday too!"

"But we cannot help that, Robert," returned the girl's cheerful voice; "we have no cold meat, and I will soon manage the cooking."

"That you will, Miss, for I never saw anyone like you," replied Robert, with an air of great satisfaction as he returned to the fire.

Connie hastily dressed. She had passed a very restless, uneasy night, at one time falling asleep and dreaming that she was being carried off again by a terrible Indian, then awaking in terror to the soothing recollection that Ernest Trevor had saved her life. Somehow she thought of that much oftener than of the equally brave conduct of Ethan Rigby. Ernest had come to the rescue at such an extreme moment, when she had had time to realise her danger, and had been watching every hope of deliverance die out, as she thought, for her. Then—but how can we explain how it is one young man finds favour in a girl's eyes when the other, equally deserving, sighs for it in vain? It was of Ernest Connie thought as she lingered a moment before her little hand-glass to tie a knot of pale-blue ribbon at her white throat. It was because

of him that she regretted that her face looked absolutely colourless. She was not usually at all solicitous about her appearance. But then, as she said to herself, circumstances alter cases, and she might never see young Trevor and his father again, and she would like them to carry away a pleasant memory of the girl whose life the younger had been the means of saving.

Peeping through a chink in the canvas of the waggon, she could see Ernest Trevor pacing up and down in earnest conversation with his father at a little distance.

"How handsome he looks, and how brave he is!" she thought. And then, mindful of the duties of hospitality, she descended from the waggon, and was soon busily engaged in cooking, while Robert spread the breakfast cloth on a table of nature's own construction, a flat moss-covered mound.

Captain Trevor, coming up to the fair cook presently, complimented her on her employment, and looked admiringly at the graceful way in which, with sleeves upturned and wearing a large apron, she was performing it.

He was pleased with the modest, unassuming manner in which she replied, and the ingenuity with which she led the conversation away from herself.

The breakfast was pronounced a great success.

After it was over a space was cleared within the

encampment, and, with the acquiescence of the other emigrants and travellers, it was announced that Major Weston was about to read the Morning Service of the Church of England.

Very soon many men, women, and children had assembled, and perfect order prevailed while the Major read in his sonorous tones the beautiful words of the English Liturgy. Two or three hymns were sung, and after a short address from Captain Trevor, who was announced as "the stranger amongst us" by Major Weston, the congregation dispersed.

Later in the day Connie and Ernest Trevor had more than one long conversation together, in which they were each delighted with the similarity of their tastes and opinions. It was a new experience for each to find another fresh young mind alike, and yet how delightfully unlike, its own. And through all their pleasure the thought of the approaching separation on the morrow intervened with its dark shadow at intervals which became shorter and shorter.

When Connie, with flushed cheeks and downcast eyes, was preparing breakfast the following morning Captain Trevor and his son came to her, and the latter said abruptly, "I have been trying to persuade my father to allow me to go to California with your party, Miss Weston. I should like it so much better than going home to study medicine in old England."

Connie looked up with an unmistakable flush of pleasure.

"But, Ernie, it would break your mother's heart if I returned alone," interposed his father in somewhat pained accents; "and you know what her great wish for you is. I am silent about my own."

"Oh! of course I will give up my wishes for yours and her's," said Ernest quickly, "only I cannot help regretting that duty and inclination should be so widely severed. So you must let me make my little moan."

"Certainly, my boy," but Captain Trevor did not stop to hear it. He sauntered away to meet Major Weston, who was returning from his morning bathe in the river.

"Do you not think it would be a grander life to fight the fight of civilization in the wilds of California than to return to swell the crowded ranks of a crowded profession in England?" asked Ernest.

Connie hesitated. For one moment the idea of having the pleasant society of this brave young man during their long journey, and then perhaps permanently in the strange country to which they were journeying, seemed very alluring. Should she persuade him—he required little persuading—to urge the matter still further with his father? Should she suggest that his mother might be appeased and won over to consent to the altered plan? She spurned the

thought, and raising her beautiful eyes to his, she answered, "I think, Mr Trevor, that nothing in the world is so grand as for one to give up one's own inclination for the sake of duty, especially duty to one's parents."

Ernest bowed, with a glance of keen admiration at the noble girl, but he had no time to reply, for just then his father and Major Weston joined them.

A couple of hours afterwards, however, while the others were all engaged with parting remarks and mutual compliments and good wishes, finding himself alone near Connie, for the gallant grey stood between them and the rest of the party, Ernest raised the girl's hand to his lips, murmuring, "Duty shall be henceforth my motto, Miss Weston, for your sake and for the sake of all that is good and noble."

Connie was deeply affected, and as he turned away she placed a locket in his hand, begging him to accept it as a small memento of the valuable service he had rendered her.

With a glance that expressed more than he could say, Ernest vaulted into his saddle, and, lifting his hat, cantered after his friends, who had by this time already started.

Connie stood looking after him for a few moments, and then she too disappeared from the scene. Something evidently required her presence in the waggon, her brothers concluded, as she did not leave it

for quite half an hour. When she did she looked very pale, and appeared to be disinclined to converse.

Meanwhile the vast train of waggons had once more been set in motion, and the faces of the patient travellers turned westward.

Connie presently took her accustomed seat in the front of the waggon, and in vain tried to be cheerful. Her usually buoyant spirits seemed weighed down by an undefinable dread. Some terrible foreboding of evil had taken possession of her, a foreboding as real as it was strange and unaccountable, which would not be shaken off.

At length, to divert her mind, she took up a small book. It was a collection of Longfellow's poems. Carelessly turning over the leaves, she came upon one of her favourite pieces, "The Psalm of Life," which of course she knew by heart. Even when she had laid down the volume, the words—

"Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream,
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem,"

were almost ringing in her ears, for they seemed strangely appropriate to her feelings and circumstances at the time.

Again, as she watched the way-worn emigrants tramping bravely forward alongside their active teams,

encouraging them with voice and whip, or anon putting their own broad shoulders to the wheel to help them out of some deep watercourse or treacherous bog, she thought of the verse which seemed particularly applicable to their situation—

“Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way ;
But to act that each to-morrow
Finds us further than to-day.”

Presently the girl took up some half-finished socks which she was knitting for one of the poor emigrant's children, and as she worked her thoughts gradually became more cheerful. She remembered how young Trevor had positively asserted that he would revisit America as soon as he had passed his examination, and before settling down to a practice. Moreover, he had promised to look up the Westons, wherever they might be settled, and Connie felt sure that he would keep his word.





CHAPTER XII.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

AFTER breaking up their camp on the Laramie River, the emigrants struck out in a westerly direction. For two or three days their route lay across broken and difficult ground. The pasturage was good, however, and game abundant, so that the horses and other live stock and their owners fared equally well. The great drawback was the necessity for constant vigilance owing to the proximity of the warlike Sioux, together with the fact that the nature of the ground was favourable to a surprise. It was probably owing as much to the skill and forethought of the commandant, aided by the experience of two or three old trappers and hunters, as to the strength of the company that no interference occurred. The Indians were several times observed to signal to one another from the summits of the adjacent hills, but they never ventured upon an attack.

Although the land rises gradually all the way from the Missouri to the base of the mountains, it was not

until the fourth morning after leaving their camp on the Laramie River that the emigrants fairly commenced their struggles to surmount the vast barrier which forms the great backbone or dividing range of North America. This immense chain is called the Rocky Mountains, and extends for nearly 2000 miles from the Anahuac Mountains of Mexico to the mouth of the Mackenzie River in the Arctic Ocean.

As the leading waggons reached the summit of a rocky ridge known as the Medicine Bow Mountains—a sort of shoot or spur of the main range—the sun was nearly setting. What a magnificent view burst upon the sight of the weary travellers! Standing boldly out before them were the Rocky Mountains in all their grandeur and immensity.

In front of them and to right and left, as far as the eye could reach, stretched ridge after ridge and peak after peak. Almost due west rose the frowning masses of the Park Mountains, their lofty summits culminating to the south in the towering height of Long's Peak. This noble landmark mounts skyward to an altitude of over 14,000 feet, and is capped with eternal snow. Here also the watershed, or "the great Divide," as it is called, bends backwards and forwards, enclosing deep and fertile valleys rich in pasturage and timber. These are known as parks, some of which are of large size, hence the name of the mountains.

In these parks rise some of the great rivers which go to swell the waters of the Mississippi and the Missouri on the one hand, and the Rio Colorado on the other.

To the north-east, Laramie Peak stood out in lonely majesty, while far away to the north-west rose the snowy summits of the Wind River Mountains. The three Titans reared themselves upwards in the far distance until their shadowy outlines were lost in gauzy cloud. But, nearer, the rays of the setting sun tipped the mountain points with crimson and gold, and the proud and snowy crest of Fremont's Peak assumed first a dazzling robe of liquid blue, then yellow, violet, and purple—by turns a sapphire, a topaz, or an amethyst. Then it gradually changed and became suffused with the warm, bright rose-coloured light of the after-glow. And, finally, as the sun sank lower and lower below the horizon it turned into a mighty chrysolite.

The Wind River range of mountains forms one of the most remarkable features of these Western Alps. It is a vast watershed in which three of the mightiest rivers take their rise. The first of these is the Missouri, which runs a south-easterly course of no less than 2500 miles before it enters the Mississippi, and then their united streams, after flowing southwards for another 1500 miles, discharge their waters into the Gulf of Mexico; secondly, there is the Columbia River, which flows in nearly an opposite direction into

the Pacific Ocean; and, lastly, the Green River or Rio Colorado, which finds an outlet to the southward in the Gulf of California.

After that, the progress of the emigrant train, though interesting, became somewhat monotonous. How they struggled through the sand and dust of that desolate region which borders on the Bitter Creek! And how at last their eyes were gladdened by the sight of the clear and sparkling waters and grassy banks of the Green River!

Here Major Weston and his fellow travellers determined to halt for a week or ten days in order to recruit their jaded animals. The last 100 miles had all but finished some of them, owing to the terrible nature of the barren tract through which they had had to pass, and the fact that they were already much reduced in flesh and spirits by the long journey up the mountains.

For nearly two days and one night the emigrants had been unable to procure water for their horses and other live stock, and had only a scanty supply carried in bottles and other vessels for their own use.

It was touching to observe how eagerly the poor, dumb animals struggled forward when once the broad stream was sighted. They seemed to strain every nerve of their weak and emaciated frames in order to slake the fiery thirst that was consuming them.

The camp was formed on the western bank of the

river, in a spot where there was abundance of good grass. Here the poor animals were all turned loose to feed and take their well-earned rest. As, however, parties of Blackfoot Indians were reported by the commandant's scouts to be in the neighbourhood, every precaution was taken to prevent their being stolen. Sentries, with rifle in hand, were placed at regular intervals all round the pasture on which the stock was grazing by day, and at nightfall the latter were driven into an enclosure prepared for them between the waggons and the river.

As it was absolutely necessary for the emigrants to remain there sometime, the camp was formed with more than ordinary care. It was situated within the bend of the river, which thus protected about half of its circumference. The other half was secured by cutting a trench and throwing up a bank, which was eventually rendered still more effective by driving in a line of stout stakes, so as to form a sort of open palisade about 5 feet high on top of the low bank. These stakes were cut from young cotton-wood trees which abounded in the neighbourhood. Major Weston took especial care to clear off any trees or bushes which were found growing within rifle shot of the camp on either side of the river, as these would have afforded cover to any lurking savages, and enabled them to approach near enough to pick off the sentries or fire into the camp.

Owing to the numbers of willing workers, these operations were completed before sunset on the day after their arrival at the Seeds-kee-dee Agie, as the Indians call this river.

While Frank, who was naturally of a warlike disposition, had taken an active part in fortifying the camp, Harry had accompanied two of the scouts, who had orders from his father to beat up the country around in search of game, and also to note if there were traces of any great number of Blackfeet in the neighbourhood.

They only came across the smouldering ashes of a fire which had been recently deserted by a small party of the latter gentry, but in crossing a narrow valley about two miles from camp they came upon the track of a somewhat numerous herd of moose deer. After kneeling down and making a critical examination of the ground, the elder scout—an old trapper and hunter who answered to the name of Indian Bill—declared that the trail which led northward was not more than a few hours old.

“Hurrah!” shouted Harry, forgetting in his excitement that he had only been permitted to accompany the scouts on the distinct understanding that he was to be as stealthy as a cat, and never to speak above a whisper.

“Whist! yonker,” hissed the old hunter, casting a withering glance at the boy; “you’re only fit for a

marooning party! Do yer want to bring the whole tarnation tribe of Blackfeet down upon us?"

"You bet he don't for his own sake!" replied the other man good-naturedly, noticing Harry's flushed face; "I guess he's no more wish to part with his glossy young hair than you have, old hoss, with that grizzly scalp of your'n! But you cannot put old heads on young shoulders!"

"Wal, I calculate yer 're about right there; but look spry and let us get back to camp."

"To camp! why, aren't we going after the moose?" exclaimed Harry in tones of despair. All the visions of an exciting hunt which his vivid imagination had pictured suddenly vanishing into thin air.

"Never fear, my lad," replied the old hunter, who really admired the boy's ardour; "but we may as well let them know at the camp, which is not far from here, what we are after. We shall probably not come up with the moose before sundown, in which case we shall have to be out all night."

"And I guess the general would want to know what 'ad become of Master Harry before then!" broke in the other scout, with a knowing glance at the youth in question. "Besides," he continued quickly, as he caught the angry flash of the boy's eyes, "we shall want a couple of mules to pack the meat on. Perhaps, too, some of our comrades would like to share the sport."

"Right you are!" said Harry, and the next moment they were hurrying back to the camp.

The news that moose deer were within a few hours' march of them spread like wild-fire, and a party of hunters was quickly collected to join in the chase. Each man carried a few provisions in a blanket strapped over his shoulder, and was armed with rifle and bowie knife. There were a dozen of them in all, including Frank and Harry Weston, Rigby, Sanson, Indian Bill, and Robert Lazenby. The latter individual and a raw-boned young Irishman, who had followed the fortunes of his master from one of the New England States, each led an active mule.

Indian Bill, by tacit consent, took command of the expedition. Instead of returning to the spot where the tracks of the moose were just discovered, the crafty old hunter struck out in a north-westerly direction. He had often spent months together in the Green River Valley and the wild and desolate region that bordered upon it; sometimes in company with a large party of boon companions, and at others trapping the beaver with but a single comrade to share his lonely existence. He had thus become familiar with the favourite haunts of the different species of game, as well as of the fur-bearing animals and beasts of prey that frequented the district, and so had a shrewd suspicion of the spot where the moose were likely to be found.

The hardy pioneers who first made these desolate

regions their chosen hunting grounds carried, so to speak, their lives in their hands. Many of the rivers, valleys, and other features of the country are named after the poor trappers and hunters who there fell victims to the savage enmity of the red men. Though it is only fair to state that, as we have seen, the latter were often goaded on to murder in retaliation for acts of cruelty and violence experienced at the hands of the whites, who, moreover, were not unnaturally looked upon by the Indians as intruders and trespassers.

It is recorded that when Colonel Fremont, who had obtained a commission from the United States Government to explore the vast territory lying between the Mississippi and the Pacific, led his first expedition, in 1842, into the Western Desert, the Indians were greatly excited. Jealous of his advance, they were everywhere on the alert, and every night the travellers had to fortify their camp and appoint sentinels to watch. The farther they proceeded the greater grew the danger, and every man of the party had to familiarise himself with the probability that the whole caravan would fall a prey to the savages. At the Laramie Fort the Indians used every endeavour, both by supplications and threatenings, to turn them back. But Fremont was not the man to be turned from any enterprise on which he had once fairly embarked. He met their wild declamatory speeches, we are told, in the same strain, and in spite of their

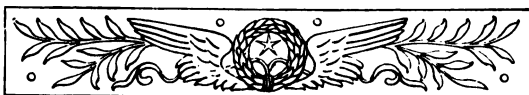
reiterated assurances that he and his party would be slain, resolved to proceed.

“We will not go back,” he said; “we are the soldiers of the great chief, your father. He has told us to come here and see this country and all the Indians, his children. . . . We have thrown away our bodies, and will not turn back. . . . We are few and you are many, and may kill us all; but there will be much crying in your villages. . . . Do you think that our great chief will let his soldiers die and forget to cover their graves? Before the snow melts his warriors will sweep away your villages as the fire does the prairie in the autumn.”*

This unshrinking resolution is said to have won the respect of the red men, and they desisted from any further attempt to stay his advance. One old chief even sent him a young Indian to act as guide. It would have been well for the poor Indians if no worse adventurers than these commanded by the high-minded and patriotic Fremont had ever entered their remote territories.

* Colonel John Charles Fremont in *Leisure Hour* for 1857.





CHAPTER XIII.

CAUGHT NAPPING.

THE party of hunters guided by Indian Bill pushed briskly on in the direction of the Bear Mountains. The day was rather hot, and the young Westons, especially Harry, found difficulty in keeping up with their more seasoned companions. Nevertheless they were too proud to complain, and it was only after much urging that they at last condescended to mount the two pack mules.

Their line of route, which had for some time been almost parallel with the river, now struck out over a wide expanse of dry barren ground, sparsely over-spread with short benty grass, and a few stunted rushes. A hot and fatiguing march of several miles through this dreary region at length brought them to the banks of a small stream which falls into the Muddy Fork or southern branch of the Black River.

Here a halt was called, and, after quenching their thirst at the little brook, each man threw himself on the ground to take a short rest and snatch a few mouthfuls of food.

While thus recruiting their strength and spirits for the approaching hunt, Indian Bill vouchsafed a few observations thereon.

“Wal, boys, hiar we be at last!” said the taciturn old trapper, “and if I’m not a Down-Easter, we’ll spot the elk afore we’re much older.”

“Where do you expect to find them?” said Frank.

“Wal, I guess it’s not a long chalk from hiar, young man.”

“Down by this stream, do you mean,” broke in the impatient Harry.

“Wal, yaas, since yer’re so mighty inquisitive. They’re in a low, marshy flat where this crik jines the Muddy Fork—you bet!”

“Shure, an it’s meself ’ll be plased to see a bit o’ timber, anyhow! For I’m jist milting away enthirely in this murthering sun, loik a morsel o’ chaze at the hind of a toasting fork!” exclaimed the Irishman, as he wiped the moisture from his brow with the cuff of his coat.

There was a general laugh at this little speech. But Indian Bill looked anything but pleased, and scowled menacingly at the offender as he rose to give directions for continuing the march.

Half the party, under the leadership of Sanson, were ordered to cross over the stream and move down its left bank, while the rest continued their course along its right.

After proceeding very cautiously in this manner for about half a mile, Sanson suddenly stopped and beckoned to Indian Bill to cross over to where he stood.

There was a short whispered consultation, a brief examination of the ground at their feet, and then the two hunters, motioning to their men to remain where they were, advanced stealthily towards a clump of willows that grew near the stream, about two hundred yards away. This proved to be the commencement of the long strip of marshland which extended on both sides of the stream for nearly two miles to its junction with the Muddy Fork.

It was not until nearly half an hour after their disappearing from sight amongst the willows, that the two old scouts returned and communicated to their companions the results of the *reconnaissance*.

It transpired that they had followed the track of the moose until it divided; the greater part of the herd having crossed over to the right bank of the stream about a mile further on. The hoof marks, it was said, were very fresh, so that the elk could not be far away. After a brief deliberation, it was decided to skirt the outer edges of the marsh so as to encircle the deer, and thus to drive them back towards the

southern end where the hunters stood. There was another clump of willow and cotton trees nearly opposite to the one already mentioned, and on the same side of it, but about two hundred yards further from the creek. Between these two points the ground was pretty firm and the grass much beaten down into paths and lanes as if by the passage of large game. It was evident that this narrow strip formed the favourite point of ingress and egress for the different kinds of deer as well as the buffalo which, each in their season, frequented the spot.

Here, therefore, would be the best positions in which any of the hunters could conceal themselves in order to obtain a good shot at the game as it was driven out of the marshy flat. As, moreover, it was an understood thing that the young Westons were to have the posts of honour in this their first moose hunt, it was speedily arranged that they should remain in ambush in the covers described, while the rest of the party drove out the game.

The mules were taken across to the right bank of the creek, and secured amongst a thicket of young willow and alder trees, so as to be out of sight of the expected deer.

At the last moment it was decided, at their special desire, to leave Robert in attendance on his young master Frank, while Paddy, as the Irishman was commonly called, acted in like capacity for Harry. The

son of Erin was likewise instructed to keep an eye on the two mules.

Accordingly, Frank and Robert were soon snugly ensconced within the leafy cover of the outer clump, whilst Harry and his rough but light hearted assistant hid themselves beneath the drooping branches of the taller trees which grew by the stream.

Meanwhile the rest of the hunters formed into two parties of four each, and had started to make a circuit of the marsh, one taking the eastern and the other the western margin. Their plan was to proceed in this manner until they reached the Muddy Fork; which river, flowing as it did, almost at right angles to the small creek that intersected the marshland, formed, as it were, the base of that chosen haunt of the elk and the buffalo. Here they were to march inwards; and having taken up their stations at regular intervals across this base, but within call or sight of one another, were, at a given signal, to start back towards the apex of the marsh where their comrades were waiting in ambush, thus frightening whatever game there might be in their direction. The two leaders, Sanson and Indian Bill took every precaution against accidents, warning their men on no account to fire at anything that might happen to cross their path or start up in a line with the two entrance clumps or with their own line of march.

This manœuvre of necessity took up a considerable

time, on account of the distance which had to be traversed and the somewhat difficult nature of the ground. Now, Harry and Patrick O'Flaherty, for such was the Irishman's real name, being naturally of restless and active dispositions, soon discovered that lying in ambush was by no means their forte. However romantic and interesting it might be in theory, it was to their irrepressible natures, decidedly slow and monotonous in practice. Accordingly they soon began to cast about them for some congenial method of relieving the tedium of their position.

"Be dad!" said Patrick, "me foot's aslape, I do belave, wi' squatulating here, loike a rickety toad, all the blessed avening."

"All the evening, do you say?" replied Harry, laughing. "Why, we've not been here more than twenty minutes at the outside, but, nevertheless, I'm about as tired of it as you are. Suppose we just stroll as far as the stream there?"

O'Flaherty was on his feet in an instant, and, forgetful of his foot, reached the creek in a few rapid strides.

"Your foot is not very bad, I think," said Harry, chaffingly.

A grin was his only answer, but the next moment the Irishman, who was looking hard into the water, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and began to unlace his boots as fast as he could.

"Whatever's the matter?" said Harry, sharply, wondering whether the man was going out of his head.

"Matter indade!" answered Pat, who had now thrown off his boots and stockings, and was beginning to divest himself of his nether garments likewise. "Matter indade! An', be all the powers, isn't it meself as 'as just seen as foine a salmon as hiver walked into the nit of a Liffy poacher."

"A salmon?" repeated Harry, "surely you must be mistaken; it is much more likely to be a large trout, I should think."

Without deigning to answer, O'Flaherty jumped into the creek. Owing to the fact of a fallen tree having partially dammed up the stream in this spot, the water was about two feet deep, consequently the fish had plenty of room in which to disport itself. The creek, however, was so narrow that the fish was easily driven into the shallow water above the dam; but it was not so easily captured even then. Although actively assisted by Harry, who had taken his stand immediately above the pool, the Irishman was continually foiled in his efforts to seize the finny monster. Once and again the latter seemed on the point of being captured; but no sooner did his pursuers attempt to seize him, than, with a mighty splash and a vigorous stroke of his great tail that sent the mud and water all over them, he darted back into the pool.

Both Harry and O'Flaherty had become thoroughly excited, and redoubled their efforts to secure the fish. So absorbed were they in this stirring occupation, that they had forgotten all about the moose, until several rifle shots, fired in quick succession, and at no great distance from them, startled them to a sense of their position.

Harry was the first to recover his self-possession and to grasp the exigencies of the situation. Springing upon the bank, he seized his rifle and rushed towards the edge of the cover, where he and Paddy had at first been stationed. He feared lest he should miss his chance of a shot at the noble game of which they were in pursuit, and bitterly regretted that he had ever quitted his post. At this stage his reflections were suddenly terminated by the tramping of hoofs, the breaking of boughs, and other sounds, which unmistakably heralded the approach of some large animal.

Springing behind the trunk of a large tree, Harry anxiously awaited the creature's appearance. He was not kept long in suspense, for in a few moments the branches in front of him were brushed aside, and a huge beast, much larger than a horse, advanced rapidly towards him. Harry was taken quite aback at the ferocious aspect of the monstrous creature, and scarcely knew whether to stand his ground or run away. The moose, however, did not seem to be aware of his proximity, but appeared to be making for the creek. Its

breathing was laboured, its eyes glaring, and its flanks and breast covered with large flakes of foam. It had evidently been wounded, for blood was mingled with the froth that dripped from its lolling tongue.

Suddenly the brute stopped, and, raising its heavily antlered head, sniffed the air and gazed suspiciously around.

Now would have been the time for the young hunter to have planted a bullet in its breast, for it was not more than fifteen paces from him. But Harry's nerves were not quite equal to the occasion. His hands trembled so violently that he could scarcely hold his rifle, and his feet seemed rooted to the ground. He expected every moment that the elk would discover his whereabouts and charge down upon him. In vain he tried to compose himself and bring his rifle into position for a successful shot. His muscles refused to obey his will, and he felt like one in the agonies of nightmare.

After what seemed to be an age, the elk uttered an angry cry, the hair on his neck bristled up, and he trotted heavily forward in the direction of the pool where Harry had left O'Flaherty.

The spell was broken, and, as the enraged animal passed within two or three yards of him, Harry levelled his rifle, and took a steady aim through the shoulder. To his great disgust he pulled in vain at the trigger—the weapon was at half-cock. In his excitement he

had forgotten to cock it. The few moments which were consumed in discovering and repairing the fatal omission marred his opportunity. The moose had passed.

Harry quickly aimed and fired at the back of its head, in the hope of piercing its brain, but the ball struck the mass of solid bone which forms the base of the creature's ponderous horns and fell flattened to the earth. The elk almost dropped on its knees from the force of the blow, but, recovering itself by a great effort, it uttered a fierce snort of pain and rage and continued on its onward course. Some object in front evidently absorbed the attention of the enraged animal.

"Look out, Paddy!" shouted the boy at the top of his voice. But the Irishman had already perceived his danger. He had just cleansed the mud from his feet and legs, and was in the act of resuming his discarded habiliments, when he heard the angry cry and rush of the moose, followed by the report of Harry's rifle. Jumping upon his feet, for he had been sitting on the edge of the stream, O'Flaherty looked wildly around.

At first he could not see anything on account of the dense foliage, but the tramp of hoofs and the crashing of branches, produced by the rapid approach of some huge animal, together with Harry's warning shout, put him into a state of the most lively apprehension.

Although an hour ago he had been boasting of the execution he would do as soon as the moose were found, he was so perturbed that he even forgot all about his gun, which he had laid aside on first spying the fish.

"Sure! an' it must be a wild iliphant they've started, bad luck to them!" exclaimed Patrick, and, without another moment's loss of time, he commenced to climb the nearest tree, a small cottonwood. Scarcely had he reached one of the lowest branches when the elk broke cover a few yards away, and charged right under the tree in which he had taken refuge.

The fact was, that O'Flaherty had ascended in such terrible haste that his toilet was not by any means completed. The right leg of his blue cotton pantaloons dangled in mid-air as he struggled to make good his position in the poplar. This flaunting portion of his quondam attire seemed to have the same irritating effect upon the moose that the waving of a red flag has upon a bull.

At the first onslaught the maddened creature passed harmlessly by, merely brushing the offending garment aside. Finding, however, that it still hung defiantly down in spite of poor Paddy's efforts to kick it away from him, the elk turned quickly about and commenced butting and tossing at the thing with its head. The upshot was, that before O'Flaherty could disengage himself from the fatal raiment, it had become

entangled in the monster's horns. The next instant the unfortunate man was jerked from his perch quite on to the elk's back, and the branch to which he clung, being half rotten, came down with him.

As Harry, who had followed in the track of the moose, approached the spot, he heard a terrified shout—

“Och! hone! Help! Murther!” cried poor Paddy, as he found himself suddenly across the animal's back.

With the instinct of self-preservation, however, he clutched with both hands the long coarse hair which grew on the neck and shoulders of the irate creature, and getting his legs firmly astride, successfully resisted its utmost efforts to shake him off.

“Bravo, Paddy!” shouted Harry encouragingly; “stick to your stall, lad!”

“Arrah, Sirrh, it's not dismounting I was thinking of unless you've a moind to hould the craythur's head for me! Ow, murther! whatever's the baste con-templatin' now?” continued poor Pat, as the elk, after executing sundry high leaps and other antics, suddenly stood perfectly still.

“Now, I'll put a bullet through his head!” exclaimed Harry, as he raised his rifle to his shoulder.

“No, be me sowl, I'd rather ye wouldn't, for fear o' accidents, tho' its meself as knows ye're illigant at shootin', inthirely!”

The next minute the moose, laying back his long mule-like ears, started off at a terrific pace through the belt of timber. Clearing the little brook at one bound, he passed quickly through the thicket of younger but denser trees, where the mules were secured, and skirting the edge of the marsh, made as if direct for the river.

“Ow, murther! Help!”

There was but time for this one despairing cry from the terrified Irishman; for, as the elk rushed straight through the trees and bushes, it was all the poor fellow could do to prevent himself from being scratched or bruised, or swept from his seat and dashed to the ground by the overhanging boughs.





CHAPTER XIV.

UNLOOKED FOR TERMINATION OF THE MOOSE HUNT.

THERE is a curious animal of the carnivorous class, inhabiting the northern regions of both the old and the new world, which preys upon reindeer and elk as well as smaller animals. It is called the glutton, and is said to be so voracious that when once it has succeeded in effecting a lodgment upon the back of one of these large deer, nothing can make it loose its hold.

In vain does its victim run wildly through the thickest woods, rubbing itself against the trees and breaking the boughs with its powerful antlers; the glutton having stuck its sharp claws between the shoulders of its prey, remains firmly fixed behind. Its pertinacity is so great that it is said pieces of its skin are often discovered, by hunters and others, adhering to the trees against which it has been rubbed by the wretched deer. With bull-dog tenacity the glutton sticks to its post, until having eaten its

way to the poor creature's vitals, the deer at length succumbs.

Like the glutton, then, O'Flaherty stuck to the moose. He clutched the huge animal's bristling mane with hands and teeth, and threw himself as flat as possible upon its back. Fortunately for him, the thicket did not extend for more than fifty or sixty yards beyond the creek, and being mostly comprised of young alders and willows, it offered a much less stubborn resistance to the passage of the elk than would have been the case with trees of a less yielding nature.

Just as Harry was wondering what was best to be done he heard a noise behind him, and looking round saw Frank and Robert hastening towards him through the clump.

"Hillo! Harry," said the former, "what's the matter? We thought we heard cries for help, so we hurried here as fast as we could. Where's Paddy?"

"Gone off on the back of a huge elk, at the rate of twenty miles an hour, I should think," replied the younger boy.

"On the back of an elk?"

"Yes, what is to be done? He cried out most piteously for help as the huge creature dashed off with him."

"But how in the world did he get upon the elk's back?" asked Frank, wonderingly, "and having got

there and found he did not like it, what was to hinder his jumping off again?"

"And being gored to death!" replied the boy. "But there is not time to explain more than that the poor fellow came into his unenviable position entirely against his will, and precarious though it may be, he naturally prefers the back to the horns of a dilemma!"

"Oh, you facetious Harry," said the elder brother, laughing, "where's Robert gone, I wonder," he continued.

"Here I am, sir," shouted the latter individual from the thicket beyond; "I'm unhobbling the mules and putting on their bridles, as I thought, may be you'd want them."

"Why! of course the very thing!" exclaimed Harry.

"Robert's an old campaigner, and has got his wits about him," said Frank, smiling, "you had better mount one of the animals and Robert the other," he continued, addressing Harry; "and gallop off to O'Flaherty's assistance, while I give the alarm to the rest of the hunters."

"All right," answered the boy, and the next minute he and Robert had cleared the thicket, and were urging their fleet-footed mules in rapid pursuit of the then distant moose.

The latter, with his luckless rider, was making straight for the Muddy Fork River, and with that

peculiar instinct that prompts these animals when plagued by flies and hard pressed by the hunter, to take to the water, he plunged into the nearest pool.

For a moment or two, O'Flaherty was quite under water, but, presently the moose rose to the surface near the middle of the river, and there it remained with only its head above the water. By sitting upright, the Irishman was just able to keep his head also above the surface. In this predicament he cried loudly for help. Attracted by his cries, Harry and Robert soon reached the spot, and, not perceiving the two heads, were about to pass on in search of a ford. They supposed that the moose had crossed over the river, and had probably rubbed off its unwelcome burden against one of the trees which thickly fringed the further bank of the stream.

"Arrah! now, bad luck to ye! would ye be after desarting a poor boy in his extrimity!" exclaimed a deprecating voice which seemed to proceed from what, in the uncertain light, and deep shadows cast upon the water by the rays of the setting sun, appeared like two old stumps sticking out of the water.

"Whist!" cried Harry, "Robert, that's Paddy's voice!"

"Where in the world are you, Paddy?" shouted Harry.

"Och! thin, I'm here, worse luck, and drhowning afore yer 're very eyes!"

"Oh! I see how matters stand," exclaimed Harry, who had been shading his eyes with his hands, and staring hard at the supposed stump. "That's poor Paddy's head, and the one beyond is the head and horns of the elk. The brute is trying to drown the poor fellow, what can we do to help him?"

"We must throw him a rope and pull him ashore," answered Robert, who had already dismounted and was quickly unwinding the packing cord which was attached to his saddle.

"Of course, the very thing!" said Harry, as he jumped down and hobbled the mules to prevent their straying away while he and Robert were engaged in rescuing the Irishman.

In a few minutes Robert had succeeded in throwing the cord within reach of O'Flaherty, who quickly secured it round his waist.

"Ready?" shouted Harry.

"Yis, Sirrh. But, och hone! I'll be drhowned enthirely afore ye get me ashore!"

"Never fear," replied the boy. "Take a good long breath. Shut your mouth and loose your hold of the elk, and we'll have you out of the water in less than no time. Are you ready yet?"

Poor Pat at last summoned up courage to give the signal, and was carefully and speedily dragged ashore by his two friends.

"You are well out of that my lad!" said Robert,

as he gave the half drowned man his hand to help him up the bank. "There, lean against me until you get your breath," he continued, supporting him in his arms.

Meanwhile Harry was intently watching the moose. Relieved of its awkward burden, it swam rapidly towards the trees which fringed the further side of the river. It had, however, scarcely scrambled ashore when Harry fired a well-directed shot, which brought the poor creature to its knees.

Elated by his success, the young hunter was rushing off to find a ford by which to cross the river when Robert said, "Stop, Master Harry, you had better jump on one of the mules, and I will follow you with the other; the water is pretty deep even below the pool."

"All right," said Harry, mounting the nearest mule as he spoke, and galloping off to the place indicated.

He had got safely over the stream and was hastening towards the now prostrate elk when he heard the sound of hoofs close behind him. Supposing that it was Robert on the other mule, he did not look round, but urged his animal to greater speed lest he should miss the honour of being first in at the death.

Had the excited boy but cast one backward glance over his shoulder he would have had no further

thought to give to the moose, but would have cocked his rifle and prepared to fight for life and liberty.

It was not, however, until first the head and then the neck of a horse, instead of a mule, drew gradually alongside of him that he looked up with a startled cry.

It was too late! The brawny arm of a Sioux Indian already encircled his waist, and in another instant he felt himself lifted bodily from his seat. In spite of his kicks and struggles the unfortunate boy was soon placed unceremoniously across the horse's withers in front of his savage captor.

It was then poor Harry's turn to cry out for help, which he did lustily until silenced by a blow on the head from the butt-end of a gun.





CHAPTER XV.

AN EXCITING CHASE.

HAVING secured his victim, the Indian turned his horse's head and hurried off in the direction of one of the spurs of the Bear Mountains, where probably a party of hunters from his own tribe were encamped. He was, however, already pursued.

After attending to the necessities of the poor Irishman, and placing him in a comfortable position on the bank, Robert took off his coat and threw it over him. Then promising to return as soon as possible, he mounted the remaining mule and hastened after his young master.

The ex-soldier had scarcely reached the further bank of the river when he was startled by loud cries of "Help! Robert! Indians! Help!" Although but a short distance from the spot whence the sound proceeded, Robert was unable to see what was taking place on account of a small but dense clump of

trees and bushes which fringed the river at this point. Urging forward his mule with repeated blows of the coil of rope which he carried in one hand, the good fellow quickly circled the intervening obstacle. No sooner had he done so than he found himself in the presence of an emergency calculated to test even the resources and promptitude of an old campaigner.

Galloping over the prairie in front of him was a solitary horseman on a powerful horse. The savage was fully armed with gun, tomahawk, and scalping knife, and held across his knee a prostrate figure, which, although the cries had now ceased, Robert at once recognised as that of his young master.

The man's first impulse was to endeavour to cut off the Indian's retreat. The latter, in striking away from the river in the direction of the mountain already referred to, was riding almost directly across the line taken by Robert in skirting the trees, and consequently in doing so the redskin lost most of the advantage of his earlier start. Moreover, his horse was heavily handicapped by reason of his double burden.

Encouraged by such considerations as these, and rendered desperate by the thought of the issues which were at stake, Robert plied the coil of rope to his mule's flanks with unceasing energy. The terrified creature scarcely seemed to touch the ground as it

fled onward with outstretched neck and tail. Already the two or three hundred yards which at first separated pursuer and pursued had been sensibly diminished. The frequency with which the wily savage glanced back over his shoulder and then cruelly pricked his overweighted steed with the point of his scalping knife, showed that he was becoming apprehensive. The mule began to flag, but Lazenby urged it forward with voice, rope, and bit. A few minutes more and he would have been within striking distance.

Robert clubbed his rifle and loosened the knife at his belt. He dared not fire, for the Indian, doubtless with the very object of deterring him, was bending closely over his young captive.

By a tremendous effort the mule, which was a fine specimen of its race, had reached within a few lengths of its equine competitor, when the latter's tawny rider suddenly sat upright. Before Robert could divine his intention, the crafty redskin had turned in his seat and levelled his gun upon him. Robert instinctively drew rein. The mule, thus sharply checked, threw up its head and received the bullet, which was discharged at that instant, in its brain.

Down came the poor mule headlong to the earth, its rider being thrown on his face some fifteen feet further on.

Fortunately the plain was here clothed with a short

but dense growth of grass, which was already half turned into natural hay by the dry and heated atmosphere of these elevated tracts. This luckily broke his fall, and Robert was soon on his feet and little the worse for his tumble. But what chance had he now of saving his young master? His fleet mule was stretched lifeless on the ground behind him, and every moment increased the distance between himself and the lad he had striven to rescue. Suddenly a thought struck him—there was still one thing that could overtake the flying courser, and that was a rifle ball.

As Robert stooped to pick up his rifle, which had fallen from his hand when he was hurled to the ground, he heard a derisive laugh, and, looking up, saw that the Sioux brave had wheeled round and was beckoning him with gibe and jeer to follow.

“Wait a moment, you scoundrel!” cried Robert, as he disengaged a tuft of withered grass which had become twisted round the lock of his weapon. “Wait a moment, my fine fellow, and I’ll make you laugh out of the wrong corner of your mouth.”

As Robert spoke he stepped back behind the carcass of the mule.

“Ugh!” exclaimed the Indian, “does the pale-face think he can awake his long-eared pony? Let him try!”

So saying, the crafty redskin, doubtless aware of his

enemy's purpose, faced quickly about again and continued his flight.

At the same moment Robert threw himself down behind the mule and, levelling his rifle across its motionless body, took a steady aim at the quickly retreating horse.

The bullet sped on its way with unerring certainty, and entering just behind the shoulder, pierced the heart of the noble creature, which bounded high into the air, and then fell lifeless to the ground. Harry, already dazed by the blow he had received upon his head, was flung for some distance along the grass, but the Indian, less fortunate, lay pinned beneath his steed.

"Harry, Master Harry! I hope you're not hurt, sir," shouted Lazenby, as he rushed breathlessly up.

"No, no, I am all right, old fellow," answered the boy, as he jumped upon his feet, delighted to find that matters had taken so favourable a turn.

"Thank God for that!" was the fervent response.

Meanwhile the Indian was making the most frantic attempts to disengage himself from his fallen horse. But all to no purpose, as the whole weight of the animal's carcass rested upon his right leg. Seeing his predicament, and with thoughtless generosity, Robert sprang forward to his assistance. The savage, however, expecting no mercy, mistook the poor fellow's purpose, and seizing his tomahawk, which lay within

reach, he hurled it with terrific force at his would-be deliverer. The latter perceived the movement, and ducked his head, but barely in time to avoid the murderous axe, which actually swept off the close-fitting old forage cap that he wore.

“Well, that’s polite of you, and no mistake, you copper-headed villain!” exclaimed Lazenby, greatly exasperated. “You’ve no more manners than a Roosian!”

This was a favourite expression of the ex-soldier’s, who had once been severely wounded in the Crimea by a dying Russian, to whom he had given a drink of water, and who, thus refreshed, spent his sole remaining strength in discharging his musket at the retiring form of his generous benefactor.

“What a narrow escape! But, never mind, old fellow,” said Harry, as he picked up the cap, “there’s some excuse for an Indian who makes no profession of civilisation, much less of Christianity. Besides, he doubtless mistook your intention, and thought you were going to give him the *coup de grâce*.”

“The what, sir?”

“Well, in plain English, to knock him on the head,” explained the boy, with a merry laugh. “But, hillo! who comes there?” he continued in a tone of surprise, and pointing in the direction of the river.

Robert looked in that direction, and then set about reloading his rifle with the utmost despatch. This

done, he again directed his gaze at the horseman, for such the approaching object appeared to be.

“Oh! it’s all right,” he said at last, “there’s no mistaking the gait of that animal, and, if I am not getting near-sighted, it’s Rigby himself who’s astride of it!”





CHAPTER XVI.

CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

LAZENBY was right. The rapidly approaching figure was that of the young Kentuckian bestriding the mule from which poor Harry had but lately been so unceremoniously snatched.

It turned out that Rigby had reached the river soon after the Irishman's rescue, and, hearing from him that young Weston and Lazenby had crossed over in pursuit of the elk, Ethan determined to follow and assist them in skinning and cutting up the meat. Once across the river, he quickly discovered the trail, but was somewhat puzzled to find how soon one of the mules had diverged from it towards the open prairie. Pushing hastily forward, however, he soon sighted the fallen moose. But where were the hunters? Ah! there was another trail leading into, or rather nearly parallel with the one he was on. It came from the direction of a small clump, or island, as it is called, of cottonwood trees, a hundred yards

away to his right. Perhaps it was where the mule and his rider, whose divergence he had already remarked, had returned again to the track of the elk. No, the hoof-prints were those of a horse and not a mule. What could it all mean? Who was the solitary horseman, and what did he want? Such were the questions that presented themselves in rapid succession to the mind of the young Kentuckian as he hurried anxiously forward. A strange foreboding of evil had suddenly taken possession of him which he tried in vain to resist. Visions of Blackfeet Indians and ambuscades, Crows and treacherous Snakes floated across his mental vision.

"Whist! what is the meaning of that?" he suddenly exclaimed, half aloud, as a gunshot resounded through the silent evening air. "That shot was not fired from any shooting iron of our company," he mused.

The young Kentuckian had halted and was listening intently for some further indication of what was taking place. All at once a kind of low whinny caught his ear. He looked in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and there perceived the head of a mule which, with ears pricked, was gazing quietly at him from among the tall flags and reeds of a swampy piece of ground close by.

This was the animal that poor Harry had been riding until so unceremoniously kidnapped by the mounted Indian. The mule belonged to Rigby's

father, and, apparently glad to see its young master, it stood perfectly still until the latter came up and led it carefully on to the firm ground.

Ethan quickly adjusted the bridle, and was tightening the saddle girths when a second and sharper, though less noisy report reached his ear.

"Ah! that's a rifle shot!" exclaimed the hunter, and springing upon the mule's back, he galloped rapidly off in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

"Bravo! Ethan, old fellow, we're very glad to see you!" exclaimed Harry, accosting the newcomer as he drew up beside them, "we were just wondering what we should do with this implacable redskin?"

"Do? why, first of all release the poor wretch from his painful position!" replied the kind-hearted Rigby, "can't you see the horse is lying on his foot?" and he stepped forward to assist the Indian.

"Take care what you are about!" shouted Robert, "the rascal has nearly brained me a moment ago for attempting the same thing!"

"Oh! never fear, I can—"

The young Kentuckian suddenly stopped short and stared hard at the countenance of the prostrate warrior, who returned his gaze with unflinching hauteur. Each recognised the other in the same moment.

"Teconsa!"

"Ugh! the big pale-face has not forgotten the chief who carried off the golden-haired maiden! He can have his revenge. Teconsa is like a trapped beaver."

"You forget that I am not a vindictive redskin like yourself!" replied Rigby, scornfully, as he motioned to his companions to assist him in removing the heavy carcass of the horse.

This done, they set the Indian upon his feet, and, finding that he was not much hurt, they bound his wrists tightly together behind his back, and bade him on pain of death march quietly beside them.

Having mounted Harry upon the remaining mule, the whole party lost no time in retracing their steps. The sun was within an hour of setting and they had a long way to go before reaching the appointed *rendezvous*.

"We must not forget the moose," said Rigby, "it is not far out of our road, and won't take long to skin if we all bear a hand."

"Certainly," replied Harry, "it would never do to return to camp unadorned by the trophies of the chase, especially after the loss we have sustained in that useful mule."

"Well, at any rate, Master Harry, we shall have a prisoner of war to show!" said Robert, as he glanced admiringly at the tall, proud figure of the Sioux chief, who strode haughtily along by his side.

There was much to tell in the hunting camp that night. Harry Weston and O'Flaherty were the heroes of the hour, and many and sincere were the congratulations they received. Lazenby, too, received a fair share of attention, and no little praise for the promptitude he had displayed in effecting his young master's rescue.

"And what's to be done with the prisoner Teconsa?" enquired Frank.

"Hold a drum-head court-martial on him," suggested Robert.

"Shoot him!" cried one old trapper.

"Make him run the gauntlet," said another.

"Tie him up to one of these trees and leave him to perish of hunger and thirst, as some of his tarnation tribe once did to a brother of mine," hissed Indian Bill, as he darted a look of deadly hatred at the captive Sioux. The latter took no notice of the remark, indeed he appeared perfectly oblivious of all that was being said. His hands had been set at liberty, and he sat quietly smoking a long pipe. A stalwart trapper who had been constituted gaoler, *pro tem.*, stood over him with loaded rifle. Many of the trappers and hunters had suffered more or less severely at the hands of the Sioux in days gone by, and, excited by the words of Indian Bill, they seemed bent upon wiping off old scores and ready for any mischief. The clamour rose higher and higher, and

some even drew their long hunting knives and sprang to their feet, as if they would, then and there, fall upon the hapless redskin and stab him to the heart.

The calmest person in the group seemed to be the chief himself. Although his knowledge of English, together with the gestures of the crowd that surrounded him, made him well aware of his critical position, yet he smoked calmly on, intently watching the wreaths of spiral smoke as they rose regularly upward from the bowl of his pipe. He was a fine-looking savage in the prime of his youth, and both Frank and Harry were lost in admiration at the stoical indifference he displayed to the very alarming state of affairs all around him. The scornful, yet scarcely perceptible smile that played about the corners of his mouth alone betrayed how keenly he was alive to all that was passing.

At this moment a towering form was seen forcing a way through the knot of angry men. It was Ethan Rigby.

"Stand back there!" he shouted, as he placed himself in front of the prisoner. "This man, redskin though he be, once saved me from being hacked in pieces by his fellows, and I'm not going to stand by and see him butchered in cold blood. The man who aims a blow at Teconsa shall learn what it means to make an enemy of Ethan Rigby!"

"Eh! and of Robert Lazenby, too!" exclaimed the

ex-soldier, stepping up beside the huge Kentuckian, "and, what is more," he continued, "I claim the Indian as my prisoner, for I think you will not dispute the fact that I was the means of securing him."

"You are right there, Robert, my man, and I will see that no harm comes to the Sioux chief until he is brought up before my father, Major Weston, to receive whatever punishment he may see fit to inflict," said Frank.

"And who, in the name of fortune, are you, my fine young coxcomb?" tauntingly demanded an ill-favoured fellow who had been one of the first to cry for the prisoner's blood. This cowardly wretch, a true type of some of the lowest classes of trappers, who shoot down the poor Indians as though they were so many wild beasts, whenever they cross their path, was furious at Rigby's interference and championship of the Sioux chief. But a wholesome dread of the young Kentuckian's prowess obliged him to smother his indignation as far as it concerned the latter. Young Weston's unlooked-for interference, however, and the air of confidence with which he spoke, drew down upon him all the blackguard's pent-up ire. The refined-looking and fair-haired English lad, moreover, seemed to be a safe enough mark at which to vent his spleen. Meanwhile the faithful Robert was scarcely restrained by Rigby, who was opportunely backed by a warning glance

from Frank, from rushing straight at the insulting trapper.

"And so," continued the latter, waxing bolder as he misinterpreted the boy's contemptuous silence for fear, "and so yer think to lord it over free and independent trappers and hunters, as yer precious daddy does over a parcel of poor emigrant folk, do yer, my fine young Britisher?" As he spoke, the braggart had advanced inconveniently near to the subject of his attack, who showed his contempt and displeasure by turning his back upon him, with an expression of extreme disgust, and the added caution, "Have a care, my man, or I may be compelled to chastise you!"

Thereupon there were some hisses at the offender and a murmur of sympathy with young Weston, who was always a favourite on account of his free, cheerful disposition, and more especially after his noble conduct in the Arapahoe incident.

These adverse demonstrations, however, did not tend to soothe the trapper's wrath, and, suddenly raising his hand, he caught Frank a heavy cuff upon the ear. The retaliation for this act of indignity was as complete as it was sudden and unexpected.

Like a wounded tiger, Frank turned upon his cowardly assailant. The boy's brow was crimson, and his eyes flashed fire, as he glared for an instant upon him. Then with one swift and well-directed

blow, straight from the shoulder, he felled the bully to the earth.

It all happened so suddenly that the by-standers were thunderstruck. Then there was a loud and simultaneous burst of applause at young Weston's startling manifestation of strength and resolution. As for the crestfallen trapper he slowly rose to his feet and slunk away to the adjacent stream to bathe his throbbing temples, muttering and cursing as he went. Doubtless he would like to have tried conclusions once again with his redoubtable young adversary, but he saw that the sympathy of his comrades was all with the latter, and that, even if successful, he would be likely to receive yet rougher treatment at their hands.

When matters had calmed down again, it was decided to send Teconsa under an escort to the emigrant camp on the Green River, to receive his sentence from the commandant, Major Weston.

Accordingly, early the next morning, Rigby and Lazenby marched out in charge of the Indian, while Frank mounted the mule and rode on as quickly as he could in advance, both to apprise his father of the success of the hunting party, and to tell him of the capture and near approach of Teconsa. He was also commissioned to send back an empty waggon and a team of four mules or horses, to bring in the elk meat and skins.

A few hours later, a temporary court had been instituted, which was presided over by the elder Rigby, Ethan's father, and a jury of intelligent men. And the Sioux chief was arraigned before it on the following charges:—

First, the unlawful and forcible seizure, carrying away, and detention of Miss Weston.

Second, kidnapping and assaulting Harry Weston, and attempting to murder Robert Lazenby.

The prisoner was understood to plead "Not guilty."

The trial lasted several hours, during which time Harry and others arrived in camp and gave their evidence.

After all the witnesses had been called, old Rigby summed up with considerable shrewdness and ability, and then the twelve jurors retired behind a waggon to consider their verdict. Five minutes sufficed for them to discover that they were almost all of the same mind, and, on returning into court, and in answer to the President's question, the foreman, amid the most profound silence, pronounced the ominous word, "Guilty;" "but," he added kindly, "some of us recommend him to mercy."

The unmistakable murmur of applause which greeted the announcement of the verdict showed that it was in keeping with the popular feeling.

Silence having been at length restored, the Indian was asked if he had anything to say before his sentence

was pronounced. He had been allowed to sit during the trial between his two guards on a bench formed by a piece of board supported between two flour barrels placed on end. When it was over, however, the chief rose to his feet, and, after glancing round defiantly, he folded his arms across his broad chest, and made a fiery and eloquent speech.

"Vagabond Palefaces," he said, "there is eternal war, war to the death, between your race and mine, between red man and white! Your fathers came from beyond the broad waters, from the rising of the sun. They held up the branch of peace, and begged a little ground whereon to raise corn for their families. The red men's hearts were big; they had plains and forests, hills and valleys, rivers and lakes—they gave without stint to the weary suppliants.

"And what has been their recompense? The white men have become strong and numerous. They have cut down the forests and destroyed the game, and now they are crossing the great river, the Mother of waters, and spreading themselves over the prairies. They are like locusts, they eat up the land, and there will soon be no place left for the Indian's wigwam.

"White men, there can be no peace between your people and mine. The Great Spirit has placed the red men on these boundless hunting grounds; and we will not yield them up without a struggle.

"You say the land is wide, but it is not wide enough for us both. The Great Spirit has not made the red men and the white to live together. If we bury the hatchet and permit you to remain we are lost!

"Where are the Hurons and the Iroquois?

"Where are the Mohawks and the Shawnees?

"Ah! you know well—their names alone remain.

"I tell you there is war to the death between your race and mine, and the struggle will not and cannot cease until the white man or the Indian shall perish from the earth. You have got me in your power and can kill me if you choose—I am ready; I die but once. But I shall not fall unavenged, the lodges of my people are very near. The Sioux warriors are brave, they will avenge the blood of their chief, and there will be much weeping in the camp of the long-knives. It is enough, Teconsa has spoken."

As the chief resumed his seat, the deep silence which had prevailed during his fiery and pathetic harangue, was broken by murmurs of sympathy from many in the crowd. One or two half smothered sobs were heard, proceeding from a waggon which stood near, and also Major Weston's voice endeavouring to soothe his daughter's generous grief.

"Certainly, my child, I will do all I can to save his life," he was saying; "and, as the commander of this train, I can at least claim the privilege of remitting the death sentence."

“You must do more, dear father,” urged his daughter. “You must insist upon his being placed at liberty.”

“Ah!” he replied, with a deep sigh, “I should rejoice to see my fellow travellers setting a merciful example to these poor savages, that they may catch some glimmer, however faint, of the Christian Faith. But come with me, dearest,” continued the Major, “and you shall plead yourself for Teconsa’s life and liberty. They will not deny any request that the Queen of the Camp, as they call you, may make, whereas it will not do for me to put too great a strain upon the silken reins of my authority.”

Meanwhile, the judge was proceeding to pass sentence upon the prisoner—after a brief and apparently heated consultation with two worthy comrades. Assuming a stern and solemn attitude, old Rigby began as follows:—

“Teconsa, Chief of the Sioux, you have been found guilty on each and every count of the indictment against you. It is therefore my painful duty to sentence you to death. I am sorry for you. You are a brave man, and have made a grand speech. But you are a heathen and a redskin, and you have therefore no claim to belligerent rights. We are Christians, and savages such as you must not presume to dispute our entry into your ancient domains. You must be content to lie down and let us trample you

beneath our feet. Patriotism is a fine thing, but it is not to be indulged in by savages. No, it is the Divine right of civilised beings. Besides, we are Christians, as I said before, and we must impress upon inferior races such as yours the desirability of conforming to the rules of Christian practice. I will read you some of the noble precepts of the Christianity we profess. Here they are, in the very words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:—

“‘I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you.’

“‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’

“‘Love your enemies and do good and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest, for He is kind unto the unthankful and the evil.’

“‘Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.’

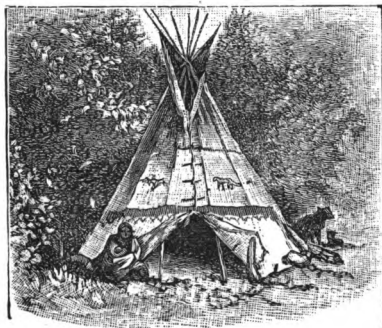
“‘Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven’

“‘For with the same measure that ye mete, withal it shall be measured to you again.’”

All but the most stupid amongst the audience soon discovered what the President meant by these re-

marks and quotations, and his manifest irony caused those who had betrayed any revengeful feelings towards the captive to feel decidedly foolish, and consequently, in some cases, angry.

The recommendation to mercy not being unanimous was out of order, and therefore the Judge was not able to give effect to it in passing sentence upon the prisoner. But, by speaking as he did, Rigby hoped to pave the way for Major Weston to exercise his prerogative of mercy.





CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPENSE AND TRAGEDY.

THE elder Rigby was a man whose character would have insured him respect and esteem in any walk in life. His kindly, genial nature won the hearts of all who knew him, while his high sense of truth and honour, and of justice, ever tempered by mercy, lent weight to the acknowledged force and sagacity of his counsels.

For a few moments it seemed as if mercy were to prevail over malice and revenge. Several young men, indeed, were already on the point of springing forward to cut the prisoner's bonds. They were, however, arrested by the angry remonstrances of a clique of unrelenting trappers and frontier's men.

"Not so fast, my young bucks!" exclaimed one of these worthies, a ferret-faced, cadaverous-looking man, with long yellow-red hair falling down to his shoulders. "I guess yer'd not be so keen to loose the pesky

Injun if yer 'd bin treated like this! Look hiar," and, as he spoke, he pushed back his long unkempt hair with his bony fingers, revealing the horrid fact that both his ears had been cut completely off.

As soon as the exclamations of horror and pity occasioned by the sight of this terrible mutilation had subsided, the trapper continued, "Yaas, I calculate yer'd not feel so squeamish about letting that worthless redskin have his deserts if yer'd been in my shoes three years ago this fall."

"Tell us the story, man," said a woman standing near.

"Wall, that's soon done," replied the mutilated one. "I was setting my traps one morning, along the side of a little creek that flows into the Yellowstone, when I was suddenly set upon and made prisoner by a band of Crees. Fortunately the Injins were in a good humour, having just captured a lot of horses from some poor emigrant folk, or I should not be hiar now, not by a long chalk. However, they stripped me of every rag I had on, and then cut off my ears, just to remember me by, as they playfully remarked, the demons! You bet! I swore a terrible vengeance. Count the notches on the stock of my rifle. Thirteen? Yaas, that's the death roll! Thirteen less of the dusky varmints for one pair of ears!" and Yellow Fox, as the Indians called him, emphasised the concluding sentence by striking the butt of his gun sharply on

the ground and squirting forth a volley of tobacco juice.

"You murderous wretch!" exclaimed Frank Weston, who had come up in time to hear the concluding part of his speech. "You richly deserve to be bound hand and foot and delivered up to your enemies! It is indiscriminate, cold-blooded slaughter, like that which you have just confessed, which maddens the poor Indians and makes them retaliate without mercy upon the first unlucky white who falls into their hands. You and such as you have very much to answer for!"

"Much, indeed!" echoed Ethan Rigby, only too glad of the opportunity of supporting his young friend in the presence of his lovely sister, whom he had observed to be approaching with her father, "those worthless ears of yours have cost a heap of lives already. For every notch you have marked, I'll wager, some innocent white has lost his scalp. It's a pity those Cree gentry didn't cut off your head complete while they were about it. You may scowl and club your gun, assassin, for you never killed those victims in fair fight. But unless you take yourself and your ugly shooting-iron off at once, I'll break the stock and notches off against your stupid head."

As young Rigby concluded, he advanced to carry out his threat, but his first step forward was the signal for Yellow Fox to slink off amongst the crowd.

Teconsa's fate, however, still hung in the balance, for, while some applauded young Weston and his energetic supporter, others hissed and demanded that the sentence of death should be carried out.

It was evident that the camp was divided, and Major Weston, who had come up, noticed with dismay that the majority of the older and more influential men were opposed to the advocates of mercy, and that the ranks of the latter were chiefly made up of the younger men and women and children. This was an ominous discovery. But the Major was still more startled to find, a few minutes later, that the extreme party were already quietly making preparations for the prisoner's execution.

The latter was even then bound securely to a young tree, near the southern extremity of the camp, and a firing party was being arranged. If, therefore, the Indian's life was to be spared, there was not a moment to be lost.

Ordering Frank to remain by his sister, and telling her it was too late for her to interfere, the commandant forced his way rapidly through the crowd which was hurrying up to witness the execution. In his anxiety to save the life of the interesting chief he did not stop to consider that it might be dangerous to interfere with the sentence of the court.

The sullen air of the men who surrounded Teconsa showed Major Weston that they were bent on blood-

shed, yet, nothing daunted, he commanded them to fall back.

“Captain,” said one hoary-headed old trapper, who went by the name of Old Abe, and who had considerable influence over the majority of the hunters and frontier’s men, “Captain, ye’re a brave man, though yew air a Britisher! Yer’ve had no great experiance of these cussed redskins, however. Yer’ll excuse me saying so, but its only green horns like yerself that ever think of treating Injuns with marcy! I’ll jest tell yer of an affair that took place not so very far to the northard of this hiar camp.” And Old Abe crossed his hands over the muzzle of his long rifle, which he had planted, butt downwards, in front of him, and, with his chin resting upon the back of his hand, proceeded to relate the following incident, one of the most tragical in the annals of the American Fur Company.

“Yer call me Old Abe now, boys,” he began, while his keen grey eyes gleamed sharply around to note if he had an attentive audience, “but I was a young man when I took service with the American Fur Company, under that prince of leaders, Major Henry Vanderburgh. Well, yer see, in trying to find the best trapping grounds, we had lost our way and wandered into the heart of the Blackfoot country, without knowing it. One day, our scouts, who were out in advance, came hurrying back into camp with the

alarming news that they had just stumbled upon the traces of a band of Blackfeet.

“Vanderburgh made light of the matter, and, taking me and seven or eight more men with him, rode off to ascertain what truth there was in the report. Sure enough, we had not proceeded far, before we came upon the still smouldering fires of a deserted camp. Several carcasses of recently slaughtered buffaloes lay around, and it was evident that a hunting party of Indians had, within the last hour or so, beaten a hasty retreat from the spot. They were, in all probability, still lurking in the neighbourhood, and our leader rashly determined to follow them up.”

“Ah!” interrupted Major Weston, at this point, “the old story, I perceive. White man’s aggression and red man’s revenge! The hunted quarry turning upon his relentless pursuer. But go on with your story!” he continued, noticing the impatience of the bystanders.

“Well, sir, to be sure,” continued Old Abe, with a condescending smile at the Major, “some of us did suggest that it might be just as well to ‘let sleeping dogs lie,’ or at any rate send to our camp for reinforcements, but, our leader’s courage was all ablaze, he seemed to sniff the battle from afar, and ‘Forward,’ was the word.

“The Blackfoot trail led across prairie and woodland until it entered a dark and gloomy ravine, the steep

banks of which, towering high above us on either hand, were overgrown with trees and brushwood. Save for the gentle rippling of a tiny stream, the deep silence was only broken by the tramp of our horses' feet.

"Suddenly there arose a fearful tumult of yells and rifle shots. The whole dell seemed to be suddenly alive with Indians, who sprang from behind every tree and shrub, firing their guns and brandishing their spears."

As the old man spoke, Major Weston thought involuntarily of Sir Walter Scott's words—

"At once there rose so wild a yell
Within that dark and narrow dell,
As all the fiends, from Heaven that fell,
Had pealed the banner cry of hell."

"To make matters worse," continued Old Abe, "the horses reared and plunged so that it was impossible to make the best use of our weapons.

"Our gallant leader's steed was shot under him by the first volley, and falling, it pinned its rider to the ground. In this terrible predicament he called loudly upon us to assist him to rise. It was in vain; his fate was sealed. One man made the attempt, but was overpowered and scalped before his eyes. I and most of my comrades were severely wounded, and we only saved our lives by headlong flight."

"And what became of the hapless Vanderburgh?" inquired several voices in a breath.

"Ah, it was a pitiful sight!—a sight I shall never forget!" continued the old trapper, his voice shaking with emotion. "As we glanced back over our shoulders, we observed the exultant Blackfeet approach to destroy the prostrate gentleman, who had not ceased struggling to disengage himself. Now he saw that he must die, but, with that dauntless courage which always distinguished him, he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. His hand still grasped his trusty rifle, and the first warrior that advanced received its contents in his heart, and fell dead to the earth. Before, however, Major Vanderburgh could draw one of the pistols from his belt he was struck down by a blow from a tomahawk and speedily despatched.

"Such was the untimely end of Major Henry Vanderburgh, one of the bravest and most popular leaders of the American Fur Company. And such," continued Old Abe warningly, "will be your fate, Major Weston, if you don't aid in exterminating these rascally Indians."

"I should richly deserve a like fate if I did wantonly take part in their destruction," replied the commandant. "But," he continued, in a persuasive tone of voice, "let us now release the poor Indian. I am sure he has been sufficiently punished already by the suspense in which you have kept him. And brave men, such as I know many at least of you to be, cannot surely stifle the generous impulses which must

stir your hearts at the sight of his wondrous fortitude."

"Eh! but, yer see, we're only carryin' out the sentence of the court," replied a grim-looking emigrant.

"Ah! certainly, but that sentence has never been confirmed by myself as commander, so I'll find the judge and see if we can't have it altered to expulsion from the camp," responded the Major cheerfully, as he started on his errand of mercy.

He saw, or fancied he saw, unmistakable signs of relenting in the attitude of the self-constituted executioners, and he thought they would be glad of an opportunity to retire honourably from the position in which they had placed themselves. Unfortunately, however, this was only the case with a few individuals amongst them, and no sooner had the officer disappeared than they once more prepared to shoot the prisoner.

The better disposed remonstrated and attempted to frustrate the sanguinary deed, but they were soon silenced and hustled to one side by the more violent party, who outnumbered them ten to one.

A dozen determined-looking men arrived, with rifles of as many different patterns, and took their stand in front of the condemned man. The crowd was not slow to take the hint, and instinctively fell back—a movement that was perceptibly accelerated by the

sudden order to "Present Arms," followed by the instantaneous levelling of the deadly rifle-barrels.

A death-like silence had fallen over the expectant crowd as they waited the order for the riflemen to fire. The click of the locks was distinctly heard, and sent a shudder through many a breast as each hammer was raised to the full cock. But, even in that brief interval, before the fatal word "Fire" was uttered, there was a sudden startling cry, and a tall girlish figure darted quickly across the open space, and threw herself in front of the living target.

It was Constance Weston.

The noble, high-spirited girl had become aware of the imminent tragedy, and, with characteristic promptitude and self-forgetfulness, she at once determined if possible to save the poor Indian. Frank had been called away from her to assist his father in the search for old Rigby, and it was while on her way to their own waggon she had learned what was taking place. She immediately retraced her steps, and quickly skirting the crowd, bounded between the astonished marksmen and their victim in the very nick of time. It was a rash act, and might have cost the girl her life. However, there she stood, like some lovely vision of a guardian angel. Her luxuriant golden hair had fallen down, and hung in long wavy masses over her shoulders and down her back. The effect was heightened by a momentary gleam of sunshine, which escaped at

that instant from a bank of clouds, behind which, as though to hide its face from a deed of bloodshed, the sun was rapidly declining.

Miss Weston thus appeared to be surrounded by a halo of light, and, as she stood with one hand uplifted above her head, she seemed like some noble goddess rebuking the cruel purposes of man.

The effect was magical. One by one the ready guns were lowered, until only one weapon remained levelled. It was that of Yellow Fox, who, reluctant to lose the chance of gratifying his quenchless thirst for vengeance, seemed as if he would even sacrifice the beautiful intruder herself rather than be balked of his prey.

As the bystanders began to hiss and cry "Shame!" there was a sudden commotion in the crowd. Some of those who stood nearest to the offender were nearly knocked off their feet by a tall powerful man, who, rushing forward, seized the levelled rifle with both hands, wrested it quickly from the owner's grasp, and threw it, right over the heads of the people, into the adjacent river.

"Bravo! Ethan," for it was he, "well done, sir!" shouted Frank and the Major as they arrived at that moment on the spot. The young Kentuckian, however, had not yet done with his ugly antagonist.

Roused to fury by his sudden discomfiture and the loss of his trusty rifle, Yellow Fox drew his long

hunting-knife, and, uttering a yell of frenzy, sprang upon his adversary. But Rigby was too quick for him. Catching the wrist of the hand that held the knife with his left hand, and taking him firmly by the throat with the other, Ethan held him at arm's length. In that vice-like grip Yellow Fox was utterly powerless. In a few moments he began to turn black in the face, and would soon have been strangled, had not his antagonist mercifully released him. Then the wretched man, thoroughly cowed, slunk awkwardly away to try and recover his lost weapon from the bottom of the river.

The young Kentuckian looked contemptuously after him for a moment, and then glanced defiantly around, as if to inquire whether there were any one else who would like to threaten Miss Weston in his presence. But if there were any base enough to raise a hand against a brave and defenceless woman, they were too discreet to betray any such desire, especially since Major Weston, assisted by Frank and Lazenby, had by then collected a band of resolute men to keep order.

As soon as the excitement had partially subsided, Major Weston addressed the people as follows:—

“Comrades, I have investigated the matter sufficiently to discover that undue influence, to use no harsher term, was used to prejudice the jury, or some of them, in the late trial. I therefore demand a new

one, unless you will consent to the immediate release of the prisoner. I think he has already suffered more than enough at the hands of a small but violent section of the camp, men who are steeped in the blood of the poor Indians. After the noble and touching speech of Teconsa himself, and the scathing irony of our able president, we must be totally devoid of mercy and compassion if we refuse to grant this heroic chief his life and liberty."

As the Major paused for a moment there was a murmur of applause, accompanied by other unmistakable signs of a wholesome reaction in the feelings of the crowd. The sight of Connie Weston in tears—for her feelings had once more got the better of her will—produced a great impression upon most of the emigrants, who simply adored her.

This hopeful state of affairs did not escape the commandant's notice, and there was a decidedly confident ring in his clear sonorous voice as he exclaimed, "Friends and comrades, I ask you to give life and freedom to the Sioux chief. Do you consent? Then hold up your hands in token thereof."

A sea of hands was immediately raised, and, as the Major turned and severed the prisoner's cords, a hearty cheer was given. Teconsa was free.

Thus restored to liberty, the Indian's first act was to shake his deliverer heartily by the hand. Then he drew himself up and looked haughtily around upon

the excited crowd. Gradually his countenance assumed a more softened expression, as he noticed the general and spontaneous display of joy and satisfaction at his release, but this suddenly changed to one of fierce and deadly hatred as his eye fell upon Yellow Fox and the rest of his would-be executioners, who were regarding him with vindictive sullenness. Giving them one withering glance of scorn and defiance, the chief turned upon his heel.

At this moment he caught sight of Connie Weston, surrounded by her father and brothers. The Indian's face brightened as he hastened to greet her.

"Light of the West!" he exclaimed, as he took the girl's fair hand in his tawny palm and pressed it to his heart, "you have saved Teconsa's life! Henceforth the chief, your father, may lead his followers, his herds and flocks wheresoever he may choose. The Sioux warriors will not point a gun or raise a hatchet against him. The paleface chief has the eye of an eagle, but his heart is tender; he would not strike a fallen foe. His children are like him, brave and generous. Ugh! if the white men were all so there might be peace between us; but some of them are dogs," he continued, with flashing eyes, as he looked in the direction of Yellow Fox and his party. "They would have killed the Sioux chief like a trapped beaver, but he would not have died unavenged; his warriors are already come to look for their chief."

While the Indian was speaking, the sharp bark of a fox was heard beyond the river, and was answered by a like cry from the opposite side of the camp.

"Indians! Indians!" shouted several voices at once, and the whole camp was immediately thrown into a state of agitation and alarm.

"Turn out the guard; man the breastworks," were Major Weston's orders, uttered in calm but decisive tones.

"Adieu, white maiden, we must part," said the chief. "Give me one lock of that golden hair, that Teconsa may never forget the service rendered to him by the daughter of a paleface chief."

Scarcely knowing what she did in her agitation and alarm, the girl caught up the knife which her father had thrown aside after severing the prisoner's bonds, and quickly cut off one of the coveted tresses. At the same time, she urged the chief to fly for his life, for she knew that if his men made an attack upon the camp nothing could save him from the fury of the trappers.

As the Indian took the coveted little souvenir, he stooped down and kissed the fair hand that presented it. Then, pressing the lock of hair to his heart, he said, impressively, "The golden-haired maiden will ever live in Teconsa's heart. Farewell."

The next moment he was bounding quickly towards the river. As he approached the bank, Connie ob-

served, through the gathering darkness, that he was intercepted by a figure which rose from the cover of a few bushes. The daylight was fast waning, but Connie recognised the lank, ungainly form. It was that of Yellow Fox. She started and uttered a cry of terror, as her eye caught the faint glimmer of light which revealed that he held a knife in his uplifted hand.

The chief was unarmed; he would surely perish. No; he springs lightly aside, and avoids the blow. Then he rushes upon the trapper, before he can recover himself, and hurls him backward into the river. There is a loud splash. Teconsa stoops to pick up the knife which his adversary has dropped. Then he plunges after him into the river.

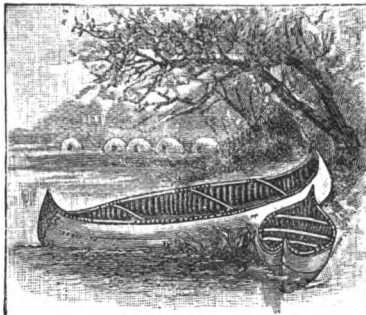
There is an upheaval of the water, a cry of despair, and all is silent again in that direction, except for the smooth, regular strokes of a solitary swimmer. Presently the latter emerges on the further bank of the river, and, brandishing the knife above his head, utters the loud and fearful war-whoop of the Sioux. It is Teconsa. The cry is taken up and repeated on all sides by hundreds of throats. His warriors encircle the camp.

Thanks to the admirable discipline taught by Major Weston, order was already restored there, and every man was armed and at his appointed post.

The Indians advanced from the cover of the trees and bushes, and seemed about to rush the defences; but, at a signal from their chief, they all at once fell back, and disappeared as suddenly as they had come.

A few days later, as the emigrants were about to break up their camp and continue their journey, they observed a flock of vultures circling round and descending upon a little islet half a mile below the encampment. Some men were sent to ascertain the nature of the carrion that attracted the foul birds.

It was the dead body of the wretched Yellow Fox. His scalp was gone, and he had been stabbed to the heart.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PERILS OF THE WAHSATCH.

TECONSA was as good as his word, and the emigrants pursued the remainder of their mountain journey unmolested to the very passes of the Wahsatch. Even the marauding Blackfeet and predatory Crows, doubtless in compliance with some potent hint or threat of their conquerors, the dreaded Sioux, appeared to have been temporarily transformed into honest and peace-abiding Indians. With unwonted forbearance, they allowed the long train of waggons and live stock to pass through their midst, without even attempting to stampede the horses or cut off stragglers.

This immunity from attack, while marching through a region hitherto considered one of the most dangerous parts of the route to Salt Lake City, tended, naturally perhaps, to some relaxation of vigilance, when once the haunts of these mountain banditti were left behind. The emigrants had still, however, a journey of some fifty miles before them ere reaching the isolated

city of the Latter-Day Saints. And, although their route was no longer infested by Crows or Blackfeet, it passed through gloomy defiles and narrow valleys which were not always exempt from the dreaded yells and war-whoops of tribes scarcely less hostile.

The Snakes and Bannacks, who lived to the northward, had not yet learned the benefits of peace, and their war parties occasionally penetrated as far south as the upper reaches of the Ogden and Bear Rivers. It was not indeed until some years later that they were civilized by General Conner, when his batteries and battalions swept half their warriors to the grave.

The emigrants had crossed the Bear River, and were now descending the Western slopes of the mountains. The head of the train had just entered a long narrow valley, and Indian Bill and the two young Westons were out scouting about a mile in advance.

The two youths had early shown a special aptitude for the latter duty. They were not only fond of adventure, but, being well mounted and bold riders, they had gradually come to be recognised as peculiarly fitted for the work. In conjunction with the old Indian fighter or one of his veteran comrades, they had headed the march all the way from the Green River, and had by this time earned the appellation of "The Boy Scouts."

"Is it not rather strange," said Frank, abruptly breaking the silence in which they had been riding for

the last half-hour, "that we should have crossed these mountains from East to West without seeing a single specimen of the ungainly animals from which they are supposed to take their name?"

"Yes," chimed in Harry in tones of disgust, "they might as well have spelled it B-A-R-E for all the bears we have seen."

Frank made some gay retort, and then their peals of merry laughter were echoed and re-echoed from the neighbouring rocks.

"Hist!" cried Indian Bill, checking his horse.

A low growl caught their ears.

"Ah! it seems our laughter has awakened something more substantial than echoes," whispered Frank to his brother, as they also pulled up.

"I wonder if it's a grizzly," said Harry, under his breath, and in tones tremulous with excitement.

"Very likely," answered his brother, "but see, Bill is motioning to me to hold his horse."

The old hunter, who was a few yards in advance, quietly dismounted and gave the end of the bridle into Frank's hand as he came up, "What is it and where is it?" questioned the latter.

"Wal, it's a bar, that's sartin, but war she's located is jest what I want to find out," answered the hunter, somewhat testily, as he examined the nipple of his rifle to make sure that the cap had not fallen off.

The next minute he was cautiously making his way

up the dry bed of a watercourse which in stormy weather doubtless contributed its mite to swell the waters of the Great Salt Lake. The boys watched him until he was lost to sight behind some huge boulders, which had probably, at some period or other, been detached from the adjoining cliffs and fallen into the gully.

Five minutes—which appeared to the impatient youths more like half an hour—elapsed, and then came the sharp report of a rifle. Its echoes had scarcely died away amongst the rocks when the old hunter reappeared, running and leaping down the stony bed of the mountain torrent at a pace which spoke volumes for the agility of a man of over sixty years of age, but which threatened the direst consequences to neck and limb if by chance he missed his footing.

“What on earth’s the matter?” exclaimed Frank.
“He must for once have missed his aim, and ——”

“Sure enough the bear’s at his heels!” cried Harry, with wild excitement, as, just then, a huge grizzly made its appearance in hot pursuit.

“My word! there’s no time to lose,” said Frank. “Hold these horses.” And throwing the reins to his brother, he sprang from his saddle and unslung his repeating rifle. In a few seconds more he was hastening to the hunter’s assistance.

Harry did as he was bid, although at such a

moment inaction was hard to bear; but that peculiarly resolute, nay almost imperious look, which the presence of danger always evoked in Frank's handsome face, warned him that remonstrance would be useless.

Without a word, therefore, the young lad looped the bridles over his arm and half turned in his saddle to watch the exciting drama which was taking place in his immediate vicinity.

Indian Bill had reached within fifty yards of his would-be deliverer, who, rifle in hand, was hurrying to meet him. The bear was so close upon the hunter's heels, however, that it seemed to Harry as if nothing could save him, and he trembled lest Frank also should perish in his rash but gallant effort to save their old comrade.

The gully was at this spot about six feet deep, with almost perpendicular sides, and Harry could only see what was taking place by riding to the very edge of the channel. He noticed that Frank had halted, and posted himself behind a boulder about four feet high which stood by itself in the centre of the water-course, some couple of hundred yards lower down than the mass of detached rocks already referred to. His feet were planted widely apart and the barrel of his rifle rested upon the top of the boulder, over which he also leaned. His cheek lay against the stock and his finger pressed the trigger in readiness for

instant action, but as yet the body of the flying man intervened between the deadly weapon and its mark.

"Now," cried Harry, in his excitement; "now's your time."

He was too far off for his voice to have been easily heard, or at any rate heeded, in that critical moment, but he would have been more than human if he could have sat there unmoved at such a juncture. The old hunter was within a dozen yards or so of the boulder behind which his young friend was posted, when, either by accident or design, he suddenly fell to the ground. With surprising rapidity the huge grizzly stopped its shambling kind of gallop to poke its muzzle into the side of the fallen man, but at that instant came the report of Frank's rifle, and the sudden lifting of the brute's head, and an angry snarl, told plainly that the shot had taken effect.

The ungainly animal had reared itself up, and was sitting upon its haunches, as though to obtain a better view of its surroundings and enable it to determine from whence the injury proceeded. This was just what Frank desired, and he seized the opportunity to fire shot after shot into the monster's breast.

At such close quarters his repeating rifle proved very effective, even against a grizzly bear, and Frank had the satisfaction of seeing its huge frame quiver and then totter and fall, as it attempted to advance upon him.

Indian Bill had been partially stunned by his fall, and as he lay upon the ground the carcass of the beast came athwart his long legs. The weight of the bear at last roused him from his semi-stupor and he endeavoured to rise to his feet, but, of course, without success.

Frank was about to step forward to his assistance when a shout from Harry arrested him.

"Back! quick, back!" cried the boy, imperatively.

"What's the matter?" shouted Frank, as he leaped on the top of the boulder, in order to see over the edge of the gully.

"Why! look there! What's that?" replied Harry, pointing down the valley as he spoke.

Frank looked in the direction indicated, and even stood upon tiptoe on the boulder, but could see nothing alarming. A few buzzards, doubtless attracted to the vicinity by their wonderful instinct, were already perched upon some neighbouring crags, in readiness to feast on poor Bruin's remains. And a bald-headed eagle soared high overhead in the cloudless sky. But, except Harry and their horses, these were the only signs of life discernible.

"I don't see anything, but we will be with you in a second or two!" he shouted, as he jumped down, and seizing one of the bear's paws tried to drag the carcass to one side.

"Try to lift her a bit," said Indian Bill. "It's

impossible to pull her on one side, as she's in a hole."

Frank accordingly changed his tactics.

"That's the ticket, yonker; if you could jest lift her half an inch I guess I could pull these old stumps of mine from under her," said Bill, encouragingly.

Frank was no weakling, but though he pulled and tugged with all his might, he could not raise that ponderous carcass the hundredth part of an inch. Hot and exhausted, both he and Indian Bill had desisted a moment from their exertions, when Harry's voice reached them again, and this time in accents of the greatest alarm.

"Indians! Indians!" it cried. "Make haste! Make haste!"

Frank and the old hunter looked at each other in dismay. Then the latter waved his hand in the direction of the advancing emigrants. "Run! run," he exclaimed, "and mount your hoss. You boys must ride back and give the alarm quick!"

"And leave you here?" said Frank. "Never! but I'll despatch Harry and return immediately." And before he had finished the sentence he was hurrying down the gully at a pace which even surpassed that of Indian Bill when pursued by the grizzly.

"Don't show yourself!" the old hunter called after him, "and tell the yonker to look slippy! He

needn't be afraid of loosing my old mare, she'll take care of herself, you bet!"

The warning was not unnecessary, for in his eagerness to get within easy speaking distance of his brother, Frank had almost forgotten the danger of his own position.

Thanks to the old hunter's kindly caution, however, he took care to keep under the cover of the high banks, and managed to reach within a dozen yards of the spot where Harry was waiting, without the possibility of even an Indian's sharp eyes having seen him from the valley.

"What on earth are you doing, to be so long?" cried the boy, in tones of mingled anger and alarm, as he struggled to control the horses, which were evidently getting excited from some cause or other. "Look sharp and mount!" he continued, "or I shall have to let Saladin go; he's nearly pulling me out of my saddle and the Indians are close upon us."

Frank could then distinctly hear the sound of horses advancing at a gallop.

"Never mind me!" he cried, "I must stay with Bill; loose his mare and ride back for your life and give the alarm."

"What! and leave you here? Are you mad? Where is Bill—hurt?"

"No; but the bear fell dead on top of him and pinned him to the ground, and I cannot desert him."

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"Then we shall all be killed!" replied Harry, despairingly, as he cast an anxious glance over his shoulder at the rapidly approaching Indians.

"Never fear, old fellow," was Frank's cheering reply. "You are not going to be so silly as to let them catch you with such a horse as that under you, and they'll know nothing about Bill and me here if you don't tell them."

"Then am I to take Saladin with me?" queried the boy, somewhat reassured by his brother's confident tone and manner.

"Yes, he'll lead well enough, and no doubt Bill's mare will follow. They might betray us if they were left behind. Now, go at once, before it is too late."

As though to emphasise the latter remark, a fierce yell burst upon their ears. Harry hesitated no longer. The frightened horses reared and plunged, but he wheeled them skilfully round and dashed away up the valley. Chieftain and Saladin galloped along side by side, and Indian Bill's mare, which was loose, followed close on their heels.

Frank scrambled up the side of the gully to some overhanging bushes which grew on its edge, and, having wormed himself beneath them, peered cautiously out under the branches. As he did so a terrific yell almost close beside him caused him instantly to draw back his head, and for a moment he thought he was discovered. His repeating rifle, which he had dragged

after him, lay within easy reach, and, as he clutched its cold barrel, he determined if his worst fears were realised to jump upon his feet and sell his life dearly. After a few seconds—which almost seemed like hours—of terrible suspense, the yell was answered twice from a little lower down the valley, and then to Frank's great relief, the Indian scout, who must have ridden up to reconnoitre the spot where Harry and his horses had doubtless been seen, cantered off to rejoin his companions. At the sound of the mustang's retreating footsteps, Frank breathed a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for his wonderful escape. He then looked forth again and was delighted to see Harry and the horses nearly half way up the valley.

Just at that moment, however, a prolonged yell of rage or triumph, he could not exactly tell which, reached his ear. Looking in the direction whence the sound proceeded, he saw a long array of mounted Indians sweep at full gallop over the brow of a low stretch of rising ground which had hitherto intervened between them and the objects of their pursuit. They made a gallant show, those wild horsemen, as they careered along, their plumes floating in the wind and their shields and lances glittering in the sunlight. But Frank could contemplate them without dismay, for he knew that they had no chance of overtaking his brother, even if he had not obtained so good a start, and he felt little anxiety as to the latter not

being able to give timely warning to the advancing emigrants. He well knew that a few moments would suffice for the lad to muster a score or more of well armed and determined men to check the sudden onset, and that even if the Indians persevered in their attack when they found so large a train, their ultimate, nay, speedy repulse was not a matter of doubt.

With these reflections, Frank retraced his steps to where he had left his imprisoned comrade.

“Wal, young squire, you’ve not let those screeching Bannecks annex that curly wig of your’n, I see; but I’ve been raal uncomfortable about you, to say nothing of myself,” and, in his delight at seeing Frank back safe and sound, the old hunter grinned from ear to ear.

“I’ve had a most providential escape, Bill; one of their scouts came within a few feet of where I was lying under some bushes,” answered Frank. “But,” he continued, after a pause, “how do you know the Indians are Bannecks?”

“By their war-cry,” replied Bill. “If you’d fought them as many times as I have, or had been with me and Sanson last fall, when a party of them chased us for two days and nights through these mountains, you’d not forget that awful whoop of theirs!”

“I don’t think I shall ever do so as it is,” answered the youth warmly. “When their scout uttered his

blood-curdling yell just over my head I thought my time had come, I can assure you."

"And mine too, you bet!" averred Bill, glancing uneasily at the shaggy carcass which held him fast.

"Yes, you must indeed have had to suffer," said Frank sympathisingly, "and the sooner we devise some means of releasing you the better."

"I'd rather have my legs cut off than go through another ten minutes like that," declared the hunter emphatically. "A hamstrung horse with a pack of hungry wolves about to spring at its throat could scarcely feel worse than I did lying helplessly here without even a charge in my rifle, and expecting the red-skins upon me every moment."

"It must have been like some horrible dream," said Frank, as though speaking to himself more than the hapless prisoner; and then, after a little reflection, he said to him! "Ah, I have it! I wonder we did not think of it before."

"What is it, yonker," inquired Bill almost hopelessly, as his dark eyes followed the youth, who sprang over the bear, and then stooped down at the other side of it.

"Your boots, man, your boots!" exclaimed Frank. "If we could only get them off, it would be easy to draw your legs from under the brute."

"You bet! it would," replied Bill joyfully, "bully for you, yonker!"

Without much difficulty Frank managed to get at Bill's feet, and divest them of the huge Wellington boots which encased them. After that it was comparatively easy, by their united efforts, to free the imprisoned limbs. And soon Bill was standing in triumph upon the carcass of the grizzly, reloading his Kentucky rifle.

"I should like to know," said Frank, as a few minutes later they started on foot to regain the emigrant train, "how it came about that that bear so completely turned the tables on you?"

"Wal, you see, I didn't know the ole lady was at home when I fired at her cub," replied the hunter.

"Oh! then you killed her cub, did you?" inquired Frank, with surprise.

"Yaas," answered Bill testily. "If I fired at it I reckon I killed it."

"Oh! I understand now how it all happened," said Frank, without noticing his companion's fractiousness. He felt that the latter was entitled to a little indulgence after the very trying experience he had gone through.

After walking for some time in silence, Indian Bill observed that they must return and secure their bear meat as soon as they had ascertained what had become of Harry and his pursuers.

Frank was about to make some reply, when Bill suddenly laid his hand on his arm and said, "Whist!"

They both stopped at once and listened intently, and then looked in each other's faces.

"I thought so," said the hunter tersely, as he started off again at a long slouching walk, which obliged Frank almost to run to keep up with him.

"Was that noise firing?" asked Frank.

"You bet!" was the laconic reply.





CHAPTER XIX.

RUN TO GROUND IN A CAÑON.

CONNIE had given the old scout Indian Bill and his two youthful colleagues, her gallant brothers, a pleasant greeting as they rode past on their way to the front that sunny morning. She occupied her favourite seat in front of the waggon, and employed her time in alternately reading a book which lay on her lap and in trimming a large broad-brimmed hat she held in her hands.

"Oh! Robert," she said presently, "are there many waggons in front of us?"

"No, miss," replied the man cheerfully, as he touched his cap, "not more than half a dozen I should say."

"Then could not you drive a little faster and get ahead of them? What with the dust they stir up and their huge tilts quite half the view is intercepted!"

"Certainly, miss, but I don't like to change my place in the ranks without orders."

"Oh! I don't think my father would have the least objection," said Connie, "at any rate I will take all the responsibility. The air is so clear to-day that there must be a lovely view down the valley if one could only see it."

"All right, Miss Connie, we'll soon take the lead," said Lazenby, as he cracked his long whip. "Get along, my beauties," he continued, addressing his horses as was his wont, as though they were human beings, "we must push on at the double unless we intend to be half the day in taking up our new position. Ah! Ruby, for shame of yourself. Steady, little mare!" this to the offside chestnut, which seemed inclined to take liberties and play up a little as they started off at a brisk trot.

As they passed the second of the preceding waggons, which belonged to the Rigbys, Ethan mounted his horse and trotted after them. Ever since that ever-to-be-remembered-day when Connie was surprised by Teconsa and his Sioux braves, the young Kentuckian had taken upon himself the rôle of especial escort to his commandant's daughter. No one ventured to question his right to the responsible, though self-constituted office. Although in everything else the soul of manly good nature, on this point he was, as O'Flaherty expressed it, like a bear with a sore head, and was

extremely sensitive to anything approaching to banter. This had been brought home to the Irishman in a way that he was not soon likely to forget, and in a manner more forcible than polite. For no sooner had Paddy, on one unlucky occasion, ventured to exercise his native wit on what appeared so tempting a topic, than he found himself seized by irresistible force, and, the next moment, he was obeying the law of projectiles and gyrating through space as though flung from the arm of some ancient catapult. He alighted upon the body of a mule, which, fortunately for the biped, but unfortunately for the quadruped, happened to be lying at full length upon the sward near by.

“ Good morning, Ethan,” said Connie, smiling and acknowledging his low bow as he drew near to the waggon. Robert was making the horses walk, as they had then got well beyond the half dozen men who formed the advance guard of the emigrant train.

“ Good morning, Miss Weston. I am sorry to see that caution still holds an inferior position in your list of virtues.”

“ Caution ! ” exclaimed the girl, looking up at the young Kentuckian with both surprise and amusement. “ Why, surely you do not anticipate any danger here in broad daylight, and almost within sight of Great Salt Lake City ? ”

“ It is never wise to take too much for granted in these mountains,” answered Rigby seriously, as he

unslung the rifle from his shoulder and held it across his horse's withers in front of him.

A momentary look of concern flitted across the girl's face as she watched this ominous preparation for action, which affected her even more than the grave tones of Rigby's voice. But soon the lovely view before them and the grandeur of the mountain gorges on either side absorbed her attention, and, aided by the natural buoyancy of her disposition, dispelled her half-fledged fears.

"What a deep and gloomy defile that is on our right!" she presently remarked, "I wonder how it was originally formed? No imaginable length of time, not even millions of years could, I should think, have enabled that insignificant river to cut so deep a channel through the solid rock."

"No, Miss Connie; these cañons, as they are called, always seem to me amongst the most wonderful works of the Almighty. They are such splendid outlets for the rivers of this vast watershed that they must surely have been designed and formed for that very purpose."

"I quite agree with you there, Ethan, for although geologists would doubtless, and, with truth, assert that these stupendous chasms are the results of some mighty convulsion of nature, yet if they went no further they would but be stating half the truth. Just as if I were to say that the grass and flowers beneath our feet, and indeed the whole teeming life of

the animal and vegetable world were mainly the results of the beneficent influence of light and heat, and were to make no allusion whatever to the great fount and source of light and heat, the sun."

"Exactly," replied Ethan, casting a side glance of love and admiration at the girl, as he bent slightly forward over his horse's neck.

But Connie was looking intently before her down the valley and did not notice him.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, presently, "there is something moving far away to the right of the valley, do you not see it? I thought at first it was only a bush."

Ethan was all attention in a moment.

"My word! you are right," he said, with a scarcely perceptible start, as he shaded his eyes with one of his huge brown hands. "They are not very easy to make out under the shadow of that rocky point they are just turning, but I believe there are three of them, and they are certainly coming our way. What do you say, Robert?"

"It seems to me, miss," was the prompt answer, "that there are three horses but only one rider."

"I guess you've hit it off square this time, Lazenby," answered Ethan, "I was in hopes my eyes had deceived me."

"Oh, dear! what can have happened?" cried Connie in alarm.

"Nothing of any importance, I dare say," replied

Rigby, cheerfully, "Indian Bill has probably shot a deer, and sent one of your brothers back for a mule to pack the beast on."

It was a lame but kindly meant attempt to reassure her, and no one saw through it more quickly than Connie. For why, then, should there be two riderless horses accompanying the messenger?

Connie's reflections were soon cut short, however, by an exclamation from Robert, who had just pulled his horse to a standstill.

"It's Master Harry, for a five-pound note!" he exclaimed, "and the led horse is Saladin, as true as I'm alive! The other horse seems to be loose. It's easy to see them now they are in the open."

"Yes, but as there are no signs of pursuit, there can be no cause for alarm," said Rigby, carefully examining the priming of his rifle and loosening the pistols in his holster, notwithstanding.

"No signs of pursuit!" cried Robert excitedly. He had never taken his eyes off the advancing horses and horseman for a moment after ascertaining who and what they were. "No signs of pursuit, did you say? Then what are those figures, aye, and mounted figures, too, swarming round the bend of the valley there, for all the world like a band of thieving Cossacks."

"Cossacks?" repeated Rigby, hastily glancing in the direction indicated. "They're Indians, if that's

what you mean! Turn your horses' heads, and look smart, man; we shall have to take the back track if we wish to avoid a closer acquaintance with these gentry!"

There was a jaunty ring in the young man's voice, which ill accorded with the anxious expression of his face, and Connie felt certain that the former was merely assumed for her sake, and that in reality they were in a position of great danger. She bitterly reproached herself for having, by her wilfulness, endangered not only her own safety but also the lives of the two brave men who were with her. And she knew her father, who had left her for a short time in order to attend to his duties as commandant, would be almost distracted when he discovered her perilous situation.

Robert lost no time in turning his team and heading them back the way they had come. The waggon was heavily laden, however, and the horses, though willing, were weakened by the hardships and privations of the long march. The slope of the ground, too, was against them, and although, in obedience to the voice and whip of their driver, they strained every nerve to get on, the pace scarcely exceeded a slow canter.

They had proceeded a hundred yards after turning to the right-about when Harry dashed past them. His face was deadly pale, but his lips were tightly

compressed and he sat well down in his saddle. The horses were covered with foam, and Chieftain's wide-spread nostrils and heaving flanks told their own tale. It had evidently been a ride for life.

For a moment the boy seemed about to draw rein. "Make haste!" he cried, "or the Indians will be upon you."

"All right, my brave boy. Push on and send us help," shouted Rigby.

Harry's only reply was to dig his heels into the mustang's flanks and gallop on faster than before.

In their efforts not to be left behind, the chestnuts also made an extra spurt, and, in the excitement of the moment, Robert actually raised a cheer. Inured to danger as he was, there was something almost exhilarating to the ex-soldier in the rush and turmoil of that wild retreat. On this occasion, however, his exultation proved short-lived, for suddenly a hames' strap broke, and one of the horses shot forward a head and neck in front of his fellow. It was only prevented from getting quite loose by the hames catching against the saddle, where they fortunately stuck.

At this fateful moment a terrific yell burst upon their ears, and looking back, the fugitives were horrified to see that the Indians were almost close upon them. The latter were not coming on in a compact mass, but in a long straggling line, according to the fleetness of

their ponies. Foremost were several well-mounted chiefs, easily distinguishable by their plumes of eagles' feathers. And then, at irregular distances, followed the braves, singly and in groups, to the number of at least one hundred.

"The cañon, make for the cañon!" cried Rigby; "it is our only chance."

Without a moment's hesitation, Robert turned his horses' heads in the direction indicated. They were scarcely a couple of hundred yards from the mouth of the deep gorge already described, and, with the instinct of a true frontier's man, Rigby saw that it offered their only chance of escape. Could they but succeed in entering that narrow passage, it might be possible for two well-armed and determined men to keep the red-skins at bay until assistance arrived.

Connie was wellnigh overpowered with distress and fear, and would probably have fainted had not the jolting of the waggon as it passed over the uneven ground partially diverted her attention by obliging her to hold on to her seat with all her might.

Presently, she heard Ethan's voice close beside her.

"Keep a stout heart, Miss Connie, and, with God's help, we shall yet escape. We are just entering the gorge. Hold fast."

There was a violent lunge and the splashing of

water as the half-maddened team plunged up the river's bed. The rocky walls of the cañon rose almost perpendicularly on either side, and the channel narrowed perceptibly at almost every step they advanced. A few yards further and the canvas-tilted waggon would have almost sufficed to block the narrow passage, but each moment progress became more difficult, the exhausted horses strained and stumbled over the treacherous boulders, until, at length, the waggon was brought up with a jerk against a mass of fallen rock.

The sudden strain proved too much for the already damaged harness, and one of the chestnuts broke clear of everything and bolted up the gorge.

"Cut the other horse loose!" cried Rigby, "and then post yourself behind that rock and shoot straight. It's now or never with us."

"All right! I'm your man," answered Robert between his set teeth, as he quickly carried out Ethan's instructions.

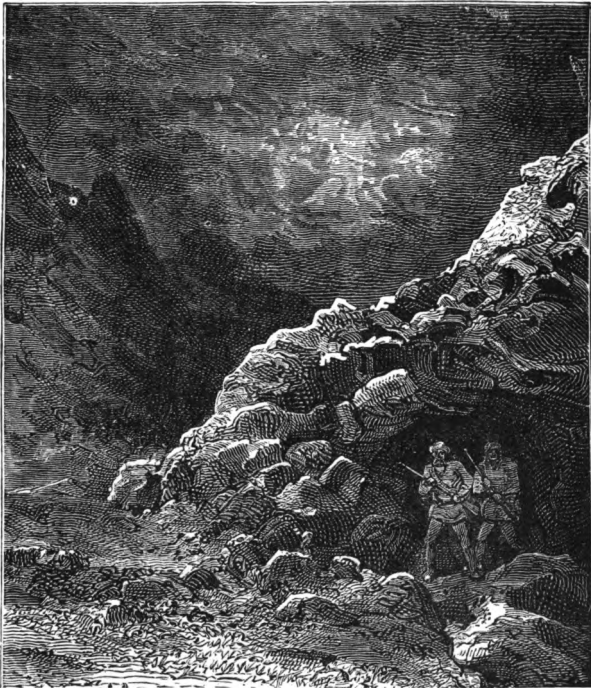
The latter had dismounted by this time and loosed his own horse also, and soon all three frightened animals were out of sight in the gloomy cañon. The splash and clatter of their passage through the shallow water and over the rocky bed was quickly drowned in the noise of the advancing Indians, who saw, with yells of triumph, that their intended victims were unable to proceed further.

Nevertheless, the red men did not at once charge down upon them, for something else had caught their eagle vision—the levelled rifles of the dauntless white men. To enter the cañon in the face of those deadly tubes would be, the Indians well knew, to court certain death. As yet no blood had been spilt, and such a reckless sacrifice of life as that would have been contrary to the instincts and traditions of savage warfare.

As fast as they arrived at the mouth of the gorge, therefore, their horrid war-cries changed to howls of rage, and, seeing how matters stood, the warriors wheeled their ponies to the right or left and took cover behind the rocks. Here for a brief space the chiefs consulted together as to their best plan of attack.

This precious interval was utilised by Ethan and Robert in making the best dispositions they could to meet the threatened onslaught. They knew that the respite was only momentary, but every moment increased their chances of succour, for, by this time, they had no doubt that a force was being got together to rescue them. The Indians appeared to have divided, one portion of them having followed the waggon into the cañon, while the main body had continued up the valley. These last were doubtless less bent upon capturing Harry than upon overtaking and looting the emigrant waggons, which

they could see before them, and which, one after another, as the alarm spread, were turned to the right-about by their terrified owners, and driven off as fast as the luckless teams could be made to draw them.





CHAPTER XX.

A HERO'S DEATH.

RIGBY estimated that about thirty of the savages had followed them and were then drawn up at the entrance of the cañon.

Telling his comrade to keep a sharp look-out for a moment or two, Ethan ran a little way up the gorge to reconnoitre and if possible to find a more secure retreat than the waggon in which to place Miss Weston.

A joyful exclamation soon told Robert that he had been successful, and in less than ten minutes he was back again.

Springing to the front of the waggon, he called Connie to him.

"Quick," he exclaimed, "I will take you to a safer place than this."

The poor girl was trying to shelter herself as well as she could at the bottom of the waggon. Hearing

Rigby's voice, she rose and staggered to the front of the vehicle.

"Oh, Ethan!" she gasped, "tell me, is there any hope? It is terrible to think of falling into the hands of those fearful savages!" And the poor girl shuddered and burst into a flood of tears.

"Never fear, Miss Connie," said Ethan, fervently, "they shall not so much as lay a finger on you while there is one drop of blood left in my veins. But there is not a moment to lose," he continued; "you are faint. Let me carry you."

The next moment the young giant had the almost fainting girl in his arms, and was hurrying with her to his newly-found place of refuge. This was a mere crevice—it could not be called a cave—in the base of the cliffs about forty yards up the cañon. In front of this tiny grotto, and on a level with its floor, was a curious ledge or shelf of rock which projected several feet into the gorge, forming a kind of rocky platform some four feet above the bed of the river.

"There!" exclaimed Ethan, as he deposited Connie gently on her feet on this rocky dais. "Run into that little cave and you will be safe from any stray arrows or other missiles."

"But where will you be?" inquired Connie hesitatingly.

"Close at hand, here," answered Rigby. "I think we can hold the pass best from behind the waggon.

But, hark! I must go," and with a look that expressed more than words, the brave fellow hastened back to rejoin Robert at the waggon.

Connie felt as though she would sink to the ground with fright. Her knees trembled so violently that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she managed to walk to the shelter which Rigby had pointed out. After resting for a few moments, however, with her forehead supported by a natural cushion of cool, damp moss, which nearly covered one side of the cave, she somewhat revived.

Two rifle shots, followed by the whoops and yells of the Indians, told her that the struggle had begun in good earnest. Controlling herself by a great effort, therefore, she stepped to the mouth of the grotto and peered cautiously out between some tufts of fern which were growing in the crevices of the rock. Her somewhat elevated position gave her a capital view of all that was going on down the gorge, and the sight might well have caused a stouter heart than hers to quail.

The Indians had left their cover and charged up the cañon, and were at that moment engaged in a fierce struggle with her protectors. The latter were fighting like Paladins, but it seemed impossible that they could maintain their ground much longer. They had stationed themselves one on each side of the waggon, but a yard or two higher up the gorge, so

that they could take their enemies more in detail as their ranks were broken and divided by the obstructing vehicle. Robert was somewhat protected by the mass of rock already referred to, and, armed with his repeating rifle, he dealt out death to all who approached him. Rigby had shoved the pole of the waggon across the wider space which intervened between it and the cliff on his side, and he sheltered himself as well as he could behind the vehicle; but as soon as the charges in his rifle and pistols were exhausted, he could only use the former weapon as a club and fight the redskins hand to hand.

Perceiving this, one of their chiefs, who was mounted on a fine black stallion, directed his warriors to concentrate their efforts on the passage which poor Rigby was thus struggling to hold. Thereupon the braves rushed forward, with wild yells and in overwhelming numbers. The pole was forced aside, and Ethan borne to his knees with the sudden onset.

Quick as thought, Robert sprang to his comrade's assistance, and was just in time to shoot an Indian who was on the point of running the young Kentuckian through with his spear. Unluckily, however, Robert himself was being closely watched by the chief already mentioned, who, seeing his opportunity, rode quickly up behind the white man and aimed a terrific blow at the back of his head with his battle-axe. This would doubtless have finished poor Lazenby's career for

ever, had not the horse stumbled at that moment over one of the numerous boulders and marred his rider's aim. As it was, although the blade missed him, the wooden haft caught the ex-soldier on the crown of his head and felled him senseless to the ground.

Ethan's heart almost died within him as he saw his comrade's fall. Wounded and bleeding, he gave way before the victorious Indians, some of whom pressed closely upon him, while others commenced looting the contents of the waggon. He had emptied so many saddles, however, with the irresistible sweep of his long rifle, that the braves no longer cared to come within its deadly radius. They endeavoured to circle round him and sweep down upon him from several points at once, but they were impeded by the uneven nature of the ground, and the increasing narrowness of the gorge. Their ponies stumbled over the boulders or fell into the deep holes, and for a moment or two it seemed almost as if he might succeed in beating them off. His spirits had by this time revived, and he fought with consummate skill and courage.

Connie watched the struggle from her hiding-place with breathless anxiety and the most terrible misgivings.

Suddenly she saw a plumed Indian on a coal-black horse disengage himself from the crush of braves who surrounded the white man. While the latter's face was turned away for a moment, this Indian slipped

behind him, and to the girl's horror, rode up the cañon in her direction. His piercing eyes scanned every nook and cranny where a fugitive might perchance be lying hid; and the poor girl felt that her time had come.

An expressive "Ugh!" caused her to look up, for, in her helplessness, she had buried her face in her hands, and the sight which met her eyes made an involuntary scream escape her lips.

A tall, ferocious-looking savage was staring straight at her, and, although almost transfixed with horror, she noticed his bearing, his horse, his weapons, and particularly the device which was rudely painted upon his shield. - It was a Death's Head.

Warned by Connie's scream, young Rigby looked behind him and saw with dismay that the chief who had already made himself so conspicuous by his dash and enterprise had somehow or other slipped past him, and discovered the girl's place of refuge. Without a moment's hesitation Ethan dashed through the surrounding braves, and bounded towards the cave.

With yells of mingled rage and astonishment, the savages urged their ponies in pursuit; but love and anxiety lent wings to the young Kentuckian, and for the short distance which intervened, he kept ahead of his pursuers. Springing upon the rocky ledge, he placed himself in front of his lovely charge, and prepared to battle for her with his life.

Soon the redskins swarmed in front of him, but the ledge on which he stood was too high for their horses to leap. Neither was it easy for them to reach him with their lances where he stood well back in the entrance to the grotto. Enraged and baffled, the chief ordered his warriors to dismount and storm the position on foot.

Love and despair nerved Rigby's arm, and once, nay twice, he dashed back the howling mob with incredible energy and force almost before they could gain a footing on the rock. In doing so, however, he necessarily came within reach of the chief's spear and received several ugly stabs. Weak with loss of blood, Ethan fell powerless to the ground just as the savages prepared to renew their attack. At that critical moment, however, a peculiar warning cry came pealing up the gorge. It was the signal to retreat, given by their scouts stationed near the entrance, and, ere its echoes died away amongst the cliffs, the Indians had remounted their ponies and were in full retreat down the cañon. All except the chief who had the Death's head on his shield. He lingered a moment to complete his bloody work.

With a fiendish leer, he urged his horse close up to the rock and made a savage thrust at Connie as she stooped to minister to her stricken champion; perceiving his cruel purpose, a cry of horror escaped her lips. The sound of her voice roused Ethan from his

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He fell back with a heavy groan into Connie's arms.

semi-unconsciousness, and, starting up at that moment, he received the spear in his own breast. As he fell back with a heavy groan into Connie's arms, the reports of rifles and the sound of distant cheering were to be heard, and the Indian chief dared no longer delay. Regardless of the many boulders and pitfalls, he urged his horse to the utmost speed and dashed towards the entrance of the cañon as though all the furies were after him.

But this time vengeance was not to be balked of her prey. Ere he could reach the outlet of the gorge, he was met and shot down by the mounted force which, in response to Harry's alarm, had been collected, and which having speedily repulsed and put to flight the main body of the Indians, Major Weston was then leading to his daughter's rescue.

Seeing the deserted waggon before him, Major Weston galloped up to it, his mind racked with the most horrible misgivings.

The contents of the vehicle were tossed about in all directions, but there was no sign of his beloved daughter or Robert.

Hark! what was that? A groan? Yes, and there was a booted foot sticking out from that heap of slain. It was but the work of a few minutes to dismount and free the ex-soldier, for he it was, from the dead bodies of a couple of redskins which lay above him.

Relieved of their weight, Robert gave a deep sigh,

and, opening his eyes, looked about him in a confused manner, as if trying to recollect where he was and what had happened.

Just then, Major Weston's attention was called to some object higher up the gorge, and leaving Sanson and others to attend to Robert he hastened towards it. On reaching the rocky ledge already described, what was his joy to find his daughter apparently uninjured. She was kneeling down in the entrance of the little cave, supporting poor young Rigby's head upon her knees. But the joyous look on her father's face at seeing her, changed to one of deep concern as he saw that the poor fellow who lay stretched upon his back on the rock was evidently dying.

The old soldier took in the situation at a glance. As he looked first at his daughter, given back to him as it were from the dead, and then at the brave men who had so nobly defended her against all odds to the very death, he turned away unable longer to control his emotion. Aware, however, of the necessity for prompt action if anything was to be done to restore Ethan even temporarily to consciousness, Major Weston quickly mastered his feelings so far as to dismount and render the poor fellow all the assistance in his power.

"Oh! surely, father, he is not dead!" exclaimed Connie, looking up, as her parent knelt beside her and felt the young man's pulse.

Her pale face and agonised expression showed how deep was her distress and anxiety, and, for her sake, Major Weston struggled to compose his voice as he answered gently.

"No, dear, he still lives. I will try what a drop of brandy will do for him," and taking a small flask from his pocket he poured a few drops of the liquor down Rigby's throat.

"He's a gone coon, you bet!" remarked a rough old emigrant who had just come up, as he shook his grizzled head.

"Sorra a bit of it, ye blathering fool," answered O'Flaherty, who with several others stood around the ledge. "Cannot ye see the spalpeen's only fainted!" and the kind-hearted Irishman winked and gesticulated at the blunt old emigrant to keep him quiet. The latter at first seemed inclined to resent the son of Erin's uncomplimentary mode of address, but, on second thoughts, he took the hint and moved away, still shaking his head.

Revived by the draught of brandy and a liberal application of cold water to the temples, Rigby gradually recovered consciousness.

"Where am I?" he enquired faintly; and then, as it all seemed to flash across his mind, he started and tried to get upon his feet, but fell back helpless ere he had raised himself to a sitting posture. "Where is Miss Connie?" he gasped; "is she safe?"

"Yes, dear Ethan, thanks to your bravery," replied the girl, struggling to control her voice, while the tears flowed down her cheeks; "but, hush!" she continued, "you are badly hurt, and you must keep quiet until your wounds have been attended to."

Assisted by her father, who had sprung forward and caught poor Rigby in his arms as he fell backwards, Miss Weston once more got the latter into a comfortable position.

It was touching to observe the look of intense relief and happiness which overspread the poor fellow's countenance as he listened to Connie's voice, and realised that it was she who supported his throbbing head, and whose cool soft hand lay upon his brow.

"Try to drink a little of this, it will do you good," said Connie, as she held the flask of brandy to his bloodless lips.

"You are very kind, Miss Connie," replied Rigby, when he had with difficulty swallowed the refreshing draught, "and I feel less faint than I did; but," he added mournfully, "those redskins have done for me this time. I shall never again be able to strike a blow in your defence."

"Oh! don't say so," sobbed Connie, quite overcome with grief.

"It is true," he answered, "I feel that I am dying."

"No, you shall not—you must not die!" exclaimed Connie vehemently, while the tears came faster than ever.

"Ah! do not weep, Miss Connie," replied the wounded man, looking up at her as he spoke, with his fine fearless eyes full of the light of an intense and unutterable love, "for if I only knew for certain that you would come safely out of this, I should die happy." He paused a moment, as though exhausted, while Connie, unable to speak, stooped down and gently kissed his pallid brow.

It was a truly touching sight to see that fine powerful frame, which held so brave and noble a heart, lying helpless on the ground—its life, a few minutes before so strong and vigorous, ebbing rapidly away, while cries and sobs broke from the sympathetic bystanders.

Ethan Rigby had always been a great favourite in the camp. Generous to a fault, frank, brave, and unassuming—each and all, young and old, felt that in losing him they would lose a tried and trusted friend.

The elder Rigby had come up, and, assisted by Major Weston, he tried to staunch the blood which still oozed slowly from his son's wounds. At a sign from the latter, however, they desisted, especially as it was then evident he could not live many minutes.

At the touch of Miss Weston's lips the spark of life seemed to flicker up for a moment. Young Rigby's face lighted up very perceptibly, and his eyes shone with a peculiar lustre. Half raising his head, with a last effort, he gazed earnestly around.

"Good-bye, father—good-bye, Major—good-bye, all!" he murmured.

His father pressed the hand he held in his, but was unable through deep emotion to say a word in reply.

"Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye," echoed the bystanders, with choking voices.

The sufferer's head had fallen back upon Miss Weston's knee, but his eyes looked up intently into hers.

"Good-bye, sweet angel," he continued, in scarcely audible tones. "I die, but—" his lips still moved, but no sound reached poor Connie's ears. Overwhelmed with grief, she wept as though her heart would break. Anxious as she naturally was, however, not to lose what she felt would be his last utterances, she again controlled herself by a great effort, and stooping down, she placed her ear close to his lips.

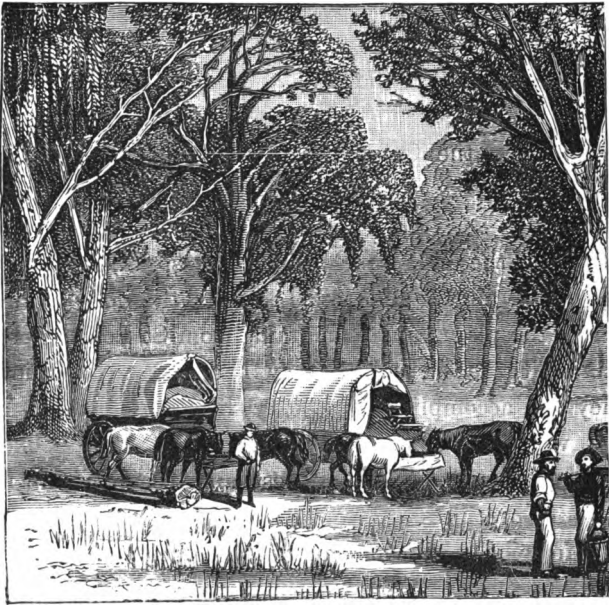
"I die," she, and none but she, heard him whisper, "I die perfectly happy, for I die for thee, my queen."

"I do not deserve such devotion as this," she sadly answered; "I have been very unkind to you. Oh! forgive me, dear, brave Ethan!"

And the repentant girl once more stooped down

and pressed her lips to the young man's brow, which was damp with the dew of death.

A smile of exquisite love and satisfaction played for a moment about his lips, then gradually overspread his countenance; the brave heart ceased to beat, and Ethan Rigby was no more.





CHAPTER XXI.

A LETTER AND A DREAM.

THE blue waters of the Great Salt Lake had long been in sight, and the sun was setting behind the cloudy summits of the Cedar mountains, when, a few days later, the weary emigrants approached the mushroom city of the Latter-Day Saints. This was the harbour of refuge, the half-way house, so to speak, for which they had aimed and toiled during the long march across the plains and mountains from St Louis. Salt Lake City once reached, they had reason to believe they had accomplished not only the longest but by far the worst stage of their journey, and they looked forward to some weeks of rest and peace within its friendly precincts.

After the perils and privations, the anxieties and hardships which they had undergone during months of travel through wild and hostile regions, these brave pioneers were in a position to appreciate a brief return to civilised life.

The terrible affair in the Wahsatch had delayed the train some twenty-four hours. For the stampeded horses had to be recovered, and the breakages and other mishaps had to be made good.

With the exception of the gallant Rigby, however, there had been happily no loss of life amongst the emigrants, though several men besides Robert had been wounded more or less severely. The latter had not yet recovered from the effects of the blow he had received, nor was he likely to do so for some days to come. Major Weston had placed him under Connie's care, not only because she was such an excellent nurse, but also with the design of diverting her mind as much as possible from the harrowing recollections of the Indians' attack and poor Ethan's death.

The shock to the young girl had been very great, and her pale, sad looks showed the grief she was still feeling.

Before resuming their march, the emigrants had paid their last tribute of respect to the brave and beloved comrade, who had so nobly met his death in that gloomy cañon.

A large cairn of rocks and boulders from the river's bed had been reverently piled over his remains, and the following simple inscription had been deeply chiselled in the face of the adjoining cliff by the two young Westons :—

In Memoriam,
Ethan Rigby,
1857.

“Greater love hath no man than this,
that a man lay down his life for his friend.”

On nearing the city, the emigrants turned aside from the main thoroughfare, and pitched their camp upon a stretch of waste ground on the Jordan River to the southward.

Here they proposed to remain until both they themselves and their jaded horses and cattle had recovered flesh and strength, and were once more fit to face the hardships of the march.

“Well, Connie, how is your patient?” asked the Major, as the family sat down to breakfast on the morning after their arrival at Salt Lake City.

“Still rather light-headed and feverish,” replied the girl; “but now that we can procure suitable food and other necessaries, I trust he will soon be well again.”

“I do not doubt it, dear; it would take a good deal to kill a man with such a constitution as Robert Lazenby’s.”

“And such a nurse as Connie,” added Frank.

“Right, my lad. But now I will read you a letter I have just received from Captain Trevor.”

“Captain Trevor, how could you get a letter from him?” enquired the boys eagerly, while a deep flush

suffused for a moment their sister's pale face. "It is months since we parted from him, and his route and ours lay in exactly opposite directions!"

"Exactly; but have you never heard of the Pony Express?"

"Oh! of course, how stupid of us!" said Frank, "one of their riders passed us on the plains when we were a few days out from St Louis."

"To be sure! And this letter must have passed us somewhere in the Rockies. Here are the contents:—

"JACKSON'S HOTEL, WASHINGTON AVENUE,
ST LOUIS, 4th July 1857.

"Dear Major Weston,—You will probably be surprised to get a letter from me, if get it you do, with all the glorious uncertainties of the overland mail; but as I have some news to communicate, which I think will be of interest to you and yours, I shall forward this by the Pony Express, in the hope that it may be in time to catch you at Salt Lake City.

"Well, then, to make a long story short, my son was stricken down with fever at Julesburgh on the Platte River, which of course obliged us to halt until he was sufficiently recovered to bear the fatigue of the march. It was a harassing time, for I knew it would be most dangerous to take him on with us across the hot low country, and especially the great Mississippi Valley, at that season of the year. It is always a trying journey, even for a strong man, and for a youth who was but just recovering from a lowering fever, it meant almost the certainty of a relapse, and perhaps a fatal one.

"I knew the best thing for my son would be to retrace our steps, and return to the higher and more salubrious slopes of the Rocky Mountains, until Ernest's strength was quite restored, and the summer heat abated. Unfortunately, however, it was impos-

sible for me thus to delay my journey, as I had pressing and important Government business to transact in Washington.

"In my dilemma a detachment of U.S. troops entered the town, *en route* to relieve the garrison of Fort Bridger, which is stationed in the mountains about 112 miles east of Salt Lake City. Curiously enough, the officer in command turned out to be an old friend of mine, and, when he heard how matters stood, he kindly suggested that my son should accompany his force to the military post already mentioned, and return a few weeks later with the troops ordered east.

"The offer, as you may suppose, was most gratefully accepted; a comfortable seat and bed combined was apportioned Ernest in one of the ambulance waggon, and the surgeon, a nice young fellow, promised to take professional charge of him.

"The lad was in high spirits at the thought of perchance overtaking your company, either on the march or at Salt Lake City, whither he intends going. So you must not be surprised if he turns up some day during your stay.

"My business will detain me for some months in Washington, and this will give Ernest ample time to rejoin me either there or at New York. We can then sail to England together, as originally intended.

"I must not forget to mention that, as I find my son's talents and inclinations all tend so unmistakably to draw him towards the more active and adventurous life of a western pioneer or ranchman, I see it would be folly to continue to urge upon him such a totally different career as that of an English doctor. I have, therefore, told him that if, in a year's time, he is still in the same mind as now, I will send him out to California and set him up on a good stock farm, or ranche, as it is there called. Meanwhile he can spend the winter and spring upon some large farm in England or Scotland, and obtain much practical knowledge of the care and management of sheep and cattle, besides learning a hundred other things which it will be useful for him to know.

"I need scarcely add, that, for my part, I shall look forward with pleasure to this early opportunity of renewing an acquaintance formed under such strange and memorable circumstances.

“Trusting you have surmounted all the difficulties and dangers of the mountains, and with kindest remembrances to Miss Weston and your two brave sons,—Believe me, dear Major Weston, yours very faithfully,

“E. H. TREVOR.”

The concern which the young people, and especially Connie, had manifested at the news of Ernest's illness, changed to expressions of the most lively satisfaction as Major Weston went on to read of Ernest's return westward for the benefit of the mountain air and his contemplated visit to Salt Lake City. And they were enthusiastic at the prospect of eventually having their young friend for a neighbour in the land of their adoption.

“Hurrah!” cried Frank, as his father concluded, “that is good news, and no mistake.”

“Oh, it's jolly!” acquiesced Harry. “I wonder where he is now?”

“If he is in the city he must have heard of our arrival by this time, for an emigrant train of this size does not reach Salt Lake City every day,” said Major Weston. “In which case,” he continued, “he will soon look us up. But I think it is scarcely likely that he can have preceded us.”

“No; for to do so he must have passed us *en route*, one would think,” suggested Frank.

“Not necessarily,” replied his father, “for, although the distance is not great, there are alternative routes from Fort Bridger to this place.”

"At any rate, he'll turn up in a day or two, I should think," said Harry.

However, day after day passed, and yet no Ernest Trevor appeared. Connie's cheeks grew paler even than before, and a hopeless expression began to settle on her face, though she still went about her numerous occupations, ministering to the wants of the sick and poor in the emigrant camp, and conscientiously fulfilling all the duties that fell to her station.

Major Weston had hired a small furnished cottage for a few weeks, and they were living in it in great comfort. It had a pretty little verandah, shaded by roses, where Connie might be seen whenever she had a spare moment, gazing wistfully along the cottonwood avenue that led out to the plain in the direction of the Wahsatch Mountains.

At last Frank thought it was time something was done to divert her thoughts a little, and so he suggested that they should take a ride together, so as to obtain a nearer view of the great lake.

With a little persuasion she consented, and early one fine evening, exactly a week after their arrival at Salt Lake City, they set off in the direction of the lake.

The horses were comparatively fresh after their week's rest, and Connie's spirits rose perceptibly as Chieftain bore her along at a sharp canter.

They had not gone more than half a mile, however,

when the girl suddenly drew rein, and, to her brother's surprise, refused to proceed further in that direction.

"Let us ride towards the mountains," she said, "instead of going to the lake; they look so lovely in their evening dress."

Thinking this was merely some sudden caprice of his sister's, Frank naturally demurred, and asked her why she had so suddenly changed her mind.

"Well," she said, "if you must really know, Frank," and as she spoke something like the old colour came back for an instant into her face, "I cannot get out of my head a horrid dream which I had last night."

"What was it?" asked Frank, all attention in a moment.

"I will tell it you as we ride along, if you will go the way I wish," replied Connie, "although I know you will think me very weak to pay any regard to it."

"That depends!" answered Frank, making no attempt to check his horse, which had commenced to turn of its own accord, as Connie wheeled hers round.

They proceeded for some distance in silence, until they had got clear of the city, and were fairly on the road, or rather track, towards the mountains. Then Connie drew her horse close beside her brother's and began her narration.

"I dreamt," she said, "that you and I were out hunting as of old in lovely Warwickshire. The hounds were in full cry after a fox, and we were some

two fields behind. Suddenly the hounds had a check, and we pulled up our ponies, which were rather blown, to a walk, to await developments.

“As we reached the end of a high fence we heard a ‘Hallo!’ and, looking in that direction, we saw the fox coming towards us. Presently we lost sight of it again as it entered a narrow coppice. On emerging I noticed that it was not a fox after all, but young Mr Trevor, in a black velvet hunting cap and scarlet coat. You had gone on to open a gate for me, and I called to you for help. The hounds were again in full cry, and coming streaming over a bank straight for the coppice. I thought the sound was more like the deep baying of bloodhounds than the musical chorus of foxhounds.

“Ernest glanced back every few moments over his shoulder, and seemed to be straining every nerve to reach the open door of a cottage which stood a little more to the right of and rather behind our position. And, strange to say,—although the incongruity of it all never struck me in my dream,—it was the very cottage in which we are staying on the outskirts of Salt Lake City.”

“How very curious! But that is always the way in dreams. Pray go on though; I am interrupting you at the most critical point.”

“Well,” continued Connie, who had been gazing intently before her while her brother was speaking, “it seemed evident that the hounds would drag down

their human quarry ere he could reach the goal. They were close on his heels, but in spite of all my entreaties I thought you would not move. I urged you to ride forward and save him, but you only shook your head and sat immovably upon your horse, which I now recognised as Saladin. At last, just as the leading hounds were about to spring upon our friend, you stuck spurs into your horse, and, galloping up, you beat the infuriated brutes off with your hunting whip. Whereupon I awoke with a sudden start to find it was all a dream."

"And a very horrible dream, too!"

"Yes," replied Connie, shuddering. "It left a most uncomfortable impression, which I have not been able to shake off all day."

"I do not wonder at it, I'm sure," answered her brother, sympathetically, "such dreams seem to try one almost as much as real experiences. But, after all," he continued cheerfully, "we have the consolation of knowing that they are not real as soon as we are able to collect our waking thoughts, however vivid may be the impression which for a time they make upon us."

"True," replied Connie, thoughtfully; "but don't you think they are often premonitions of danger—warnings from the spirit world to put us on our guard against impending calamity."

"Possibly; who can tell?" said Frank. And then,

after a pause, "I see now why you wished to ride in this direction. It is always a relief when in anxiety or doubt to be doing something, however feeble, to grapple with the difficulty, is it not?"

"Yes, anything is better than inaction, and to turn one's back upon the Rockies seemed even worse than inaction," said Connie, with a sigh.

"Exactly," answered Frank, "but, since we must turn our backs upon them soon, in order to get home before dark, I propose that we shall now pull up to a walking pace. Then, after going a mile or two further, we can turn and canter quietly homewards."

"Not yet," pleaded the girl, "our horses are still fresh, and I should so like to ride as far as the summit of that ridge, if you don't mind."

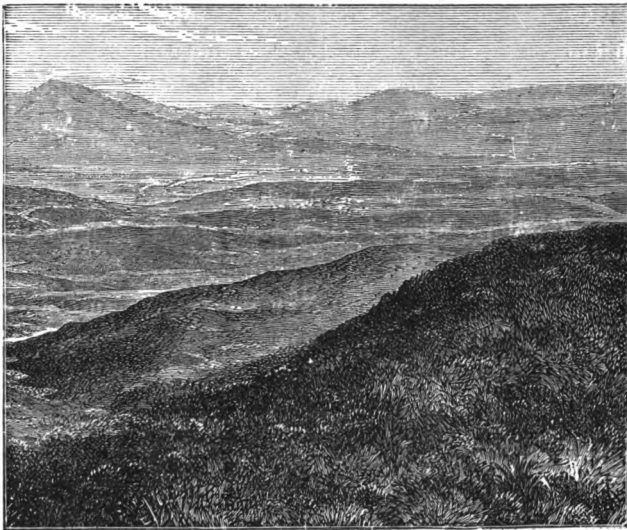
"With all my heart, if you really wish it," answered Frank, good-naturedly. "But all the same," he continued, thoughtfully, "I don't think there is any cause for alarm, even if young Trevor does not turn up for another fortnight. He had a long journey before him when his father wrote that letter, and he would probably stay a week or two at Fort Bridger. Besides, you must not forget that he was travelling with a detachment of soldiers, and therefore would be in no danger from Indians—with whom, no doubt, you connect the sleuth hounds in your dream."

"Yes, yes," replied Connie, "I quite admit the force of what you say, but that dream has taken such a hold

upon me, I cannot shake it off. Besides, it is just possible that Ernest might have grown impatient of waiting at Fort Bridger until the troops were ready to march, and so be venturing on alone or with only a guide."

Frank saw that it would be useless to argue the question any further. He therefore made some little observation indicative of dissent, and changed the subject.

They reached the ridge in due course, and pulled up their horses to survey the scene which it commanded.





CHAPTER XXII.

A PLUCKY EXPLOIT.

EXCEPT for a slightly better view of the plain, the mountains, and the Mormon settlement, there was nothing much gained by their two miles' further ride. Eastward the ground fell away again for a short distance, and then gradually rose until it seemed to terminate in another ridge, some three quarters of a mile away, exactly like the one on which they had halted.

As far as the eye could reach there was no human being in sight, but a few small herds of cattle dotted the plain here and there at wide intervals.

"We had better return without more loss of time," said Frank, pointing with his whip at the sun, which was then very low on the horizon.

He turned his horse's head homewards as he spoke, and began to retrace his steps. Connie lingered for a few moments, as though loath to turn her back on the mountain passes.

"Come along," cried Frank, "we are a good seven

miles from home, and I don't think it would be very safe for us to be out after dark."

"All right!" answered the girl, as she reluctantly prepared to obey the admonition.

She had turned Chieftain round, and was on the point of cantering after her brother, when, in obedience to some sudden impulse, she gave one more look back towards the mountains.

A startled cry burst from her lips as she saw the figure of a man coming into sight over the ridge already mentioned. Owing to the darkness of the mountain background, she would probably not have noticed him in that brief glance had it not been for a handkerchief which he was vigorously waving. It was evident that, whoever he was, he had seen her, plainly outlined as she and her horse must have appeared to him against the bright golden light of the sunset.

Frank had quickly returned on hearing his sister's startled exclamation. He had no need to ask what was the matter. Connie sat as though spellbound, one hand restraining her horse and the other stretched out in the direction of the approaching figure. Accustomed to scouting, Frank's keen eyesight took in more than his sister's.

"My word!" he exclaimed, "it's either a ruse of some robber band to detain us until they can come up, or else—"

He checked himself as he remembered the shaky

state of Connie's nerves. The fact was, he could see what looked very much like a string of mounted Indians topping the ridge in pursuit of the runner. Just then a flash against the dark background behind, as from a pistol, confirmed him in his conjecture, and, at the same time, roused Connie as with an electric shock.

The figure was evidently firing upon his pursuers.

"Oh! Frank," she cried, "that is Ernest! and my dream is coming true! Oh! save him!" And then, without a moment's hesitation, she herself dashed off to aid her conjectured lover in his extremity.

Frank also started at the same moment, for he felt sure that some poor fellow—and it might, indeed, be young Trevor, as his sister imagined—was hard pressed by enemies, and in the most imminent danger of being killed.

The horses seemed to know that there was some pressing need for them to exert themselves to the utmost, and they raced along at the top of their speed. Frank drew alongside of his sister, and implored her not to be rash, but, when they got nearer, to drop behind a little, and let him advance the last few hundred yards alone. He told her that, unless she kept cool and did as he directed her, she would inevitably defeat her object, and sacrifice both their own lives and that of the man they were trying to save.

Fortunately, his words had the desired effect, and she promised to obey his orders implicitly. It almost

seemed, however, as if the pursuers would have carried out their bloody intentions before Frank could get near enough to interfere.

The latter could see plainly enough by this time that the pursued was a white man, and just such a young fellow as Ernest Trevor, too, although his back was turned to them at that moment, as he had faced about to fire upon two of the Indians—for such they really were—who had almost ridden him down. Even at that critical moment, Frank found himself wondering what had become of the brave fellow's horse. Then he fairly cheered as he noticed how firmly he stood his ground, and how, as he fired, one of the Indians fell headlong from his mustang. But the cheer died away on his lips, and Connie uttered an involuntary scream, as the second shot missed its mark and the Indian rushed upon the white man with uplifted tomahawk. Quick as thought, however, the latter sprang lightly aside and avoided the blow.

This happily gave Frank a chance to interfere. For the last hundred yards or so he had been collecting his horse, and he had the noble creature well in hand. He called to his sister, whom he had already motioned to slacken speed, and told her to pull up and keep well beyond the reach of the Indians. Chieftain was so fleet that he had no fear for her so long as she kept on the alert and did not allow any

of the Indians to approach her too closely. Several more of them were coming up, but their ponies were evidently fagged and blown with hard riding, and their pace scarcely exceeded a canter. The brave already referred to had wheeled his steed round, but seemed indisposed to risk a second encounter; and Frank hoped to be at the white man's side ere the other half dozen leading Indians could reach him.

It became a race between the young scout and the savages. If the latter arrived first, they would in all probability overwhelm and slay their victim. But if Frank could anticipate them, the chances would be rather in favour of the white men. The dreaded revolvers of the latter more than counterbalanced their disparity in numbers.

A few minutes sufficed to show that the Indians were not "in the running." The superior stride and condition of the well-bred Saladin enabled his rider to reach the goal first, although he had considerably the most ground to cover.

As, revolver in hand, Frank galloped up, the man for whom he was about to hazard his life turned towards him. Their eyes met, and the recognition was mutual and instantaneous.

"Frank!"

"Ernest!"

There was no time for more; the Indians were upon them.

Frank had drawn up his horse alongside his friend, and, pistols in hand, they boldly faced their savage foes. The latter came sweeping down upon the white men with fierce shouts and brandished spears and tomahawks.

“Fire!” cried Ernest.

There was a double report, and two of the Indians rolled from their saddles. The others instantly swerved from their course, and passed to right or left of their dauntless adversaries.

“Quick!” ejaculated Frank. “Place your foot in my stirrup and mount behind me.”

The words had scarcely left his lips before Ernest was safely posted on Saladin’s back, behind his gallant friend. At first the fiery creature seemed inclined to resent the imposition, but a few soothing words and a pat or two from his master soon made him resigned to his double burden.

It was well for his riders that the horse proved so docile, for there was not a moment to lose. The main body of the Indians was rapidly approaching, and the survivors of the two previous encounters were thirsting for revenge. Indeed, had it not been for a plucky diversion of Connie’s at this moment they would probably have swooped down upon the young Englishmen and cut them down at the critical moment when Ernest was mounting beside his friend.

Divining the intention of the savages, Connie gal-

loped straight towards them, making believe that her steed had mastered her and bolted. Having thus attracted their attention, she pulled a little to the left, and passed within fifty yards of where they were drawn up. This tempted the braves to abandon their intention of making another charge on the two pale-faces. Instead, they determined to try to capture the young girl. The former had proved dangerous adversaries, whereas the latter seemed likely to fall an easy prey to them. With yells of triumph, therefore, they urged their ponies in pursuit.

Satisfaction and fear were strangely blended in Connie's breast as she realised the success of her manoeuvre. She had succeeded in drawing the attention of the savages upon herself, but the position was not a pleasant one. One thought, however, upheld her. As she had approached the scene of conflict she had ascertained beyond a doubt that her surmise was correct, and that the man whom she and her brother were trying to save was really Ernest Trevor. Sustained and animated by this reflection, she displayed marvellous courage and skill, allowing the Indians to approach near enough to encourage them to persevere in the pursuit, and yet managing her horse with such nerve and dexterity as to foil all their attempts to capture her.

Meanwhile, Frank and Ernest had made the best use of this timely diversion, and were gradually

increasing the distance between themselves and the main body of the Indians.

The feelings of alarm and dismay with which they had at first witnessed Connie's startling action had speedily changed to those of admiration as they perceived its purport and noted the skill and intrepidity with which it was carried out.

Ernest's heart swelled with love and admiration, not unmingled with anxiety, however, as he watched the brave girl decoying the savages away, at no little risk to herself, well mounted though she was, in order that he and Frank might make good their escape.

As soon as she found that the latter were getting safely beyond reach of the Indians, Connie gave Chieftain his head, and soon left her pursuers far behind. In a very few minutes she had joined her brother and Ernest, who, in their turn, had wheeled round to cover her retreat with their fire-arms. They greeted her with hearty cheers and waving of caps as she rode up, and she felt amply repaid for her bold exploit in the thought that they were safe. For his part, Ernest thought that Connie had never before looked so lovely. She was flushed with the excitement and exercise, and some of her long golden hair had come down and was hanging in wavy luxuriance over her shoulders.

"Thank God, you are safe!" "Your plucky feat has saved our lives!"

Such were the exclamations with which the young men greeted their fair ally as she reined in her horse beside them. The Indians had abandoned their pursuit; and the three young people, who had so narrowly escaped their tomahawks and scalping knives, were able to proceed more leisurely.

As they rode along at a gentle canter in the waning daylight, they had much to talk about. The few weeks that had elapsed between their first eventful meeting and parting on the eastern threshold of the Rocky Mountains, and their equally strange reunion on their western slopes, had been full of incidents and experiences of the greatest consequence. More trials and adventures than fall to the share of some people in a long lifetime had been crowded into those two or three months of their young lives, and had left their mark upon them. They were no longer very young, except in years.

Ernest explained the circumstances which had brought him to the sorry plight in which his friends had found him. He said he had travelled from Fort Bridger in company with the troops, who were on their way to Great Salt Lake City, until within about twenty miles of their common destination. Then the soldiers had formed their camp, with the intention of resuming the march and entering the city on the following day. Finding, however, that he was within a three-hours' ride of his destination, and that there was sufficient

daylight to last until he was within sight of the town, Ernest had determined to push on. The officer in command had tried to dissuade him, but, having been detained longer than he had intended at Fort Bridger, the young Englishman was impatient of further delay.

For the first mile or so after leaving the bivouac, nothing occurred to make him regret his decision. On emerging from a narrow pass, however, he was startled to find himself within a few hundred yards of a large troop of mounted Indians. They were evidently expecting him, for, on turning his horse, with the intention of regaining the pass and making good his escape, he found that he had been anticipated, and that his retreat was already cut off.

There was nothing for it but to dash past the Indians who were waiting for him in the open, and ride for dear life.

He knew that his horse was a good one, and that if he could manage to elude them and get a fair start, he would have little to fear afterwards. Fortune at first seemed to favour him, the plain was wide, and he contrived to evade their first rush and get clear away. After an hour's hard riding, finding his pursuers were out of sight, he ventured to slacken his speed, and even to dismount and walk beside his horse for some distance, in order to rest it a little. He then discovered that the good creature had received rather a nasty cut from a tomahawk on one of his hind legs,

and that blood was slowly oozing from the wound. It was evident that it must already have lost a considerable quantity of blood, and he fancied it seemed dull and weak in consequence. He tried to staunch the bleeding, but, the wound being close to a joint, he found it impossible to bind it up tightly enough without interfering with the motion of the limb.

While Ernest's attention was thus occupied, he suddenly heard the tramp of horses hoofs behind him, and, turning round, he perceived his persistent enemies not half a mile away on his trail. He quickly mounted and continued his flight, but, after going a few miles, it was evident his horse could not carry him much further; and, just before he reached the ridge, it succumbed and sank down under him.

In his despair he was about to stand and sell his life as dearly as possible, when he caught sight of an equestrian figure on the opposite ridge, standing out boldly against the glowing evening sky.

"It looked like some guardian angel sent to help me," he concluded, "and I plucked up courage and ran on, waving my handkerchief in hope of attracting attention."

"How inexpressibly thankful I shall always be that I gave one more look back!" exclaimed Connie, fervently.



CHAPTER XXIII.

A TRYING PARTING AND EXCITING HUNT.

ABOUT a week after young Trevor's arrival at Salt Lake City he received a message from the U.S. military post, to the effect that the homeward bound troops would be leaving there on the following morning. The intimation had been hourly expected for the last two or three days, and yet it came with crushing weight upon the young lovers—for Ernest and Connie were now formally engaged. Seven or eight days of pleasant converse and close companionship had but served to bind their hearts closer together, and even twelve hours separation would have seemed a long time to them. It was with terrible dismay, therefore, that they contemplated a severance of at least twelve months.

Lovers, like more prosaic mortals, however, must bow to the inevitable. It was necessary that Ernest should keep to his arrangement to return east with

the troops; for if he let this opportunity slip, he might have to wait so long for a suitable escort as to seriously endanger his chances of reaching Washington within the time specified by his father.

Fortunately, Connie and Ernest had too much spirit and good sense to give way to their feelings to any great extent. The dreaded blow had fallen, the parting hour was fixed and close at hand, but they wrestled with their misery, and strove to cheer each other with brave and hopeful words. Thus the morning found them calm and confident, and the final leave-taking was robbed of half its bitterness.

Major Weston allowed his daughter to accompany her lover in the rear of the troops as far as the mid-day halting ground at the Ogden river. She was mounted on Harry's mustang, and Frank was in attendance on Saladin to escort her back to Salt Lake City. Meanwhile young Weston rode beside the officer in command of the detachment, and conversed with him on the congenial topics of Indian campaigns and hunting adventures.

The vows of love had been repeated for the last time, the final adieus spoken, and the fluttering handkerchiefs waved until lost to view in the ever-widening distance. Then, at last, poor Connie's feelings got the better of her and she burst into a flood of tears.

Frank bent down, and taking Chieftain's bridle in his left hand, gently wheeled the horses round in the direction of Salt Lake City, at the same time uttering a few words of encouragement to his sorely tried sister.

When they had retraced about a mile of their morning's journey, and Connie had so far recovered herself as to be able to respond, now and then, to her brother's efforts to divert her thoughts, she was startled by an exclamation of surprise which broke from his lips:—

“Look, Connie, look!”

Frank had half turned in his saddle and was gazing backward in the direction which the troops had taken towards the mountains. As he spoke, he wheeled his horse round—a movement instantly imitated by his sister, and then she saw what looked like a mass of burnished silver gleaming in the sunlight at the upper end of the valley where it narrowed in towards the Wahsatch Pass.

“What is it?” cried Connie.

“It is the reflection of the sun's rays from the well-polished arms and accoutrements of Ernest's gallant escort,” answered Frank.

“So it is!” exclaimed Connie, brightening up instantly. “How pretty it looks! I am so glad you called my attention to it.”

“It was fortunate I happened to look round,” con-

tinued her brother, "for in another minute they will be out of sight beyond that shoulder of the mountain."

As he spoke there was a last spasmodic flash from the glittering appointments, a lingering glimmer of light over the distant hills, and the martial band had vanished into the deep recesses of the Wahsatch.

"A happy omen surely!" said Frank cheerily, as he once more turned his horse's head westward.

"I sincerely hope so," replied Connie, with a sigh, as she followed his example. "And at any rate," she continued bravely, "I feel better for having had so bright a parting glimpse of them—now shall we have a gallop?"

"With all my heart," was the ready response, and, at a hint from their riders, the two horses were soon coursing over the plain at a pleasant hand-gallop.

"This is very delightful!" said Connie, as she patted the neck of her mustang, "but I fear poor Gellert is not enjoying himself much."

This remark had reference to a fine dog, a cross between a deer-hound and blood-hound, which, with lolling tongue, followed close on their horses heels. The faithful but somewhat overfed dog had been bought by Frank from a Mormon elder soon after the emigrants arrived at Salt Lake City, and having become attached to his young master accompanied him everywhere.

"Then let us slacken our pace a little, and we shall not distress him," answered Frank.

So they went on at a gentle canter until they approached the ridge where they had rescued young Trevor from the pursuing redskins a few days before. Lest it should remind his sister of her lover, Frank determined to make a detour, and so turned down the opening to a narrow valley which ran almost due south. The officer in command of the detachment had told him this valley, a mile or two further south, widened out into a prairie, and that, by keeping the lofty summits of Lone Peak and Pilot Peak in view, it would be easy to regain the road to Salt Lake City at any time.

After they had ridden more slowly a couple of miles, Connie sighed, and Frank knew the exhilarating effects of the gallop were wearing off; he was therefore glad when her attention was diverted by some little dark mounds or hillocks they were approaching.

"What are they?" she asked.

"If we had been east of the Rockies, I should say they marked the site of a prairie-dog town," replied her brother.

"East or west! it must be one of those strange little communities, for I see the wee animals bobbing in and out of their holes. Shall we ride that way?"

"Certainly," with alacrity, "only mind your horse

doesn't put his foot in one of the burrows, or you may have a bad fall."

"Chieftain knows the prairies too well to be so foolish! So now, my beauty, steady!" For the fiery little chestnut began to snort and toss his head on nearing the edge of the town.

Their presence created no little stir amongst the marmots, or prairie-dogs. One by one the droll little creatures uttered their short warning bark, and then, with a preliminary shake of the tail and a comic jerk of the hind legs, darted, head first, into their burrows.

"What a large village!" exclaimed Connie.

"Yes," replied Frank, "there are many hundreds of these perforated mounds."

"But where are the owls and the rattlesnakes which are generally supposed to share with the marmots their subterranean dwellings?"

"If you look for the owls a little more to your right, you may see a few blinking at us meditatively; but the rattlesnakes are, I believe, a myth."

"I hope so, for the sake of the innocent, sprightly prairie-dogs. How comical they look there, sitting bolt upright, with hanging paws, like dogs begging!"

"Yes," answered her brother, "those are the sentinels."

They had scarcely left the marmot village behind them, when they saw a skulking cayote (pronounced ki-o-tee). This scrubby beast of prey is a kind of

grey wolf, which is generally found prowling alone on the dreary plains.

With a "view-halloo!" Frank galloped forward, and Gellert, quickly taking up the wolf's scent, gave tongue in his loud, deep tones as it set off in pursuit.

"Tally-ho! away-o-o!" sang out Frank, the incident recalling to his mind old fox-hunts in lovely Warwickshire.

"Tally-ho!" echoed Connie tearing up alongside her brother.

"Forrard, hoick!" shouted Frank.

The pace became very fast; Frank said it was a burning scent. But after about a mile the ground became broken and covered with low, brown-leaved bushes, and Gellert had a check, having overrun the scent. The wily cayote had doubled back amongst the bushes, and thrown his pursuers out.

"Hold hard," shouted Frank, suddenly reining in his horse to avoid riding over the hound.

"Ye-geote! yoi! wind him!" he cried, as the noble dog cast about to recover the scent.

"Did you notice exactly where he threw up his head, Connie?" inquired her brother; "I thought it was just opposite this cluster of sage-bushes," he continued, "but I must have been mistaken."

"No," answered the girl, "I was trying to follow the wolf instead of keeping my eye on the hound. I know it was very unsportsmanlike," she continued, "but

then I relied so implicitly on your skill and dexterity as huntsman, that I quite ignored all the rules of the chase and gave myself up to the wild enjoyment of the gallop."

"I fear I myself was over excited."

"But why are you so anxious to catch or drive away the poor creature?"

"Because, in the first place, the cayote no doubt intended to make a meal of one or two of your odd little friends, the prairie-dogs, and —"

"Oh! do you think so? What a horrid brute! I shall feel no compunction now in helping to chase it away; but don't let Gellert seize it, there is no necessity to kill the wolf."

"Never fear! The hound is far too fat, and out of condition for running, to catch so fleet and crafty an animal."

"Poor fellow! he ought to be allowed more regular exercise; but then he might go off in pursuit of some wild animal and get lost, or perhaps fall into the hands of a roving band of Indians who would maltreat or even kill him."

"And eat him!" interpolated Frank.

"How horrible!" exclaimed his sister.

"But none the less true. I have heard that dog's flesh is esteemed a great delicacy amongst the Indians, and forms one of their chief dishes, or rather the chief dish at their most important feasts."

"Oh! please don't say any more on that subject! See, there goes the cayote half a mile away."

"So he does! And at the same easy swinging trot as when we first started him, just as if it were not worth his while to hurry himself at all."

"Tally-ho! away-o-o!" he shouted. "Hoick! Gellert! Hoick!"

The hound now owned the scent again; and away went the two eager horses with their ardent riders almost as fast as before the check. Six or seven minutes at this pace brought the pursuers within a few hundred yards of their game. The hound himself was not fifty yards behind the wolf, which still kept on at the same soft, long, delusive trot, every now and then turning his head and displaying a row of formidable teeth. This was all the interest he appeared to take in the close proximity of the deep-mouthed hound, which was straining every nerve to come up with him. It was only when Gellert had reached within twenty paces of the ugly beast that he perceptibly quickened his pace, and then only just as much as sufficed to keep the hound from approaching nearer.

"Eloo! at him! Eloo! eloo!" cried Frank, excitedly.

"It's no use, Frank," said Connie; "the dog is straining every nerve to overtake the wretched creature, and yet you can easily see he does not gain a foot upon him."

"Which is the more provoking," answered her brother, "in that the wolf does not even seem to be over-exerting himself in the least."

"While poor Gellert is evidently much distressed. Had you not better call him off?"

"Perhaps so; for it is just as I said, the hound is so absurdly pampered that he is quite out of the running. If he were not overfed and had plenty of exercise, that gaunt, wretched-looking creature would have spent a bad half hour. As it is, I firmly believe the cayote is just keeping twenty yards ahead of the dog in order to tantalize him, and that, if he wished, he could easily distance him."

"I believe you are right, Frank; just notice how the creature looks back every now and then over his shoulder, with a sort of grin, as if deriding the efforts of his panting pursuer. At the same time he does not even condescend to vary his pace from that smooth, swift, aggravating kind of run."

"No, I am sure he is fooling us," said her brother, with a laugh. "I will call the hound off, and try what will be the effect of a shot from my rifle."

It was not, however, without some little difficulty that Gellert was induced to give up the chase. So great was his courage that, although much distressed from his being out of condition for such work, he appeared as keen and determined as ever to run down the enemy. At last he obeyed, and lay down panting

upon the sandy plain, looking quite a picture with his fine head held erect, his ears pricked forward, and his long red tongue hanging down from his open mouth, displaying its formidable rows of pearly teeth, while his large intelligent eyes continued wistfully gazing after the retreating wolf.

Meantime Frank had reined in his horse; and quickly dismounting, he unslung his repeating rifle. Then, throwing himself on one knee, he took rapid aim at the cayote. At the same moment the cunning beast, as if divining his intention, quickened its pace, and the bullet struck the ground a few feet behind it, tearing up the sand almost under its feet. The effect was magical. Uttering a series of frightened and angry yelps and barks, the half-starved shabby-looking brute developed an energy which few would have suspected. Laying itself out like a greyhound in pursuit of a hare, the cayote shot off at such an extraordinary speed that in a few minutes it appeared like a mere speck upon the desert.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Frank, "that has made him show his paces, and no mistake!"

"You rival Prester John with that wonderful rifle," replied Connie, joining in the laugh.

"Hillo!" exclaimed Frank, as he turned to remount his horse, "here's another marvel! I thought we must be miles away from our proper route, and there is Lone Peak straight before us. We cannot be more

than half an hour's ride from the trail, and it will go hard with us if we do not reach home before sunset. The sly old cayote must have led us in a half circle, until my parting shot unsettled his nerves for him, and sent him off like a rocket."

"How clever of the rascal! he did not want to have far to return for his dinner," said Connie. "Let us hope," she continued, "that you have spoilt his appetite for prairie-dog, for the present at least, and that he will obtain as substantial, if less dainty, a repast elsewhere."

"Hear! hear!" was Frank's laughing response.

As the young man had predicted, they soon came upon the waggon-road, and entered the city ere the sunset glow had faded from the tips of the Cedar Mountains to the westward.

There was a surprise in store for them that night. Before retiring to rest, Major Weston announced his intention of quitting Salt Lake City within forty-eight hours.

"But old Rigby told me only this morning that the train couldn't possibly be ready to resume the march for at least ten days!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement.

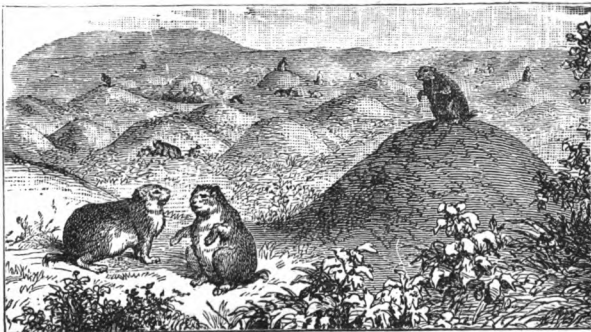
"That may be," replied his father, calmly; "but I have decided to enter California by the more northerly route, and have made my arrangements accordingly. We shall part company with our fellow-travellers at

this point. They, as you are aware, are mostly bound for Southern California, and intend to take the easier but more roundabout Sevier River route. We shall skirt the northern end of the Great Basin and cross the desert by the most direct route."

"But how shall we find our way?" inquired Frank; "Indian Bill has often told me that it is courting almost certain death to attempt to cross the desert without a competent guide. He says he knows every step of the way, and that one portion of it, just before reaching the Sierras, is strewn from end to end with the bleaching bones of hapless travellers and their horses, mules, and oxen, not to mention the wreckage of countless waggons."

"No doubt," replied the major, quietly, "but Indian Bill himself has contracted to guide us safely into California."

This announcement was received with great satisfaction.





CHAPTER XXIV.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

Two days later, a solitary canvas-tilted waggon, drawn by a team of chestnuts, and preceded by three equestrians, was being driven down the great western avenue of the Mormon metropolis. The travellers were accompanied as far as the outskirts of the town by a small crowd of men, women, and children, who alternately cheered and showered adieus and blessings on the occupants of the vehicle and the riders of the horses.

“Three cheers for Major Weston! three cheers for our old leader!” cried an elderly man, stepping to the edge of the side walk as the crowd halted at the city limits.

“Eh! and three good ones for Miss Connie and the young gentlemen, bless 'em!” exclaimed a pleasant-looking woman in the roadway.

“And may good luck go wid ye, and stick to ye loike a mither-in-law!” shouted a red-haired son of Erin.

In response to these varied and kindly-meant expressions of goodwill from the poor emigrants, Connie drew the canvas aside and bowed and smiled from the back of the waggon. Major Weston pulled up his horses, and, throwing the reins to Robert—who was now almost recovered from his wounds—jumped down from his seat and addressed a few well-chosen remarks to his old friends and fellow-travellers. He thanked them for so kindly leaving their camp to see the last of him and his family, assured them he felt bound to them by the ties of sympathy and respect created and fostered by the innumerable trials and perils through which they had passed in their long journey together across the wilds, and reminded them that although they were not likely to encounter enemies in human shape during the remainder of their journey to Southern California—otherwise nothing would have induced him to resign the leadership and part company with his old friends—yet there were dangers of another kind. They could not expect to travel three or four hundred miles through the Great Basin, that notoriously barren tract of country, without suffering considerable privations, under any circumstances, and unless good order and discipline were maintained their trials would be multiplied and intensified a hundredfold. He exhorted them, therefore, to render implicit and loyal obedience to their new leader, Rigby, and his lieutenants, Old Abe and Sanson, “than whom,” he said,

“no three better or braver men could have been selected.”

Major Weston then shook hands with the last-mentioned individuals, and also O’Flaherty, the Irishman, and many others who pressed round him. Indian Bill, Frank, and Harry, who were on horseback, as also Robert, came in for a large share of attention and handshaking; whilst Connie was nearly dragged out of the waggon, so desirous were the poor people to press her hand. She had endeared herself to the heart of all in the train by her ready sympathy and help when any were in trouble, and by her sweet gracious manner at all times.

At last, with a great parting cheer, the Westons were allowed to depart, and they found themselves fairly launched on their arduous journey of seven hundred miles to Sacramento—the first point for which they aimed.

After skirting the southern extremity of that wonderful sheet of water, the Great Salt Lake, into which flow the three large rivers, the Ogden, the Bear, and the Jordan, but which has no visible outlet, the travellers steered their course mainly by Pilot Peak. This lofty mountain, which towers on high as though to guide the anxious wayfarer across the arid desert, forms an excellent landmark for many miles around.

On the evening of the third day, after leaving Salt Lake City, the Westons encamped for the night on the

edge of the desert. They had got safely through the Cedar Mountains, and a small stream of limpid water and a fair bite of grass afforded excellent facilities for recruiting the strength of their horses before plunging further into the wilderness.

The horses were hobbled and turned out to graze along the banks of the streamlet, the supper was cooked and eaten, the blankets were spread, and all had retired to rest by the time the stars appeared above.

The Major and his sons occupied the small tent which had been bought at St Louis. Connie, of course, slept in the waggon, and Robert and Indian Bill reclined snugly beneath it. The faithful hound, Gellert, stretched himself across the entrance of the tent at his young master's feet.

Being out of the track of the hostile Indians, no watch had been set. A death-like stillness—the stillness of the desert—reigned around, and, tired with their day's journey, the whole party was soon soundly asleep. It wanted but an hour of midnight when a low growl from Gellert penetrated the watchful ear of Indian Bill. In an instant the old hunter was wide awake and listening intently. At first he could hear nothing but the deep breathing of his companions. Thinking that it might perhaps be the vicinity of a mountain-lion or a prowling cayote which had disturbed the hound, he was about to compose himself to

sleep again when the growl was repeated somewhat fiercely.

"Quiet, Gellert; lie down, sir," came in sleepy accents from the tent.

"Master Frank," whispered the hunter, who had now crawled from under the waggon, with the intention of investigating matters, "I think there's a cayote or some other varmint about; but I'll jest 'ave a look round."

"All right, Bill," was the quiet response, "if you think it's worth the trouble."

"It don't do to take tew much for granted, yonker, in this God-forsaken country," muttered the old man, as he stepped away from the tent with his rifle over his shoulder.

When he had gone about fifteen or twenty paces, so as to be clear of distracting noises, Indian Bill halted, and after looking about him for a few seconds, laid himself prone upon the earth. Then placing one ear upon the ground he listened intently.

The next minute he was upon his feet and hastening back to the tent.

"What is it?" cried Major Weston and his sons almost simultaneously, for by this time all three had been thoroughly aroused by the continual growling of the dog.

"It's a mounted party of some kind, you bet!" replied the hunter, significantly. "May be they are

only a troop of cavalry from Camp Floyd, and maybe they are gentry of another sort."

"What do you mean?" inquired the Major, anxiously.

"Wall, I mean a band of desperadoes in quest of plunder, Captain; so we had best be ready for whatever comes."

"You are right," answered Major Weston. "Stand to your arms all of you. Under the waggon, boys, and be ready to fight if called upon."

In a few moments the officer had made all the needful preparations. Connie had been roused up and stowed snugly away in the bottom of the waggon, with a mattress and several buffalo-ropes piled over her for further protection; Robert and the two boys had taken their places under the waggon, with their rifles at the ready, and the Major had stationed himself inside the vehicle.

Meanwhile, Indian Bill once more advanced some twenty paces in the direction whence the sound of hoofs had reached him. It was a fine starlight night, and the keen eyes of the old hunter soon detected the dim outline of a small body of horsemen approaching from the eastward.

"Umph!" he soliloquised, "looks sort of quare. What do they want on our trail at this time of night, blame 'em!"

So saying the old hunter drove firmly into the

ground the prongs of a hay-fork which he had brought with him from the waggon. He then quickly divested himself of his long overcoat, and suspended it by the collar over the upright handle of the fork. This he surmounted with his 'coon skin cap.

"Thear! that's good enough for 'em to shoot at by this light!" He chuckled to himself as he stepped a few paces to the left rear of the scarecrow-looking object, and lay down in the shadow of a small cluster of sage bushes.

The whole proceeding had barely consumed a couple of minutes, yet even that slight lapse of time had brought the intruders within hailing distance.

"Who goes theer?" shouted Indian Bill.

"Friends," replied the leading horseman.

"Then keep a friendly distance, and don't crowd around and disturb our camp at this time o' night, blame ye," continued the old hunter, waxing wroth as he perceived that his words were unheeded, and that the horsemen continued to advance. "If ye come ten yards nearer, I'll fire upon ye."

The band were now within fifty paces of him, and their only answer was a volley of pistol shots and a loud shout as they charged down upon the camp at full gallop.

Indian Bill's rifle spoke out, and the robber-leader fell wounded from his horse. The rest dashed on, firing their revolvers without cessation into the waggon

and tent as they advanced. But they met with such a reception as they had little expected.

At the word "Fire" from Major Weston, a sheet of flame burst from the rear of the waggon, and the repeating rifles poured forth a withering fusillade.

The midnight marauders were completely taken aback. They had expected to surprise the travellers in their sleep, but they were themselves surprised and panic-stricken by the deadly rifle-fire.

Instead of charging home, they wheeled their horses to one side, and disappeared as rapidly as they had come.

The darkness favoured their escape, and when the defenders afterwards sallied forth the only traces they could find of their assailants were a couple of dead horses.

The wounded leader had disappeared.

As soon as the excitement had somewhat abated, two discoveries were made. One was that the camp fire was still smouldering—it had doubtless by its glow guided the marauders to the spot—and the other that Major Weston was wounded. A bullet had penetrated the officer's felt hat and grazed his scalp, causing a painful but not dangerous wound. It bled freely, however, and at first caused no little consternation, especially to Connie. The latter had endured an agony of fright during the short but sharp encounter, but was otherwise none the worse, having been securely ensconced in the bottom of the waggon.

Owing to their comparatively sheltered positions, the rest of the defenders had escaped scatheless. Indian Bill's stratagem had proved a complete success, and had doubtless saved that worthy's life, for the improvised dummy was found riddled with bullet holes.

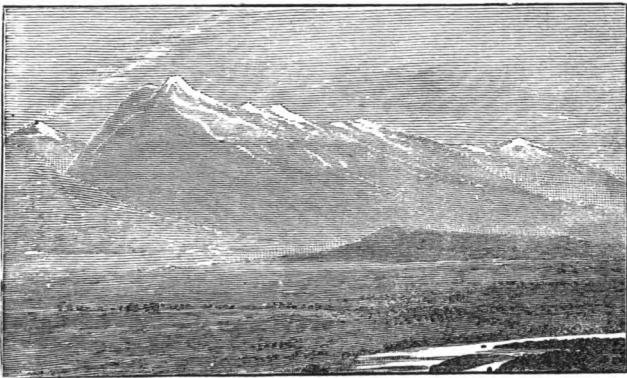
From beginning to end the whole affair had only occupied three or four minutes. The murderous onslaught of the ruffianly band had come and gone like a whirlwind, and, thanks to the vigilant hound and the prompt action of Indian Bill and Major Weston, the desperadoes had suffered far more than their intended victims.

The morning light revealed irrefutable evidence that two or three at least of the miscreants had been badly "scotched," as Robert expressed it. The latter, with the instincts of an old campaigner, took the high peaked Mexican saddles and elaborate bridles from the slain horses and stowed them away behind the waggon as trophies of the fight, with the remark, "May-be they will come in useful on the Californy farm."

Daylight brought one other revelation—a revelation of a peculiarly vexatious nature to the individual concerned. Harry had retired to rest towards morning with the proud consciousness of having manfully aided in the defence of the camp, and of having fought shoulder to shoulder with Frank and the veteran Robert. What was his dismay then on proceeding to

clean his rifle after breakfast to find that it had never been discharged. It was exactly as he had left it after wiping and oiling it the previous evening. The bitter truth at once flashed upon him that, in the confusion and excitement of the moment, he had forgotten to reload the weapon. Without perceiving it in the din and turmoil of the fight, he had been merely pulling at the trigger and snapping the lock.

He kept his secret, but everyone wondered why he always turned so red in the face when praised for his conduct in the night attack.





CHAPTER XXV.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY.

THE next day was a very hot and sultry one, and the travellers determined to proceed a very short stage only that morning, and make the great plunge into the desert in the cool of the evening.

Accordingly, the Westons diverged slightly to the northward, where, at the foot of a mountain spur, Indian Bill showed them a small pool of water surrounded by a fringe of coarse grass and other herbage. Here they camped from about noon until near sunset, when they started upon a fifty mile march across the dreaded "alkali" desert. If they had entered it a little further south, their doing so would have caused them to have nearly twenty miles more of the hideous waste. Without a competent and trustworthy guide, like Indian Bill, Major Weston would not have ventured to attempt the journey at all, and much less by night. Yet with a capable guide the latter was by

far the least fatiguing time both for horse and man. None but those who have experienced it can comprehend the misery and suffering which are inseparable from crossing a desert, and especially an "alkali" desert, in the heat of a summer's day. Without a friendly cloud to intervene, the blazing sunshine pours down for hours upon the hapless travellers. The fine ash-like dust set in motion by the horses' hoofs and waggon wheels floats in the air and settles upon the clothes, hair, and faces of the travellers. It finds its way into the throats, eyes, and nostrils, of man and beast, intensifying a hundredfold the discomfort. And this continues for mile after mile and hour after hour, until it seems no longer possible for flesh and blood to endure the sweltering heat and agonising thirst.

The situation is rendered more weird and lonesome, too, by the intense stillness, which, instead of being relieved, is only made more palpable by the occasional crack of a whip or the hoarse voice of a driver as he endeavours to rouse his team to fresh exertions.

Before quitting the pool, all the horses were allowed to drink as much water as they could, and a couple of small barrels were filled with the precious fluid and stored away in the waggon.

Acting under the advice of Indian Bill, Harry was accommodated in the waggon, and Robert mounted upon the mustang. The newly acquired Mexican

saddles were made to replace these ordinarily worn by Chieftain and Saladin. The lassos or lariats which were coiled about the horns of the pommels were also utilised. The noose-ends of these handy ropes were made fast to the ring-bolts on either side of the waggon. The other ends were given a few turns round the saddle-horns, and so, by riding a few yards apart and in advance of the team, Robert and Frank caused their horses to render considerable help to the two chestnuts in drawing the vehicle through the deep sand.

At first the mustang was inclined to resent what it evidently looked upon as an unwarrantable imposition; but, with a little patience and coaxing, it soon became reconciled to the unwonted task, and did its share of pulling.

In this manner good progress was made, and by midnight nearly half the journey had been accomplished.

A halt was now called, for rest and refreshments. The water-barrels were brought out and the thirsty horses refreshed with nearly two gallons a head, after which they received a good feed of crushed oats and barley. Supper was then served, and all were glad of the cold meat and cold tea which Connie set before them.

At the end of two hours the march was resumed in the same manner as before, Major Weston driving and Indian Bill riding a little in advance and leading the way.

At length, about nine o'clock in the morning, the task was accomplished, and the further verge of the desert was reached. The poor horses seemed as though they would never be able to quench their thirst; they plunged their noses into the first stream they came to, and gulped the water down, Harry declared, in bucketfuls.

As the pasturage was fairly good, nearly two days were spent here in order to recruit the horses after their exhausting struggle across the desert. Connie and her father, who still occasionally felt the effects of the wound he had received upon his head, were glad to rest, but the young men passed much of their time in shooting.

Except that at a point called Rocky Cañon a slight encounter with Indians took place, there was little to relieve the monotony of the journey across the Humboldt Mountains. The aborigines of this region were the most despicable-looking creatures imaginable, and a whole war-party of them fled at the sight of the well-armed white men. Indian Bill said they were known by the name of Goshoots, and seemed to hold them in great contempt, saying they could only fight from ambush.

Another stretch of forty miles of sandy desert had to be crossed before the foot of the Sierras was reached. This was effected in much the same way as the former desert-journey. After weeks of hard travelling, how-

ever, the horses were out of condition ; their distress before they reached Carson Lake was pitiable to behold, and more than once Major Weston was on the point of abandoning the waggon in the desert. They were more than sixteen hours in doing the forty miles. For the last ten even Connie had to get out and walk to lighten the load.

The worst of their journey, however, was now accomplished, and the weary travellers arrived at Sacramento about a fortnight later without further mishap. Here they were able to rest in a comfortable hotel, whilst Major Weston made many inquiries about the price of land and the best districts for stock-raising. Then the Major and his party proceeded to sail down the Sacramento and along the coast to Monterey, where Connie was left in the care of her brothers, while her father and Robert—on whose agricultural knowledge Major Weston could rely—went across the Buena Ventura River and up one of its smaller tributaries to the Foot Hills, about forty miles inland from the Bay of Monterey, to inspect a Mexican Grant or Rancho which was offered him for about two dollars an acre. The estate of Buena Vista, as it was named, was nearly four thousand acres of rich, well-watered land, comprising prairie, valley, and hill pasturage, and dotted, here and there, with groves of oaks free from underwood, and near the centre of the valley lay a beautiful sheet of sparkling water.

The prairie, which was covered with a luxuriant growth of native grasses and wild oats, was a nearly level tableland, with only just a gentle slope towards the south-west from the partially wooded hills to the north and eastward. At its western extremity there was a sudden dip of about one hundred and fifty feet to the valley below. Here, on the edge of the tableland, and in close proximity to the deep gorge which the river bed cut for itself through the sandstone rock ere it broke into the valley, stood an old ruin. The thick stone walls of what had evidently once been a substantial residence were half-hidden in a tangle of luxuriant grape vines and lovely clematis, whilst all around grew fine old olive, lemon, citron, peach, and orange trees, many of them laden with fruit. Clusters of fine grapes, both black and white, dangled from the ruined walls and overhung the rocks on either side of the gorge. This deep channel, with its almost perpendicular walls of red sandstone, only extended about a couple of hundred yards back from the valley. Then it terminated in a beautiful cascade, where the water fell from the tableland above into its self-hewn basin at the upper extremity of the chasm.

It was a beautiful spot, but the whole estate was larger than the Major had intended to possess; however, he determined to purchase it, for he had little doubt that, considering the relations between Ernest Trevor and his daughter, when the young man joined

them in the following year, he would be glad to have a part of it. Then their two farms would be side by side, and their houses could be built near each other. He therefore paid £1500 for the whole block, and then at once engaged a builder and contractor to restore the least dilapidated portions of the old residence, so as to make it into a comfortable little dwelling of about five rooms.

Then the Westons took a small house in Monterey until Buena Vista should be ready for them to inhabit. Major Weston and Robert spent most of their time at the ranche superintending the Californians employed on the house, and ploughing about ten acres of the land, which they sowed with wheat, oats, and barley—all sowing has to be done in the autumn in California, for it is seldom any rain falls between May and November. Frank put his knowledge of carpentry to good practical use by assisting in making doors, windows, &c. for the house, and he and Harry took it in turns to stay with their sister at Monterey.





CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FATE OF THE EMIGRANT TRAIN.

At length the time arrived for the Westons to remove into their new home at Buena Vista. The dry season was just commencing, and the nuclei of future herds of cattle and flocks of sheep had already been purchased and driven to the ranche. The heavy furniture—what little they required—had been hauled there, and Connie and her small belongings alone remained to be transported in the covered waggon, which had sheltered her on incomparably longer journeys.

The last day of their stay at Monterey was Sunday, the 30th of April, and in the evening the Westons sat long in the verandah, having a last chat in the fine scent-laden air before retiring for the night. Bye-and-bye the conversation turned upon Indian Bill, who had taken leave of them the day after their arrival at Sacramento in order to rejoin his friends and relations of the emigrant train. By travelling quickly up the

San Joaquin Valley he had hoped to be in time to meet them at the Tejon Pass.

"I wish we could have induced the old man to remain with us," said Major Weston. "He told me that he knew all about the management of sheep and cattle, having once acted in the capacity of head stockman upon a Mexican ranche."

"He would have been invaluable to us," said Connie, "but as he had a sister who was married to one of the emigrants, it was only natural he should wish to settle near her."

"No doubt," replied the Major, abstractedly, for he fancied he heard a step on the sanded walk which led up to the verandah from the other side of the house; "but I think there is Robert," he went on, "coming to receive his final instructions for to-morrow, so good-night, young people, we shall have to be stirring in good time in the morning."

As Connie and her brothers rose to retire, a figure appeared in front of the verandah. It was not Robert—it was Indian Bill. He looked pale and haggard, and scarcely returned the joyous welcome they all gave him.

"We were just talking about you," said Major Weston, "and wishing you were with us. I have bought a ranche in the neighbourhood, and should be very glad of your help. I trust you have changed your mind, and have come back to stay."

"I hev, Captain," replied the old hunter, laconically, as he sank wearily into the chair which Frank had offered him.

"You are tired and faint with your journey," said Connie, kindly. "I will see about some supper for you," and she hurried into the house.

Meanwhile the Major poured out a glass of wine from a bottle which stood on a small table beside him, and gave it to the hunter. It seemed to revive him, and rising from his seat, he drew the officer aside, as though to communicate something of importance.

"What is it?" asked the Major. "You seem agitated! Has anything happened to your—nay, *our* friends of the emigrant train?"

"You bet!" almost sobbed the old man, as he gripped the Major's arm convulsively.

"What? how?" exclaimed the other, now thoroughly alarmed. "Pray explain yourself."

Indian Bill, who was usually so cool and emotionless, trembled violently, and appeared unable to articulate the words which he wished to speak. It was evident that some terrible calamity must have happened to have so completely unnerved him.

"Calm yourself a moment, my good fellow," continued Major Weston, kindly. "Did you not meet your sister and the rest of the emigrants at the Tejon Pass?"

"No, Captain," replied the old hunter, tremulously.

He paused a moment, and then continued with great difficulty, "We'll never meet again down hiar. The hul lot on 'em's bin *clean wiped out!*"

"Slaughtered! impossible!" cried the Major. "Not the whole train, surely!"

"Yaas, the hul train, 'cepting only a few little children."

Major Weston was almost dumbfounded at the terrible news. He could hardly believe that all those poor inoffensive emigrants, with whom he had journeyed so many hundreds of miles, had thus at last miserably perished. Taking the old hunter by the arm, he led him to a little arbour in a secluded part of the garden, and there drew from him all the particulars he had been able to learn of the terrible catastrophe.

It seemed that the train had reached a point at the upper end of the Sevier Valley, some three hundred miles south of Salt Lake City, known as Mountain Meadows, when it was attacked by Indians or by white men disguised as Indians. But the emigrants threw up earthworks and fought so vigorously that they kept their enemies at bay for several days. At the end of the fifth day an armed party of Mormons, so it was said, arrived and professed to intercede with the Indians. After which the emigrants were persuaded, in order to appease the savages and secure their own lives and the lives of their families, to surrender all their goods and chattels and to vacate their camp; the

Mormons promising to guide them back to one of their settlements.

“The poor emigrants accordingly marched out of their intrenchments, but they had not proceeded more than a mile or two when they were surrounded and slaughtered.”

“By whom?” inquired Major Weston, almost fiercely, for he could scarcely restrain his indignation at the horrible butchery.

“God knows, sir,” replied the old hunter, solemnly. “I don’t, but I hev my suspicions.”

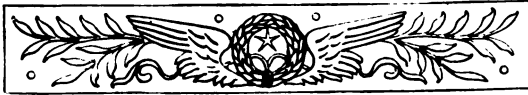
Major Weston looked at his companion inquiringly, but the latter only shook his head and muttered something about “treachery” and “a day of vengeance.”

And then Connie’s voice was heard calling to them that Indian Bill’s supper was ready.

A little later news of the terrible Mountain Meadows Massacre, committed by a large party of Mormons feigning to be Indians, and under the leadership of John D. Lee, caused a thrill of horror throughout the civilised world.

And Major Weston and his children, whilst thankful for their own escape, mourned long for the poor emigrants thus cruelly betrayed and murdered.





CHAPTER XXVII.

BOUND TO THE STAKE.

THERE is one particular region of the Rocky Mountains which was formerly much celebrated as a great hunting-ground and fighting arena. It is a series of valleys, big and little, which lie embosomed in the mazy bends and ramifications of the Park Mountains—the source of many a mighty river—the debateable ground of many a hostile tribe.

These fertile valleys or parks, as they are called, used to abound in game of all kinds, from the huge buffalo to the industrious little beaver. They are well watered and sheltered, and, but for the wild forays and bloody combats so often enacted there, would be veritable earthly paradises.

It was in one of these valleys, lying in the most direct route to California, that such an encounter had taken place, some twelve months after Ernest Trevor had bidden adieu to the Westons at Salt Lake City, and about the time of his expected return to California.

Three horsemen journeying westward had been surprised and overwhelmed by a large band of Sioux Indians. Two of the travellers had been slain on the spot, and the third—a young Englishman—had been knocked off his horse and taken prisoner.

The morrow's sun had risen upon a scene of great excitement in the Sioux Camp. The hated Paleface was to be burned at the stake. Many of the Indians were already busily engaged in gathering dry grass and hacking off branches from the trees of a neighbouring copse, with their tomahawks, for that purpose, whilst others piled the combustibles around the stake to which their prisoner was bound. The latter, though tall and athletic-looking, was but a youth. His head was bare, and his dark hair, except where matted together by the blood from a wound, fell in curly negligence over a high broad forehead. He looked faint and pale, but there was a fearless light in his fine dark eyes and a firm, almost defiant expression, about his handsome mouth, which clearly revealed a daring and resolute spirit.

“I wonder how long they will take to put me out of my misery,” he said to himself. “Oh! that I had been killed outright like my poor guides, and then I should have been spared this hour of torture! Surely the fiends have collected enough firewood now to burn me to a cinder! I only hope they will pile it all on at once, and not roast me by inches. Oh! darling

Connie, it seems hard that I should never see your sweet face again. And it is dreadful to think that for months, even perhaps for years, you should be tortured by uncertainty as to my fate!" And he wondered if it were only for this bitter end that she had been the means of saving him from destruction, and thought it would have been better for him if he had perished by the sharp hatchets and knives of the Bannacks than by the slow fires of the Sioux. And then he longed to be able at least to open her locket, and look once more upon her likeness before he died. But, alas! he was bound fast and could not touch it.

Just then, his reflections were cut short by the appearance of the chief, who advanced as though to fire the piled-up reeds and branches. He held a lighted pine-knot in one hand, and with the other he marshalled his warriors into a circle around the pile. He was a fine, intelligent-looking Indian of commanding appearance, and his dress betokened a degree of refinement seldom found in one of his race. He wore a richly-embroidered buckskin shirt, confined at the waist by a brightly-beaded girdle. His lower limbs were encased in long leggings fringed with scalp-locks, and his feet in moccasins ornamented with porcupine quills, while on his head he wore a tuft of eagle's feathers.

Young Trevor—for we have seen that it was he who was bound to the stake—fancied that he had seen

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The chief tore open the front of his victim's shirt, when something arrested his attention.

this noble-looking savage before, but could not recall the occasion, and had no time to think, for at that moment the chief came still nearer, and, lowering his torch, appeared about to plunge it into the combustibles.

Ernest thought his time had come, and breathed a prayer for help. But suddenly the Indian seemed to change his mind, and, throwing the torch aside, sprang upon the faggots.

“Dog of a Paleface,” he cried, “you have entered the hunting grounds of the Sioux and slain three of their braves. You shall die by fire, but first of all Teconsa will wet his knife in the blood of his enemy.”

So saying, the chief tore open the front of his victim's shirt in order to administer a stab, when something arrested his attention. It was the locket and chain which Connie had given to her lover, and which he still always wore suspended from his neck.

In a moment the chief had torn the glittering ornament away. So roughly was this done, however, that the catch of the locket was released, and the features of the fair-haired girl were disclosed to the astonished Indian.

For a moment or two the chief seemed spellbound.

“Ugh!” he exclaimed at length, “it is the golden-haired daughter of the great Paleface chief—the white maiden who saved Teconsa's life.”

This speech made young Trevor's heart leap within

him, for it recalled to his memory facts of the greatest importance at such a juncture.

This remarkable Indian was evidently none other than Teconsa, the dreaded chief of the Sioux, and the very man from whom he had rescued Connie some fifteen months ago when she was being carried off into the mountains. But what was now even of greater consequence to him was the fact that this same Indian had subsequently been saved from death by Connie's intervention, when about to be shot by the more violent of the emigrants, into whose hands he had fallen. For Connie had told her lover the whole story during the happy week he had spent with her at Salt Lake City.

Most anxiously did Ernest scan the countenance of the chief whilst the latter looked earnestly at the portrait in his hand. The miniature appeared to have some wonderful fascination for the untutored savage, and it seemed as though he would never tire of gazing upon the features of the fair English girl who had thrown herself between him and the muzzles of the white men's rifles.

At last he looked up, and Ernest was relieved to see that the fierce, vindictive expression of his face had given place to one which was comparatively mild.

"Ugh! the Palefaces are great medicine men," exclaimed the chief, as he looked inquiringly at his prisoner; "they can fasten the images of their friends

upon glass. But how did my white brother obtain the image of the golden-haired maiden? Is she his sister?"

"No," replied Ernest, "but she is a very dear friend, and she gave me that portrait herself."

The Indian shrugged his shoulders. "My young brother is following his love across the mountains from the land of the rising sun beyond the great salt waters. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied young Trevor, "but until I had crossed the great waters once I had never seen her."

"My brother speaks in riddles," said the chief, with a gesture of impatience.

"I will explain if you will release me from this unpleasant situation," said Ernest. "These things cut into my flesh."

The chief instantly severed the bonds with his scalping knife.

"My white brother is free," he said. "The golden-haired maiden saved my life; how, then, could I slay one who is dear to her?"

"Thanks," was all Ernest could say at the moment, as he almost fell upon the faggots that surrounded him, for his limbs were stiff and cramped by reason of the tightness of the cord and the length of time that he had been bound.

The chief stretched out his hand, however, and

caught him, and supported him to a seat on the edge of the pile.

"There," said Ernest, "now I shall be able to give you the history of that locket, which," he added mentally, "seems to be turning out a veritable talisman."

"Let my young brother speak. Teconsa's ears are open."

"Some fifteen moons have come and gone," began Ernest, "since I had the good fortune to rescue the young lady whose portrait you hold, from the hands of a Sioux chief, who was carrying her off into the mountains."

He paused a moment, and kept his eye steadily fixed upon the Indian, who perceptibly started, whilst his look became black as night as he gazed upon the young Paleface with flashing eyes.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, "then you are the young white chief whose horse was fleetier than the wind, and who followed me into the mountains. You were like the cougar when it pursues a wounded deer, I could not shake you off."

Ernest bowed his acknowledgments of these flattering observations, and met the chief's gaze without shrinking.

"When I parted from Miss Weston," he continued, "she gave me that little miniature in acknowledgment of the service I had the good fortune to render her.

I prize it very highly, and have ever since worn it on my heart. Once again I saw her after that"—he paused, feeling how impossible it was to explain their new and tenderer relations to this savage, who yet, from love to her, was giving him his freedom. Then he went on—"As soon as I could I returned to America; and, as you have rightly guessed, I was on my way to join her in California when, without a moment's warning, your braves dashed out from yonder thicket and cut me and my guides down without mercy."

"My white brother has already been avenged," interrupted the chief moodily; "his companions have not reached the happy hunting grounds alone; they were accompanied by three of Teconsa's bravest warriors."

"That fact does not afford me much consolation," replied Ernest, despondently, "for how shall I find my way across these trackless wilds now that my faithful guides are slain?"

The chief rose to his feet, and extending his hand to Ernest, exclaimed warmly—"Let not my young brother be troubled. Teconsa himself shall guide the young Paleface chief across the mountains, for the sake of the white maiden who had pity on her enemy. Teconsa had tried to steal her from her friends, but the Master of Life had given her a large heart, and she made herself a shield to the poor red man. Ugh!

the golden-haired maid was very lovely, and her voice like rippling water."

While the chief was speaking, he had uncoiled a tress of fair hair from a rough bracelet of beaten silver which encircled his wrist.

"See!" he exclaimed, "Teconsa begged this lock, and swore that he would never forget the fair white maiden who saved his life. He and his warriors will carry the young chief of the Longknives safely to his love beyond the snow mountains. Is my white brother satisfied?"

Ernest's reply was a warm grip of the Indian's proffered hand, and a look which meant more than words.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION—TECONSA PAYS HIS DEBT.

It was the end of October, and the long Californian summer, or rather the dry season, was coming to an end. Though still generally fine and warm, the days were not so bright or the skies so cloudless as they had hitherto been, and a few showers had already fallen.

Buena Vista had proved well adapted for sheep—the most profitable stock which can be reared in California—and Major Weston, having decided to increase his flock, had gone off with Indian Bill on a sheep-buying expedition to a distant farm. Harry had been left in charge of the cattle, and Frank and Robert were busily engaged in putting up a stout fence to enclose a neat little frame-house which had been erected at the other side of the gorge as a sort of overflow residence for the young men and Robert as soon as Ernest Trevor—who was now daily expected—should arrive.

A letter from Captain Trevor had been received some weeks before, which told them that his wife had died the previous winter, and that Ernest had already sailed for America, and he and his two young daughters intended to follow him as soon as he had arranged his business affairs. He also thankfully closed with Major Weston's offer of one-half of the Buena Vista estate at little over cost price, and said that he considered himself very fortunate to obtain so conveniently situated a ranche for his son. Meanwhile he trusted that Ernest would make himself useful, and become thoroughly versed in the business he had chosen.

Since this letter had been received, Connie had mounted to the flat roof of the house a dozen times a day in the hope of seeing the approach of her lover. But, as day after day and week after week passed by without his appearing, she grew despondent, and the roses faded from her cheeks.

As she stood that October evening on the roof of the house, leaning against a parapet and gazing at the extensive view of hill and plain stretched out before her, there was an abstracted, almost hopeless expression on her beautiful face, and a painfully wistful look in her large blue eyes.

It was not that young Trevor was so very much behind the expected time, but the knowledge she had of the dangers of the route he had to travel—dangers multiplied and exaggerated a hundredfold in her vivid

imagination—which caused her increasing anxiety with every day's delay.

The scene was enlivened by the sheep, cattle, and horses which, singly or in groups, dotted the plain, and the flocks of wild fowl which hovered about the lake or disported themselves on its glassy surface; while the silence was broken by the tapping of the busy workmen's hammers as they worked at the fence, and the murmuring of the now scanty stream as it dropped over the fall into its rocky basin.

Connie was looking dreamily at the snow-clad summits of the distant Sierras, when a mingled sound of shouting and bellowing in the distance caught her ear, and then she noticed a great commotion amongst the cattle Harry was herding near the further extremity of the prairie. The boy was "rounding them up" on his fleet mustang, and apparently trying to head them towards home.

What could be the matter? wondered Connie, as she watched the strange proceedings. It still wanted more than an hour to sunset, and it was the usual custom to let the cattle return leisurely towards the house, grazing as they came; now, however, they were being rounded into a compact body and urged along at a gallop.

Connie began to feel alarmed. Her eyes searched the surrounding country for some clue to the mystery, but for a long time they searched in vain, until at

length she saw what appeared to be a faint gleam of light on the hills at the western extremity of the prairie. Presently the glimmer developed into a long sparkling line of light advancing towards the plain.

At this sight a flood of tumultuous feelings swept through the girl's breast. The flashing was the flashing of steel, and the last time she had seen anything like it was when Ernest Trevor had bidden her a long good-bye, and was disappearing with his escort into the Passes of the Wahsatch.

Might not this same flashing of steel herald her lover's return? It was not likely that he would come alone. He would either be travelling in company with some caravan, or, as was more likely, have hired the services of a party of hunters or trappers for the journey across the mountains. These would of course be well armed, and hence no doubt the glitter of steel.

For a moment Connie indulged in an ecstasy of joy at the thought that at last Ernest was really come. Then doubts began to creep into her mind as she noted the size of the approaching cavalcade, and saw the frantic haste with which Harry continued to urge his unruly mob of cattle towards the home paddock. Was it possible that the glittering line so rapidly approaching was a troop of marauders bent on plundering the ranche?

She grew pale at the thought, and hastened to give

the signal to Frank and Robert to return to the house. Then she went down to her father's room for the large field-glass, and mounting once more to the roof, took a searching look at the advancing party.

The head of the line had entered a wooded dingle before she could adjust her glass. She got the focus right, however, before a quarter of the cavalcade had disappeared, and then nearly dropped the glass in terror.

They were Indians.

No wonder Harry had made such haste to drive his herd into the well-fenced yard. He had doubtless spied the redskins with his telescope while still a long way off, and hence the hurried stampede.

"What's the matter, Connie?" shouted Frank at this moment from the front of the house; "Harry is driving the cattle home like mad, and Robert has gone to open the yard gate for them. I can't imagine what all the fuss is about, or why you signalled to us."

"Come up here and you will soon see," replied Connie excitedly. "The Indians are coming down upon us from the mountains!"

"Indians! Impossible!" replied her brother, as he disappeared into the house.

"They are nothing else!" cried Connie, as he reappeared on the roof beside her. "Take the glass and be convinced. I saw them quite distinctly in

their paint and feathers; and look how their lance-points flash in the sunlight!"

Frank looked steadily through the glass for a moment or two, and then an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips, and a peculiar smile played for an instant about the corners of his mouth. "You are right," he said at last, "there is a large party of Indians approaching, but not necessarily with hostile intent. I never heard of an Indian raid on this side of the Coast Range. But we may as well take precautions," he continued; "go down and prepare a good supper for them in case they should prove friends, while Robert and I see to the defences."

Connie was surprised at the cool way in which her brother seemed to take the matter; but she descended to the kitchen, and, aided by her "help," set about preparing gallons of coffee and huge dishes of buck-wheat cakes.

Robert came in and helped to spread out the feast on the verandah floor, picnic fashion, but was very reticent about the Indians. Frank looked in now and then, and in answer to his sister's questions, said the savages were in great force, but as yet had made no hostile demonstration. Nevertheless, Harry and he had raised the draw-bridge across the moat—the old moat encircling the house, which had been repaired and deepened—and barred the gates. They had also run out and loaded the two swivel-guns on the top of the house,

which commanded the whole of the approaches. "But," he added mysteriously, "you need not be alarmed."

Presently Harry rushed in, saying that the Indians were close at hand, and that their chief had demanded to see "the golden-haired maiden."

"Why!" exclaimed Connie, "that is what the Indian chief Teconsa used to call me! Where is the chief?"

"In the courtyard," replied Harry, disappearing.

Connie followed him outside, and immediately found herself in the presence of the redoubtable Sioux chief and a score of his warriors.

Teconsa advanced with outstretched hands and beaming countenance to meet the fair English girl, but just as she was about to greet him her eyes fell on the sunburnt face of a fine tall young Englishman who stood a little way behind him, and, with a cry of joy, she threw herself into Ernest Trevor's arms.

Teconsa surveyed the happy pair with satisfaction, then he stepped up to them, and laying his hands upon theirs, said impressively, "Teconsa's heart is very glad; he has paid back the debt he owed his fair young sister."

"And paid it nobly," said Major Weston, who having returned at this interesting juncture had approached almost unobserved.

It was a joyous party that sat round the Major's hospitable board that eventful evening, and though the swivel-guns were fired, it was only a *feu de joie* in honour of Ernest's safe arrival.

Eighteen months later, another happy group assembled round the festal board at Buena Vista. This time the occasion was the wedding breakfast of Connie and Ernest, and Captain Trevor and his daughters were also present.

A substantial block had been added to the frame-house across the gorge, which was now to be the home of the newly married pair. All the land on that side of the river had been formed into a separate ranche for Major Weston's son-in-law.

Captain Trevor had built himself a pretty little residence on the shores of the lake, and he and his daughters, Mary and Ethel, spent much of their time in fishing and sailing upon it—a pastime in which Frank and Harry Weston were often pleased to join when their day's work was over.

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