

CLARA MORELAND;

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR SOUTH-WEST.

BY EMERSON BENNETT,

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TO
JAMES W. NEWLIN, ESQ.,
Of Philadelphia,

THIS STORY,

As a slight Token of Friendship and Esteem.

IS SINCERELY INSCRIBED,

BY THE AUTHOR.

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CLARA MORELAND:

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR SOUTH-WEST.

CHAPTER I.

THE BROTHER.

THE first of October, of the year of our Lord 1845, found me a guest of the Tremont House, in the goodly city of Galveston, Texas. An invalid guest, I may add—for I had been confined to my room for some days, suffering much pain from a couple of flesh wounds received in a recent skirmish with a party of Texan brigands, somewhere between my present abode and the river Brazos, while in the act of making my escape with some friends from the head-quarters of a notorious villain, counterfeiter, etcetera, known as Count D'Estang. The reader who has been so fortunate, or unfortunate, (I leave him to decide which,) as to peruse a portion of my narrative, under the title of "VIOLA," will readily understand to what I allude; but in order to refresh his memory with the past events of my career, and also give those before whom I may now appear for the first time an inkling of what has already been recorded of my adventures, I will here transcribe a letter, which about this period I wrote home to my worthy parent in Virginia:

"DEAR FATHER;—

"In my last, dated at New Orleans, you will recollect I made some mention of a very eccentric travelling companion, by the name of Harley, who, having been introduced to me one night at a ball in Swansdown, renewed acquaintance on the boat at Louisville, and kept me company down the river; and I think I also added, that we had in contemplation a trip to Mexico, merely to gratify curiosity and have some adventures. Well, we have not been to Mexico as yet—but we have had some adventures notwithstanding. If memory serves me right, I told you there was a certain mystery about my friend—for even then I regarded him as such—which I had not been able to fathom; but this has since been explained away, and I now know his whole history:

"It seems that he is the son of a wealthy Georgian planter, residing in or near Macon, and a graduate of one of our Northern colleges. Some three years since, soon after completing his course of studies, and while on a visit to a relative in Virginia, he accidentally, and in a very romantic manner, formed acquaintance with a young lady (or perhaps I should rather say girl) in her teens, called Viola St. Auburn, who chanced to be there at a seminary, and between whom and himself at once sprung up a very warm attachment. Now the reputed father of Viola, and the father of my friend, were sworn enemies, and in consequence of this the lovers were torn asunder, and each forbid by an indignant parent ever seeing the other again. But 'man proposes and God disposes,' as you will see by what follows.

"Harley and St. Auburn, the parents of my hero and heroine, had in early life been rivals—had quarreled and fought; and the former had been worsted in more senses than one—having received the ball of his antagonist, and,

shortly after, the news that the lady, on whose account he had shed his blood, had become the wife of his enemy. This latter blow had been nigh finishing what the former had left undone; but he lived to marry and rear a family; though his reason, it is still contended, has never been entirely sound since the date of the aforementioned events: and to this day, the bare mention of the name of St. Auburn is enough to drive him frantic.

"Not long after his marriage, St. Auburn removed to the city of Mexico, where he became a merchant, and continued in business till recently. Viola he put to school in this country; and by this means the children of the rivals and foes met, as previously stated. After the separation of the lovers, they had only seen each other once prior to the date of my last letter; and my friend Harley, having received his portion from his father, had become an eccentric wanderer, travelling with no other purpose than to kill time and drive unpleasant thoughts from his mind.

"I now come to speak of events which have, for aught I know to the contrary, brought this romantic *affaire de cœur* to a happy termination—events in which your dutiful son has had the honor to figure somewhat conspicuously.

"While in New Orleans, as fate would have it, my friend saw Viola pass him in a carriage. Wild with conflicting emotions, he followed it at the risk of his neck, and brought up on board a steamer bound for this city. He saw Viola but a moment, but in that moment learned that her first destination was Galveston, Texas. Thither he followed her, a day or two afterward, accompanied by myself and Tom. In the post-office here, he found a letter from her, in which she stated that her father had sold her to a French Count D'Estang—that shortly she expected to be on her way to his residence, D'Estang Ville, somewhere near the river

Brazos—and implored him to come to her rescue in disguise.

“We accordingly disguised ourselves as pedlars, and set off in quest of her; and after a day or two of adventures—some ludicrous and some thrilling—we succeeded in finding D’Estang Ville and gaining admittance. I cannot here recount one tithe of what followed. Suffice it to say, that Viola and St. Auburn were both confined here as prisoners; that we discovered the Count to be a base counterfeiter; and that we succeeded in securing him in his own stronghold and liberating his victims.

“While escaping across the country to Galveston, we were assailed in the night—by the Count’s cut-throats as we suppose—St. Auburn was mortally wounded, and I was stabbed in the arm and thigh, and am slightly indisposed in consequence. After being mortally wounded, St. Auburn lived long enough to make a confession; by which it appears that Viola was not his daughter, but the stolen child of a distinguished Spanish gentleman of great wealth, and at present a resident of the city of Mexico. By the death-bed of St. Auburn, at his particular request, Viola and Harley were married, and are now gone to New Orleans to procure proofs of her identity with the lost daughter of Don Alverda, her reputed father. These obtained, it is their intention to return to this city and take me with them thence to Mexico. Whether I shall go or not, remains to be seen.

“Thus you see, dear father, I have been favored with not a little of living romance already—what remains in store for me, Heaven only knows: I hope something better than sabre stabs.

“I have neglected to record, by the way, another little affair of my own, which *may* grow into something serious, or may not. You will recollect I mentioned the death of a

young man on the Neptune, while we were coming down the Mississippi, the victim of a gambler. I learned that his name was Thomas Moreland, and that he was the son of a Widow Moreland, residing at an inland village of Texas. Now mark how curiously things turn up! While travelling on foot in the disguise of a pedlar, I came to a house from which issued the most melodious strains of the human voice I had ever heard. Well, I was anxious to see the singer, and I went in. I found her to be a very beautiful young lady, who was momentarily expecting her brother, who had been absent two years in Europe. She mistook me for her brother, whom I suppose I very much resemble, rushed into my arms, and we had quite a time of it, I assure you. Well, to be brief, she turned out to be a cousin of the gambler’s victim, and her name is Clara Moreland. She was very much affected to hear of his death; and putting one thing with another, we got very well acquainted in a short time. She is very lovely; and her father, Colonel Moreland, is a gentleman of political distinction. In short, I became *very* much interested in her, and have had some serious thoughts about calling on her again. That is all.

“Give my love to sisters, Old Moll, and the negroes generally; and tell the latter Tom is well. By the by, I owe my life to Tom—but I will tell you more another time. How do you all come on? I ask the question, but have no idea how, where, or when, I shall get an answer.

“You shall hear from me again soon. Meantime, I am, dear father,

“Affectionately yours,—

“HENRY WALTON.

“To Richard Walton, Esq., }
Swansdown, Va. }

“P. S.—Don’t be alarmed about my wounds! They

are not very serious, and I am getting well fast. I think they would not trouble me now, only that I exposed myself and took cold."

This letter I sent to the post-office by Tom, who on his return handed me the subjoined:

"NEW ORLEANS, *Sept. 27th*, 1845.

"MY DEAR HARRY:

"I have just received a letter from home, which requires my presence there immediately. My poor father has been taken suddenly ill, and is not expected to recover. I shall leave to-day for Macon, via Savannah, taking Viola with me, to whom I now expect my friends to be reconciled, since the blood of the St. Auburns is not in her veins. As I cannot fix on any time for my return, you had better not wait for me; but write to Macon, and keep me advised of your whereabouts. It grieves me to part with so dear a friend—but necessity compels me. Can you not come to Macon? Think of it seriously—I will assure you of a cordial reception. Dear Viola, with tearful eyes, sends her love to you. Do not fail to write, and keep me advised of your doings; and believe me, my dear Harry,

"Your sincere friend,

"MORTON HARLEY.

"P. S.—How about Miss Clara?"

I read this, seated in a large arm chair, swayed with bandages and propped with pillows, and was pondering on the uncertainty of human life, and the many accidents which flesh is heir to, when Tom, who had gone out after handing me the foregoing, re-entered my apartment, and said, hurriedly:

"Dar's a gemman below 'quiring about you, Massa Hal,

dat if I did'nt know you was here, I'd tink was you'seff, sartin."

"Ah! indeed," returned I, with no small degree of interest, for I more than suspected who he was: "Show him up, Tom!"

Some five minutes later Tom ushered into my chamber a fine, noble-looking, handsome stranger, to be mistaken for whom, so far as personal appearance might be concerned, I could consider in no other light than a compliment. He was nearly six feet in stature, finely proportioned, with bright hazel eyes, a high, smooth forehead, a nose just sufficiently Roman to give a character to the face, a well-formed mouth, and a finely turned chin. The countenance was altogether highly intellectual, and his manner had all the graceful ease and dignity of a true bred gentleman.

"Mr. Walton," he said, in a frank, off-hand way, advancing to me, and extending his hand, "I am very sorry to find you an invalid. But I beg your pardon! I have not yet introduced myself: My name is Walter Moreland."

"So I anticipated," I replied, "when Tom informed me that there was a gentleman below inquiring for me, who was the very counterpart of myself, as I had the honor of once being taken for just such an individual."

"Ah! yes," said my new acquaintance, laughing: "my sister Clara told me all about it; and I have had my own sport with her since, concerning it, I assure you."

"I hope she is well," I rejoined; and though I affected a genteel indifference, I felt the blood mount to my temples, and knew my companion noticed it.

"Yes, Clara is well," he answered; "and had she dreamed that I should be so fortunate as to meet with you, I doubt not she would have sent her special regards."

As Moreland said this, I fancied he gave me a very

peculiar look; and for a moment or two I really felt confused.

"I am greatly obliged to her," I hastened to rejoin, "for so kindly remembering one who can lay so little claim to the honor. Our meeting was certainly a rather romantic one; and was owing, I believe, to a species of impudence on my part, for which I can only forgive myself by recollecting of what pleasure I must otherwise have been deprived."

"Well, you did meet, and that meeting has led to our meeting, and this I sincerely trust neither of us may have cause to regret. I have just arrived in town; and seeing your name on the register, I was making some inquiries concerning you, when your servant, who I suppose had overheard a portion of the conversation, informed me he had orders to show me to your chamber. They tell me you were wounded in a skirmish with a party of brigands between here and the Brazos?"

"Yes! and I thank Heaven the result has proved no worse than you see. We all had a very narrow escape;" and I proceeded, at his request, to give him the particulars of the whole affair, and the causes which led to it.

"Truly romantic!" he rejoined. "And so you think this Count D'Estang at the head of a band of desperadoes, eh?"

"Such is my honest conviction."

"I must acquaint my father with this. If I am not mistaken, he knows the man, and suspects his occupation. We must clear the country of such villains, now that we are getting into good society. Too long has Texas been the resort of the outlaws of all nations, and it is time for them to be seeking some new Australia."

"The war—if, as some predict, we come to a brush with Mexico—will be likely to take off many of them," I replied.

"Yes," returned Moreland; "and in so much, war will be a blessing rather than a curse."

"By-the-by," said I, "I have neglected to inquire where your sister is now?"

"Home, at my father's, in Houston. And apropos—shall we not have the pleasure of seeing you there before long?"

"Why, to tell you the truth, I have had some very serious thoughts of making myself visible up that way—though, being so much of a stranger in this country, I have been almost afraid to venture without a letter of introduction."

"Sir," returned Walter, "I am not in the habit of complimenting a man to his face; but in this case, I will say, that your own countenance would have been quite sufficient to convince us of your right to the title of gentleman—and that alone would have given you a claim to our hospitality—to say nothing of your generous endeavors to befriend a relative who is now no more, and for an account of whose death we are indebted to you."

"Well," returned I, laughing; "as to the marks of a gentleman being so conspicuous in my countenance, I have only to reply, that, as we look so much alike, even modesty will not require me to deny the 'soft impeachment.' But you spoke of your cousin, Thomas Moreland, whom I saw fall a victim to that ruinous vice, gambling—how did his poor mother receive the news of his death?"

"Very hard, indeed,—in fact she will not long survive him."

"Your sister feared as much. Poor woman! hers has been a life of sore affliction."

"It has, indeed," sighed my companion; "and the expectation of a speedy death now appears to be her only consolation."

"The fate of her son was a sad but salutary lesson to me," I rejoined. "I had before heard of the dire consequences which oft-times ensue from gaming; but here was a case in which the evils of it were so forcibly brought home to me, that over his solitary grave I vowed a solemn vow to Heaven, that I would never play again!"

"Keep that vow, sir! sacredly keep it!" cried my new friend, with almost startling energy, as he took a quick turn or two up and down the room. "For," he added, after a thoughtful pause, "the man who gambles, perils body and soul. Ay, beware of it, my friend!" he continued; "for he who enters the gambler's den, passes the portals of hell. I—" He was evidently on the point of making some confession; but stopped, and with some confusion in his manner, added, changing the subject: "I am on my way to Corpus Christi, Taylor's head-quarters, where I have some business to transact for my father. The next steamer for that place goes out in a couple of hours, and my passage on her is already engaged. I shall not, I trust, be absent many days; and on my return hither, may I not hope to have the pleasure of your company to Houston?"

I assured him that nothing would afford me more delight; and that if I found myself able to travel by that time, he might count on my accepting his kind invitation.

After some further conversation, he took his leave, and I fell into a delightful reverie on love and Clara!

CHAPTER II.

THE HOME OF CLARA.

It was on one of the most delightful days of delightful October, that, in company with Walter Moreland, I stepped from the boat to a carriage, and was driven through the pleasant streets of Houston, to the abode of one who already had a hold upon my heart such as none of her sex had ever had before. Yes, I was about to behold Clara for the second time—to gaze upon her lovely features, bright eyes, and hear again that melodious voice, which had exercised over me such a spell ere we ever met. It were vain for me to attempt to analyze my feelings—to resolve to simple elements that strange compound in my heart which is known by the term of love. Hopes I had—fears and doubts—delightful anticipations and tremulous misgivings. What would be her reception of me? It would be cordial, I flattered myself, from what her brother had told me, and from the fact that I had come home with him, an invited guest, to remain for a week or two, or longer. But would there be any evidence in her manner that she had my interest at heart beyond the polite etiquette of good breeding? In short, should I find her heart-whole? and if not, what part had I in her being otherwise? As thus I pondered, occasionally replying to my companion's remarks, the carriage entered a broad, beautiful street, and presently turned through a gate into a large, handsome inclosure. Thence moving up a circular, well shaded avenue, past a small pond, on whose bosom a few ducks were lazily sailing, it approached a

large, fine-looking mansion, of a rather cumbrous style of architecture, which stood on the brow of an eminence, and commanded a view of the town and the river, and of a broad, level, beautiful prairie, which stretched away in the rear beyond the enclosure.

As we drew up before the portico, the first object I beheld was Clara, as she came tripping down the steps to welcome her brother home. Just as she reached the carriage, Tom, who accompanied me, had dismounted and opened the door. As I was nearest to her, she did not perceive her brother, who had purposely drawn himself up in one corner; but holding her hand out to me, said:

"Oh, I am so glad you have come—I have such news for you. But heavens! Walter, how pale you look!—are you ill?"

"I believe this is not the first time Miss Clara Moreland has mistaken me for her brother," I returned, playfully.

"Why, as I live, it is Mr. Walton!" she said, in a tone of surprise, blushing to the temples. "Ah, you rogue! I see you now," she continued, peering in at her brother, who had betrayed his presence by a hearty laugh. "This is another of your innocent jokes, is it?"

"Faith, I think it is one of your own, Clara; for something like it, you know, once occurred during my absence. Well, if you want to kiss him again, in mistake for me, I will turn my head."

"Goodness knows I think it is pretty well turned already," cried Clara, laughing gaily, to cover her confusion. "Would you believe it, Mr. Walton," she continued, turning to me, the color still as deep as ever on her beautiful features—"Walter is actually in love with a young lady, who, report says, doesn't care a straw for him."

"Well, that is certainly a very interesting piece of

intelligence to a gentleman who is my very counterpart in looks," returned Walter, tapping her under the chin, as he alighted from the carriage. "That is as much as to say, a gentleman of his personal appearance cannot be successful with your sex—which, to say the least, is very complimentary."

"Oh, you mad-cap! you provoking teaze! you know I didn't mean any such thing," rejoined Clara, clapping her soft, white hand over his mouth. "Do not mind him, Mr. Walton! If you do look like him, I will wager the resemblance ends in looks. But here comes papa, and so I will leave you;" and she went bounding up the steps, with the airy lightness of the fawn, whispering a word or two to her father as she passed him.

The latter now came toward me, and Walter hastened to introduce us.

"Happy of your acquaintance, sir," returned Colonel Moreland: "I have heard Clara speak of you. You knew my nephew, Tom—or rather, saw him die, I understand. He might have been a clever youth, had he avoided dissipation. Well, come, walk in! walk in! Bless me!" he continued, taking another look at me—"Why, what a likeness! Walter, he ought to be your brother."

And so I intend to be, I thought to myself.

"Yes," answered Walter, "we could pass very well for twins even."

"Curious are the freaks of nature—physiology is an interesting science, Mr. Walton. Is he yours?" pointing to Tom.

I answered in the affirmative.

"Fine boy, sir! fine boy! good build! good eye. Would you like to sell him?"

"No, Colonel, Tom and I can only be parted by death."

"Aha! strong attachment. Well, come, follow me;"

and the father of my intended, as I already began to regard him, went humming up the steps, and ushered me into a large, fine drawing-room, richly, but somewhat quaintly, furnished.

Colonel Moreland was, in some respects, a character—by which I mean a personage distinguished from the many by certain peculiarities. He was tall, muscular, but not what is termed stout. His age I judged to be somewhere between forty-five and fifty. His hair was quite gray, which gave him a venerable appearance, and the cast of his countenance was such as to add a certain degree of dignity. His eye was dark, bright, and shrewd; and his features generally had the strongly marked outlines of the Scotch. He had high cheek bones, a large nose and mouth, and around the latter the lines indicated decision and firmness amounting almost to stubbornness. He was a little bald on the top of his head, which made his broad, high forehead appear still broader and higher; and altogether he had quite a commanding, intelligent appearance. He dressed plainly, and was devoid of ostentation. He had pride, however, and was ambitious, both for himself and family. He was a man in general of few words; and these, as is the case with people that speak little, were ever to the point. He might be slow in making up his mind to any thing new—but when once he had settled upon a thing, right or wrong, it was almost impossible to change him.

An early pioneer in the wilds of Texas, he had grown up, politically speaking, with the country, and I believe he really had her interest at heart. During her struggle for independence, he commanded a regiment under Houston, who was his personal friend; and subsequently he had been elected a member of the Texan Congress—a post of honor which he still held. Though a public man,

he had not neglected his own private interest; and by speculating to some considerable extent in lands, he had amassed quite a fortune. He owned a large cotton plantation some miles away, which was worked by negroes under charge of an overseer and agent, and from which he derived a handsome income. He had taken some pains with the education of his children, three in number—Walter, Clara, and Mary—and altogether I found the Morelands were among the first families of the Republic—or State, as I should now call it—of Texas.

Bidding me be seated; the Colonel went out; and presently Clara reappeared, accompanied by her mother and sister. Mrs. Moreland—a pale, handsome, intellectual woman—I found to be a perfect lady—mild, affable, and winning though not a great talker; but Mary, unlike her in this respect, was a perfect chatterbox, full of spirit and raillery. The latter was about fifteen years of age, with black hair and eyes, and very pretty features, which were seldom in repose. I did not think her as handsome as Clara; for I have a partiality for blue eyes, sunny hair, and a light complexion, and in this respect Clara seemed perfect. There was a family resemblance between the two—but Clara seemed to me more dignified, graceful, and lovely. Clara, however, was three years Mary's senior; and as I have acknowledged to being in love with her, I suppose the reader will not set me down as an impartial critic.

Both Mary and her mother were struck with the resemblance between Walter and myself; and as this opened the way to conversation, without going through the lackadaisical formalities generally incident upon the introduction of strangers, I soon felt at my ease, and began to regard my new friends as old acquaintances.

“Are you not paler than usual?” inquired Clara, in the

course of conversation, and in a tone that I fancied had a touch of feeling in it.

"Yes—I have been confined to my room, of late, by reason of my wounds."

"Wounds?" she exclaimed, quickly, in a tone and with a look of anxious surprise—"What wounds? have you been wounded?"

"Yes, in an affray with a gang of desperadoes."

I saw Clara's cheek pale as I said this; but ere she could make any reply, Mary ran up to me, with the freedom of an old acquaintance, exclaiming:

"Oh, do tell us all about it, Mr. Walton—do! Oh, it is so romantic! isn't it, sister? My! did you really have a fight with robbers? Dear me! I wish I had been there: I'm so fond of adventure."

"Hush, daughter—you do not consider what you are saying," chided Mrs. Moreland.

"Yes but I do, mamma—only try me, and see if I don't."

I told them in brief my story—of the ensnaring of Viola, and her providential deliverance—of the assault made upon us while crossing the country from the Brazos to Galveston—with a detail of the fight, and of my own narrow escape from death by the timely appearance and heroic conduct of my faithful servant Tom; and concluded with the disclosure of the dying St. Auburn and the marriage of Harley and Viola.

Each of my listeners was deeply interested in my recital—but each in a manner peculiar to herself. Mrs. Moreland heard me through with a mother's feelings and sympathies; Clara, I fancied, saw in myself the hero of the tale; and while speaking of my narrow escape, I perceived that her lovely features were very pale, and that she was unusually excited; but Mary was one glow of

delight throughout; and the moment I had done, she exclaimed, clapping her hands:

"Oh, charming! delightful! so romantic! How I should like to have been in Viola's place!"

"Come, come, child—no more of such nonsense," chided her mother.

"Nonsense?" echoed Mary, pouting her pretty lips "I do believe, mamma, there is no romance in you."

Mrs. Moreland smiled.

"No, child, my days of romance are gone by."

"And mine are just coming on," was the reply.

Walter and his father now came in together; and Mary, running up to the latter, began to relate to him the story she had just heard.

"Ay, ay," he interrupted—"Walter has just been telling me something of this. And so," he continued, turning to me, "you think this Count D'Estang, as he is styled, is a counterfeiter, eh?"

"I have good reason for thinking so, Colonel."

"Yes, and I doubt not he is more than that," he pursued. "About a year since, I was passing through that part of the country, with a span of as fine horses as can be found in this region. I stopped at a village inn; and while there, a gentleman accosted me, wishing to purchase the animals. I told him they were not for sale. He inquired where I resided; and on my informing him, and giving him my name, he replied that, in the course of a week or two, he expected to visit Houston, and should take the trouble of calling on me, in hopes that by that time I might change my mind. Well, he called, but I was not at home; and he left his card, Count D'Estang. Subsequently he called again—but I still refused to sell. He went away, after having been to look at my horses in the stable, and two weeks from that time they were stolen.

I do not know why—perhaps because I did not like his looks—but from that day to this, I have never been able to divest myself of the idea that he had some hand in taking them away.”

“Very likely,” I returned; “for I consider him capable of any crime.”

“Well, well, we may be able to trap him yet. I will write at once to the Sheriff of Brazoria, who is a personal friend of mine, and tell him your story, and what I suspect.”

The day gradually wore away; and the more I saw of Clara, the more I thanked Fortune for her favors. As if to charm away the time, she sat down to a fine-toned piano, and played and sang several songs. I was enchanted. Had she been as ugly as Milton has described Sin, one’s heart must have warmed toward her, for her melodious voice—so sweet, so touching. It was this voice, so used, that had magnetically drawn me to her at first; and therefore the reader cannot be surprised that I was now in a state of rapture.

Being pressed to sing in turn, and believing I possessed some little talent in that way, I took up a guitar which stood by the piano, and gave them, “Come Share My Cottage, Gentle Maid”—throwing my whole soul into the words, for I felt every line. Perhaps Clara thought so; for ere I had done, her eye, which at first was fixed on mine, drooped to the ground, and a warm glow came upon her cheeks and remained there.

“Beautiful!” murmured Mrs. Moreland, when I had finished.

“Too sentimental by half!” cried Mary, with a laugh: “isn’t it, Clara?”

“Eh?” exclaimed the latter, starting in some confusion;

for her mind had evidently followed the words of the song, and she had forgotten that eyes were upon her.

“Why, one would think that you fancied the words intended for yourself,” said Mary, roguishly.

Clara now blushed crimson; and I much fear I did not remain any too pale; at all events, I know I *felt* very red.

“Come, come, Mary—you are too rude—too wild,” again chided her mother; while Walter, I fancied, smiled to himself—though he appeared not to notice us. The Colonel was not present.

Mary glided round to my chair, and said, in a whisper:

“Don’t sing any more such sentimental songs, Mr. Walton, will you?”

“Why, I thought you were fond of the romantic,” I replied.

“So I am; but something wild, grand, terrible;” and her black eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. And then she added, archly: “It’s of no use for you to sing ‘Come Share My Cottage’ to Clara.”

I felt the blood rush to my temples; but I affected to be used, and, in a careless tone, inquired:

“Why so?”

“Why, because her cottage is engaged;” and she bounded away with a merry laugh.

It is impossible for me to describe my feelings for the next five minutes. I felt confused, vexed, and foolish, and the last sensation I think predominated. Had I really made a *faux pas* in my first love adventure? and was I really seeking the affections of one already engaged? Engaged, forsooth! How that word grated on my feelings! But no! I could not think it true; and yet my heart somehow misgave me. But I will know, I thought

to myself; and if I find my fears confirmed, then farewell to Texas and my first romantic love-dream.

"My! sister! just see how pale Mr. Walton looks!" were the words which aroused me from my reverie, and which proceeded from the lips of Mary, whom I now began to regard as a regular tease.

I looked up, and saw all eyes fixed upon me.

"Are you not well?" asked Clara, with a look of anxiety, which made me exclaim, mentally:

"If her hand is engaged, her heart is not."

"A little faint," I returned to her inquiry. "A glass of water, if convenient."

Walter sprung to the bell-pull, and the crystal liquid was soon produced.

"Perhaps you find it too close here," suggested Mrs. Moreland. "Better step out and take the air."

I availed myself of her suggestion, and took a short stroll with Walter; and we conversed on various subjects, but touched not upon the one that lay nearest my heart.

CHAPTER III.

A MOONLIGHT INTERVIEW.

It was a calm, lovely night, the one following my arrival in Houston, and the round, full moon, just risen in the East, was pouring a flood of mellow light over a beautiful landscape. One or two bright stars were visible, as though keeping watch while their companions slept. A certain dreamy stillness seemed to pervade Heaven and earth—a kind of holy calm—as if great Nature were taking her repose. Occasionally the song of some night warbler came floating on the balmy air, and, dying away in sweet cadence, left all again still. It was a scene and an hour for meditation and for love.

I stood within an orange grove, through whose spreading branches the bright moonlight streamed, and crinkled on the teeming earth, and seemed to nestle among the sleeping flowers. It was on the slope of a hill which looked off upon a wide stretch of prairie, over which the queen of night spread her rays like a great veil of silver. Beside me stood one that made the pulse of life beat faster, the warm blood course quicker, and the heart labor under powerful emotions.

I am one of those who believe there is a suitable time for every thing—that Nature, in her multifold variety, has seasons peculiarly adapted to all the different passions and emotions which may exist in the human breast. The early morning, for instance—the awakening of day, with a burnished, unclouded sky, up which rolls the bright sun in

glorious splendor, amid the sweet songs of all animated nature—ever seems to me a time for rejoicing, when the thoughts should fly upward to the Creator in a heartfelt thanksgiving. Then come the hours of business, or of pleasure, with a season of rest, when the mind relaxes and loses its cares and its troubles, perchance in a brief oblivion of sleep. There is something solemn, sad and sweet in the dying day, when the fiery sun is quenched in a golden sea, and the hum of busy life falls gradually off to tranquillity, and the soft shades of coming night steal imperceptibly on, one after another, reminding us of the going out of life and the shutting in of death. The roar of the storm, with its rushing winds, flashing lightnings, and crashing thunders, stirs up the mind to sublimity; and if the spirit be not tranquil, it readily finds a wild harmony in the raging elements. But a soft, clear, serene, moonlight night—when the silver veil of Luna falls gently upon the dewy earth, and gives to the scene the matchless charm of picturesque light and shade, and the stillness is only broken by the melodious songs of the night-singers—then, of all times, the soul seems best fitted for the holy commune of love.

So at least I thought and felt, as alone I stood with Clara Moreland, amid the shade of an orange grove, in the rear of her father's mansion, on the night following my arrival in Houston. Walter, Clara, Mary, and myself, had together left the dwelling; and after wandering for an hour or more through the garden, among the sleeping flowers, Clara and I, as if by mutual arrangement, had become separated from our companions, and had continued on beyond the pale of the garden, each as it seemed so much buried in thought as scarcely to give heed to our steps. From some cause—and I flattered myself I could divine the cause—Clara had been silent all the evening;

and often I caught her sighing, as if sad at heart. As with her arm through mine we strolled to the point mentioned, my heart beat fast with strange, powerful emotions.

I have more than once said that I was in love—but whether I had awakened such a feeling in the breast of my companion, I could only judge from indications that might after all proceed from other causes. I was anxious to know; for the words of Mary, whether in earnest or jest, had started doubts and fears; and what better opportunity than the present to ascertain, I thought, as we strolled on in silence. True, to introduce such a subject now, with so brief an acquaintance, seemed ill-timed and premature; but if I missed the present opportunity, it might be long ere another as favorable should occur; and under present circumstances I did not care to remain in suspense. I therefore made up my mind to venture in words what lay nearest my heart; but the next moment I fairly trembled at the idea of making a beginning.

It is easy for our sex to flatter the other—to pay frivolous compliments on the grace of person, the beauty of countenance—to say we admire and are delighted, when our own hearts are untouched, and we little care in what manner our words are received; but it is a very different thing, when emotions, that language cannot portray, are struggling within us, aroused by the presence of an object for whom we feel we could lay down our life and deem it a pleasant sacrifice. Let no woman—and I say it with due consideration—put too much faith in the words of the man who tells her in fluent and courtly phrase he adores her; for the true adoration of the heart may make itself known by looks, and signs, and actions, but the tongue is seldom the first messenger. I have heard those who could and did boast of having *made* love

to twenty damsels, in flowery speech and graceful attitude, acknowledge to having stood abashed, silent, and awkward in the presence of one for whom they really felt what they had only *professed* to feel heretofore.

Thus silently pondering on the way in which I should begin to give voice to the feelings that so deeply agitated my breast, we reached the point I have mentioned amid the orange-grove, when Clara, who seemed suddenly to comprehend where she was, said, in a hurried, excited tone:

"Why, whither are we going? let us return."

"Stay, Clara—Miss Moreland—one moment—I have something to say to you," I returned, in a low, eager, agitated tone; and I took her hand, which I felt tremble in mine, as she made a slight attempt to withdraw it.

"Why, where is Walter and Mary?" she cried, looking around her, and turning as if to retrace her steps.

"They are not far off, I think—but what I have to say is for your ear alone," I replied, still retaining her hand.

She drooped her head in silence, and I could feel her soft hand quiver, as a tremor ran through her frame—but she made no further attempt to withdraw it. Now had arrived that time and opportunity I had long wished for; but my tongue refused speech, and my very thoughts seemed jumbled into chaos. How was I to begin? what was I to say first? Something must be said, and that quickly, for Clara was waiting in tremulous expectation.

"Miss Moreland," I began—"or rather Clara—if you will permit me so to call you—I—" Here I stopped, and cleared my throat, and coughed a little, while my blood rushed through my throbbing veins at furnace heat: "I have much wished for a circumstance—I mean a privilege—I should say—ahem—an opportunity—to—to—" Here I felt myself breaking down, the perspiration started from

every pore, and in an awful agony, like a drowning man clutching at a rope, I clutched at words, and gasped: "In short, you must have perceived—"

"Oh, let us return, Mr. Walton!" interrupted Clara, hurriedly, in great agitation—"I fear we shall be missed."

"Nay, dear Clara, hear me out!" I cried, still keeping her hand, which she now made several attempts to withdraw. "Nay, I must be heard," I continued, more resolutely. "I will detain you but a minute; and certainly you will not refuse me so brief a point of time!"

"Go on!" she murmured, faintly.

"You must have perceived, Miss Clara, from my conduct, since our first meeting," I resumed, "that you have awakened in my breast feelings which may never slumber again; and unless I greatly err, you do not altogether regard me with indifference. Nay, turn not away, and do not withdraw your hand; but speak, and tell me—is it not so? Perhaps you think me bold, premature, in thus venturing to address you, whom I have known but a brief time; and if you so censure me, I cannot deny you have justice on your side; but love, lady, will sometimes break through all formalities—leap over all bounds of decorum—and this I must plead in extenuation of my offence, if offence it be.

"Yes, Clara," I went on, in a low, eager, passionate strain—my thoughts, lately so stifled, now rushing forward for utterance, like the waters of a dammed up stream when its obstructions first give way: "Yes, Clara, be not angry at the bold, presumptuous declaration, that I love you—that I loved almost ere I saw you—and that since the moment our eyes met, you have scarcely been absent from my thoughts. You are the first to whom these lips ever made such an avowal—nor should they now venture to tell

you so, but that I feel it necessary to know on what ground I stand. I do not ask you to pledge me affection in return—for as yet you know nothing of me, beyond what I have told you; but I am anxious to learn if your heart is otherwise engaged; and if not, I would have your sweet voice tell me that I have not offended, and that I may live in hope, even though you promise nothing beyond.

"But I cannot think you regard me with indifference; for I have narrowly watched and studied your fair features at different times; and though little experienced in matters of the heart, I flatter myself I have seen there signs which bespeak emotions akin to my own. And yet, from words your sister let fall, my breast has been chilled by doubts and fears.

"I have said, dear Clara, that I love you; I have said that you have scarcely been absent from my thoughts; and I now add, that when my body has been racked with pain, with no friend and companion near to lighten my solitude with a single word of consolation, I have made the otherwise heavy and tedious hours glide pleasantly by in thinking of you: how deep then, how pure, how powerful are the emotions which your own sweet self calls into being! and if I thus love one who can never be mine, Heaven only knows what may be the final consequences. To see you, to tell you this, was my motive in coming hither: and I now ask you to answer me, candidly and sincerely, if I am guilty of offence? or if you can respond to the sentiments of my heart?"

I paused, and Clara trembled violently: for some moments she did not reply: but at length she seemed to master her feelings, and in a low tone, said:

"It would have been better for both of us, Mr. Walton,

had we never met. Urge me to say no more! Let us return."

"Nay, Miss Moreland," I replied, with a sense of bewilderment and a sinking of the heart that I cannot describe—"let me entreat you, ere you go, to explain your words!"

"Not now! not now!" she rejoined, hurriedly: "I am unequal to the task."

"It is but little," I urged, "to say why it had been better for us had we never met. I do not wish to pry into your secrets; but if another holds first place in your esteem—or if your heart holds not sentiments corresponding to mine—you may surely tell me so; and however much I may grieve, I promise you not to get offended. There are many of our faculties that we may cultivate; and, in a great degree, shape to our will; but love is a pure offspring of the heart, which we cannot bring into existence, however much we may subdue and control it afterward: this I know; and therefore if you tell me there can never be a tie between us closer than that of friendship, I shall take no offence, nor ever trouble you with vain repinings at my fate."

To my great surprise, instead of answering me, Clara burst into tears. I was startled—for the cause of this strange emotion was beyond my conjecture.

"Good heavens! Clara," I cried, "what means this? why do you weep? I cannot believe I have said any thing to wound your feelings; but if so—"

"No!" no!" she interrupted, hurriedly, "but—"

She paused and shuddered.

"Go on!" I urged.

"No! no! I cannot—let us return."

"Well, then, be it as you wish," I rejoined, rather coldly; and I made a movement to go.

"But you are offended now?" she said, quickly, turning her face up toward mine; and I could see by the moonlight, which fell upon it through the trees, that it was very pale, and sad, and anxious. I was touched to the heart; but I answered in the same cold manner:

"And if I am, I suppose it is a matter of little moment to Miss Moreland."

"Nay, not so," she replied, eagerly: "I would not have you offended with me."

"Can aught concerning me interest you then?"

"Yes! yes! every thing! That is, I mean," she stammered, turning her face away—"I should not like to give you offence,—I would like to have every one friendly."

"Clara," I rejoined, earnestly, "there is an under current to your strange manner which I cannot fathom. Either something serious troubles you, or you are playing a part with me."

"I trust you do not think the latter?" she said, quickly. "Heaven knows my actions too much betray my feelings!"

"Then if so, you do not regard me with indifference," I eagerly rejoined. "You are silent. May I take this as a favorable augury? May I hope—"

"No! no!" she again interrupted: "hope nothing—hope nothing;" and again she shuddered.

"Be it so," I returned—"I must even take you at your word. But pardon me one more question! Is your heart engaged to another?"

Clara seemed to struggle with herself for a few moments; and then, in a low tone, scarcely audible, replied:

"The heart should go with the hand."

"Ha! I think I understand you: then your hand is pledged?"

"It is," was faintly replied.

For a short time I stood speechless, motionless; and then rousing myself, I rejoined:

"Clara, (permit me still to call you thus, at least while we are alone together,) you say the heart *should* go with the hand; I reiterate, *yes*, by all means; but will it in your case? Ha! why turn you silently away? You dare not answer! Ah! you know it will not. Oh! then let me, as a friend, as a brother, warn you to beware how you let worldly considerations influence you to perjure yourself before God's holy altar!"

"Sir! this is strong language," returned Clara, drawing herself up rather proudly.

"But it is justified by the cause which draws it forth," I answered.

"How know you that, sir? And were it even so, methinks it ill becomes one so recently a stranger, to assume the office of mentor to a lady who has a father, mother, and brother at hand to look to her welfare."

"I crave your pardon, Miss Moreland!" I rejoined, coldly. "My zeal in your behalf overcame my discretion. I only sought to warn, in a friendly manner, one whom I thought would receive it in the same spirit of kindness in which it was meant. I perceive my mistake now, and shall take care how I offend again. When agreeable to you, we will retrace our steps to your father's dwelling."

Clara made no reply; but drooped her head, as if giving heed to her steps, and we picked our way back to the garden in silence. As we approached the dwelling, we heard gay voices; and the next moment could distinguish that of Mary's, saying, with a ringing laugh:

"Making love, for a hundred!"

There was a low reply; and then we heard Walter exclaim:

"This way, Will—we'll soon find them."

I fancied I could see Clara shudder, as she quickened her pace; and a minute after we met Walter and another gentleman coming down the garden walk in search of us.

"Ha! here are the wanderers now?" cried Walter, gaily. "We were afraid you had got lost," he continued, "and were on our way to hunt you up. Mr. Warncliff, Mr. Walton," he added, introducing his friend.

We bowed; but each in a cold, stiff, formal manner, that did not express any too much delight in present acquaintance, nor presage any very warm friendship to follow. The truth was, one of those striking antipathies, for which one can give no satisfactory reason, had suddenly sprung up between us. I did not like my new acquaintance, and I felt that he regarded me with aversion. Why this was, it would have been difficult, I think, for either of us to have said at the time. His name was new to my ear—even if mine were not to his—and certainly we had never met before. Perhaps he had heard of me—heard Clara speak of me—and regarded me with a jealous eye; and true it is, though I knew not why, I looked upon him as the acknowledged suitor of Clara, to whom her hand was pledged. Rivals are never friends; and my heart whispered me we were rivals, and he the successful one. As we bowed, our eyes met, for the moonlight here fell full and clear upon each face. A keen, piercing glance shot from one to the other—a glance, as I fancied and felt, of haughty defiance. In that moment of time—for almost instantly he turned away to speak to Clara—his person and features became indelibly impressed upon my memory.

In height he was rather tall, but slenderly made, though evidently possessed of considerable physical strength. His

age I judged to be about twenty-five. His complexion was light, with light curly hair, and blue eyes. His features were not devoid of beauty, though not to my taste. They were regular; and his nose, mouth, and chin, taken separately, were certainly well-formed; but the expression of the whole countenance, and particularly that of the eyes and mouth, was to my mind that of an unprincipled voluptuary; and though I now felt that Clara could never be aught to me, yet I deeply regretted that her choice, or peradventure the choice of her friends, had not fallen upon a more worthy object. Mr. Warncliff was studiously and elegantly dressed; and his short upper lip was graced with a mustache, and his chin with an imperial—the rest of his face being cleanly shaved. I could not deny that he had seen good society; for his movements were easy and graceful; and his manner, save so far as concerned myself, very courteous.

"Good evening, Miss Clara," he said, on turning to her. "I am rejoiced to see you looking so charming in the pale moonlight. I trust you have had a pleasant walk, and now feel inclined for a pleasant ride. My carriage is at the door."

Was it fancy? or did she shrink back with a slight shudder as he proffered his arm? She took his arm, however; and then I heard her say, in a low, and as I thought quavering, tone:

"You must excuse me to night, Mr. Warncliff—I really do not feel well."

"Mr. Warncliff!" repeated the other, with a short laugh, facing round. "Did you hear that, Walter? Clara grows formal. It used to be—'Willard, will you do this? and, Willard, will you do that?' But," and he glanced at me in a very significant manner, "I think I can guess the reason of the change."

I felt an angry flush flash over my features, and was about to give a tart reply; but Walter immediately rejoined, with a laugh:

"Oh, go on, Will—never mind formalities. Willard, with the soft adjectives, will return in good time. Come, Walton," he pursued, taking my arm, "it is a glorious night! and though at the risk of being wished a thousand miles away, we will join our lovers in a ride."

"Nay, you must excuse me," I said.

"What! are you ailing too?" he cried. "Heyday! what has come over you and Clara all of a sudden? Ah! I see: your long walk has fatigued you."

"I have not complained of illness, or fatigue, to my knowledge," I replied, with an air of cold reserve.

"Oh, well," he replied, "if you really do not wish to go, I will stay and keep you company."

"By no means," I rejoined; "it would please me better to have you all go and enjoy yourselves, the same as if I were not here. You know I am in part an invalid still; and I will make free to request to be allowed to retire a little earlier than usual."

"Oh, certainly," replied Walter, who seemed the soul of frankness, good-humor, and affability; "if it will suit you better to remain, I will not press you to go."

Thus conversing, we reached the house; and on the steps, Warncliff, who still had Clara's arm, turned and said:

"Walter, I fear it will be you and I alone—for I can do nothing with Clara—she is as obstinate as a mule."

"Out upon you," cried Mary from the window, "for comparing my sister to one of your own species! Faith! if I were she, you should apologize for that rude speech, on your knees, ere you were twenty-four hours older, or you should wake up some fine morning and find yourself a discarded lover."

"Sooner than suffer such a penalty, my pretty black eyes, I would do almost any thing," returned Warncliff, laughing.

"I believe you," rejoined Mary, in a tone and with an emphasis that seemed to give her words a marked meaning.

Notwithstanding her refusal, Clara was finally prevailed upon to take a moonlight ride—though not till her father had joined his request to Warncliff's in a tone so like a command that she seemed to have no alternative. There were seats for four; and as I still persisted in declining to make one of the number to fill them—though I now studiously shaped my language so as not to give any offence—Mary took my place, and the party dashed off behind a black driver and a splendid pair of black horses.

It was still an early hour in the evening; but pleading some indisposition and fatigue, I shortly after took leave of the Colonel and his good lady, and was shown by a black domestic to the lodging I was to occupy during my brief stay with the Morelands.

Alone, in the welcome solitude of my chamber, I locked the door, and then gave full sway to those gloomy, despondent feelings, which must ever follow upon the total annihilation of bright and cheering hopes. Yes, strange as it may seem to the reader—and strange as it now seems to me, viewing it from another point of time—I really felt as if all the bright things had been stricken from the earth, and that nothing remained worth the living for. Not till now was I aware how much the bright vision of Clara had been associated with all the delights of the present—all the glorious anticipations of the unattained future! Not till now was I aware, that since the first hour of our meeting, she had been inseparably mingled with my every enjoyment. In short, not till now was I aware what a deep, firm, rooted

hold she had taken upon my heart, which gives its own peculiar hue to every object. True, I had acknowledged to myself that I loved her; yet not till I found that love hopeless, had I been aware of the real strength of my passion. True again, I had never looked upon her as absolutely mine—for I knew too little of her, and she of me, to warrant any such conclusion; yet less, I must confess, had I ever for a moment harbored the idea that she might be another's. But now the last startling truth stared me in the face. Yes, the dream was over—she could never be mine. And yet did she not love me? She did not love my rival, I felt certain; and when I recalled to mind a thousand little things—in themselves nothing, yet passing signs of the drift of feeling—I could not but flatter myself that, whatever might be her fate or mine, I should not readily be forgotten.

Something evidently preyed upon the mind of Clara, and I somehow felt that I was connected with her sorrow. Had she rashly promised her hand to Warncliff? and did she now regret it, and yet fear to make it known? Or had this inconsiderate step been forced upon her by the entreaties—it might be commands—of those she feared to disobey, and who were governed solely by worldly motives? Yes, something had evidently gone wrong, around which her peculiar conduct had thrown an air of mystery that perplexed me in more senses than one.

But much as I took this mystery to heart, I had no idea of making any attempt to satisfy my curiosity, by inquiring into the real facts of the matter. No! she could never be any thing to me—her own lips had said it—there was no hope—and it only remained for me to go forth and endeavor to forget that we had met. This I felt I could never do; but I could depart from her fair presence; and this I resolved to do at the earliest moment that would

allow of my taking leave without giving room for any speculations as to the cause.

With these, and many other like reflections, I worried myself to sleep—little dreaming, in the vanity of human calculations, what the eventful morrow had in store for me. It is well for us that we know not what a day may bring forth.

CHAPTER IV.

A RIDE AND A QUARREL.

WHEN I awoke on the following morning, the sun was pouring a golden flood of light into my chamber. I arose in some haste, for I had slept later than I intended; and at the same moment my faithful Tom made his appearance, and placed in my hand a slip of paper, on which was traced, with a pencil, as follows:

"Pardon my seeming uncourteousness of last night! I was agitated, and troubled, but not without cause. After what has already passed between us, I think it no more than right that I should, to some extent, give you the explanation you desired. This cannot be done in the presence of a third party; and I must entreat you not to mention aught of last night's interview to any one! Destroy this as soon as read!

"C. M."

I perused this note some two or three times, with emotions of delight beyond my power to describe. Clara wished to give me an explanation in private; and if I augured more from this than was actually set down in black and white, it is nothing I think to be wondered at, considering that I was in some sort a lover, and of a rather sanguine temperament. I hardly need say, that the injunction to destroy the note as soon as read, was not complied with. With the usual extravagance of one in my situation, I pressed it a dozen times to my lips, and then carefully hid it away as near my heart as was convenient. On turning to Tom, who had

been eying me the while, I fancied I saw a merry twinkle in his eye, and a suppressed smile on his ebony countenance.

"What are you grinning at?" I demanded.

"I's not grinning, Massa Hal, dat I knows on," answered the black, looking very serious.

"Who gave you this note?"

"De young Missus Clara."

"Did she give you any message with it?"

"She say, 'Tom, you gib dat to your massa, and don't you let nobody else see it;' and den she slipped dis into my hand;" and Tom exhibited a silver coin.

I expected to meet Clara at the breakfast table—but I was disappointed. She did not make her appearance, and Mary informed me that she was slightly indisposed. After the meal was over, I went out with Walter, and took a stroll around the town, with which I was much pleased—though, being situated upon a low lying prairie, the climate is not very salubrious. Toward noon, as we were on our return, we met Warncliff. He bowed coldly to me, and I returned his salutation as coldly. He then drew Walter aside, and spoke hurriedly to him in a low tone.

"I cannot," I heard Walter say; "Mr. Walton is my guest, and it would be ungentlemanly to leave him."

"But perhaps he would accompany us?" suggested the other.

"No! no!" returned Walter, quickly; and then lowering his voice, he added something I did not overhear.

Both now conversed in low tones for a few moments, and then I heard Warncliff say:

"Leave it to me."

He then turned to me, and with much formal politeness said:

"Not aware that Mr. Moreland was otherwise engaged. I this morning made an engagement for him to meet a

few choice friends, who will be much disappointed if he does not come. Would you be so good as to excuse him for a few hours?—or, if you prefer it, honor us with your company?"

"Oh, I will excuse him, most certainly," I answered, with a stiff bow.

"You will not be offended?" said Walter coming forward and taking my hand. "You see how it is—the engagement has been made for me, unknown to myself."

"Give yourself no uneasiness on my account," I replied, with cordiality. "I will return and have a little chat with your sister."

I did not say which; but the look which Warncliff bestowed upon me, seemed to imply that he at least thought of only one. His eyes flashed, his lips compressed, and an angry flush passed over his features, leaving them very pale. I was satisfied I had roused his jealousy; and this being exactly the result I intended, I bowed, with a meaning smile, and walked slowly away.

On arriving at the house, I met Colonel Moreland coming down the steps.

"Ha! in good time—where is Walter?" he said.

"We were met by Mr. Warncliff, who said he had made an engagement for him, and the two went away together."

"This is unlucky," he returned, musingly. And then, after a pause, he added: "By-the-by, perhaps I could count on you to do me a favor?"

"Certainly, Colonel—any thing in my power."

"Thank you! The fact is, you see, my brother's widow—the mother of Tom, whom you chanced to see die—has been taken suddenly ill, and has sent word that she must see Clara immediately. Now that neither Walter nor Warncliff are here, there is no one to escort her but myself; and I have some important business to attend to,

and cannot well spare the time. Now if you would be so kind—Are you fond of riding horseback?"

"It is one of my favorite pastimes, Colonel."

"Well, then, if you will be so kind as to accompany her on horseback, you will lay me under an obligation."

"It will afford me great pleasure," I answered, scarcely able, for very joy, to keep myself calm.

"Clara might venture alone," pursued the Colonel; "but as the nearest way to the widow's residence lies across a prairie, I should feel better satisfied to have some one with her."

"Nothing will afford me more delight than such a ride," I rejoined. "What is the distance?"

"About ten miles across the prairie—but nearly twice as far round by the road. Clara knows the way—so you have nothing to do but keep her company. Come! come in and take a lunch—for I shall not let you stay to dinner. Cato, (to a house servant) go and tell Mingo to saddle the gray for Miss Clara, and the sorrel for Mr. Walton, and bring them round to the door here immediately. And hark you, boy! if Mingo is not at the stable, put the saddles on yourself. Away with ye! and don't let the grass grow under your feet."

Saying this, he led the way into the house, and ordered some refreshments to be served without delay. Just as he had done giving these directions, Clara entered the room, looking very pale, but more lovely I thought than ever. A slight flush mantled her features as she saluted me—but ere she had time for further speech, her father exclaimed:

"Away, Clara, and don your riding dress! Mr. Walton has kindly consented to accompany you: Walter has not returned. Come! away with you! for your aunt may die

ere you get there—something tells me she is not long for this world."

Clara blushed still deeper, as her father made this announcement; and turning quickly away, she left the room.

"So you are going to run away with Clara, eh?" cried Mary, bouncing into the room, with a roguish twinkle in her black eyes. "Take care you bring her back safe, Mr. Walton, or it will not be well for you to show me your face again!"

"I shall certainly endeavor to do so," I answered, with a laugh.

"I wish I were going. Papa—"

"You will stay," said her father, peremptorily.

"Always the way," muttered Mary, pouting her pretty lips, as the Colonel quitted the apartment. "If there is the least chance for a spice of romance, Clara goes, and I am carefully housed. Never mind!" she pursued, tossing her head and shaking her raven curls; "I shall not always be in leading strings, and then let them bridle me who can. Now mind!" she continued, with an arch look, holding up her finger: "don't you run away with Clara, nor steal her affections! do you hear?"

"Away with you, Miss Impertinence!" cried the Colonel, at this moment returning. "I trust Mr. Walton is a gentleman; and if so, it will be enough for him to know that the hand of Clara is already engaged. The lunch is ready, sir—this way."

I was glad to escape from what I was just beginning to feel a rather embarrassing situation. After a hasty meal, I made some change in my dress, secured my pistols about my person, and informed Tom whither I was going. By the time I had done this, the horses were at the door, and Clara, in a riding habit, stood ready to mount. I assisted her into the saddle, with emotions I shall not pretend to

describe. I had never seen her look so charming as now, as she sat erect on her gallant gray—the plume of her riding-cap sweeping down so as to mingle with her sunny curls—her eyes sparkling, and her pale features growing animated with that sort of enthusiastic rapture which the true lover of the equestrian art ever feels when well mounted. I was soon by her side; and waving a cheerful adieu to the father, mother and sister of my companion, who were watching our departure, we rode slowly down the avenue to the gate opening upon the street. Suddenly, I knew not why, I felt a cold shudder pass through my frame; and, for a moment or two, a sense as of some heavy calamity oppressed me, and fairly made my heart sink. At the same moment Clara turned her head to look back; and as I thus caught a full view of her features, I was struck with their deathly pallor, and a certain expression of wildness and alarm which they displayed. Could it be that we both had a presentiment of coming evil? that a dark cloud of the future was lowering over our heads, invisible to all but our spiritual eyes?

"What is the matter?" I inquired of my fair companion.

"Nothing! nothing!" she said, hurriedly; and giving her horse a smart cut with her riding whip, she rode quickly forward to the street, and then moderated her pace.

This street led out of town in a northerly direction; and as this was our course, we did not turn out of it. We had advanced along it some two hundred yards perhaps, and I had my eye on a beautiful prospect away to the left, when I heard a voice, not unfamiliar to me, exclaim:

"Whither bound, my pretty runaway?"

I turned my head quickly, and beheld the object of my dislike, Willard Warneliff, in the act of putting his hand upon Clara's bridle-rein.

"Do not detain me!" she said, hurriedly, with considerable agitation, as he stopped her horse. "I am on my way to visit my aunt, who has suddenly been taken ill and sent for me."

"Methinks *I* am the proper person to escort you thither," he replied, with marked emphasis on the pronoun, glancing somewhat fiercely toward me.

Clara looked frightened, and I felt my blood boil—though, by a great effort, I controlled my temper, so as to rejoin, in a cold, quiet tone:

"As you and Walter had a pressing engagement on hand, and were not present, Colonel Moreland assigned the pleasure of escorting Miss Moreland to her destination, to your most humble servant."

"But I am present now, sir," he replied; "and, with your good leave, I will take the trouble off of your hands."

"Will you be so good, my dear sir, as to inform me to what trouble you allude?" I inquired, with mock politeness.

He colored to the temples, and his eyes flashed fire.

"In short," he rejoined, "I will take your place by my affianced bride."

"In short, you will do no such thing," said I, "unless Miss Moreland particularly desires it."

"Which she does, of course," he said, appealing to Clara.

"Where is Walter?" she inquired, a good deal agitated, and apparently somewhat alarmed.

"He is with some friends, not far off," replied Warncliff. "I chanced to espy you coming up the street, and left him to speak to you: I can call him if you wish."

"It were a pity to withdraw you both from your friends at the same time," I interposed; "and therefore, in case

you do call Walter, perhaps you had better take his place."

"I was not addressing my conversation to you, Sir Insolence!" cried Warncliff, almost beside himself with rage—at the same time giving me a look, which, had looks the power to destroy, this narrative had never been penned.

"It is a matter of indifference to me to whom you were speaking," I rejoined, carelessly.

"Say you so, sir!" began Warncliff—but was interrupted by Clara, with:

"Come, come, gentlemen—no quarrelling!"

"Your presence, Miss Clara, will protect him now," he replied; "but," and he looked fiercely at me, "we shall meet again."

"I hope not," I returned, "for I dislike to meet any but gentlemen."

"How, sir! do you—"

"Come, come, Willard," cried Clara, now really alarmed; "for my sake, retire, and let there be no more words between you! Go, Willard—you are detaining me; and my aunt, for what I know, may be dying."

"Shall I take his place?" inquired Warncliff, sullenly.

"No, no! I would not so insult him."

"Indeed!" sneered the other: "Umph!"

"Come, Willard, let go my bridle-rein!" said Clara, coaxingly, in a tremulous tone.

To this request Warncliff gave no heed; but first looked fixedly at her, and then fastened his eye on me, with an insolent and most wicked expression. I felt that I had borne about as much as my nature could stand; and quietly taking Clara's riding-whip from her hand, I bade him let go his hold or take the consequences. As he did not seem inclined to move, I raised the whip, with the rapid-

ity of lightning, and struck him a blow across the hand that brought the blood.

With a yell of demoniac rage and pain, he sprang back; and at the same moment I started both horses forward, upon a quick gallop. After riding a short distance, I turned my head, and saw Warncliff still standing where we left him, looking after us with one of the most fiendish expressions of countenance I have ever seen. In his hand he held something which I took to be a pistol. This he raised and pointed toward me; and while I kept my eye on him, expecting every moment he would fire, he suddenly wheeled on his heel and disappeared.

"Oh! Mr. Walton, what have you done?" said Clara to me, in a tone of alarm, as we slackened the speed of our horses about half-a-mile beyond the town.

"Nothing, I trust, offensive to you," I replied—"or, if so, I shall deeply regret it."

"You have made Warncliff your mortal enemy, and I fear he will revenge himself upon you in some terrible manner."

"Were I certain Miss Moreland only regretted this on my account, I should rejoice at the danger which could give me so much interest in her eyes," I replied.

"Nay, this is folly," she said, hurriedly. "My taking an interest in your welfare would not advantage you in the least; but, on the contrary, might raise you up enemies where you least expect them."

"I know not how that may be; but only tell me your heart is mine, and I will unflinchingly brave all consequences, even though the displeasure of your father be one of them."

"Ha! why do you mention the displeasure of my father?" she returned, quickly: "have you and he spoken together on this subject?"

I repeated what he had said concerning her hand being engaged.

"Ah! yes," she sighed—"on this point he is inexorable, and will hold any one an enemy who seeks to counteract his wishes."

"It is then by his express command that you tolerate the visits, or more especially the suit, of Warncliff?"

"I cannot deny it," returned Clara, in a low tone.

"I fancied as much," I rejoined; "for it is easily seen you rather fear than love him."

"But it was not always so," she resumed. "Nay, there was a time when he stood high in my esteem; but of late, from some cause—" She paused, and hung her head, and the color deepened on her lovely features—"In short, I think I have seen that in his character which no true woman would tolerate, and which no one would like to perceive in him who is to be her partner for life."

"Then, even at the risk of offending you again, I must repeat my warning—beware how you perjure yourself before God's holy altar! for when you there take upon you the sacred vow—to love, honor and obey—will it not be perjury?"

"But what am I to do?" she said, earnestly. "My father's commands must be obeyed."

"No parent's commands should be obeyed, when those commands lead to dishonor," I replied; "nor has any parent a right to impose such commands upon a child. I know that you love and respect your worthy father, and my counsel to you in this matter may seem harsh; but believe me, I speak for your own good, and with no selfish motive—though you appeared to think otherwise last night."

"I was offended last night, I do not deny; for I then felt that, for a stranger, you were taking unwarrantable

liberties; but after due reflection, I was forced to acknowledge to myself that, if a little severe, you were just; and thinking perhaps that I had wounded your feelings, and that there could be no harm in giving you a fair statement of how matters stand between Warncliff and myself, I this morning sent you a note to this effect."

"Which I received, Clara, with grateful emotions," I rejoined; "and without which I should never have presumed to address you on this important subject again. No, believing myself out of place at your father's house—that my presence would prove rather an embarrassment and annoyance to you than a pleasure—I had resolved to take the first favorable opportunity of bidding you a final farewell."

"Would that we had never met!" murmured Clara, drooping her head.

"As matters stand, it had doubtless been better for both of us," I rejoined. "Still, Clara, if you are willing to look upon me as a friend, I will counsel you to the best of my poor ability, and promise you not to say aught to you which I might not with propriety say were you already wedded."

"Oh, say you so?" cried Clara, joyfully. "Thanks, sir! thanks! your words relieve me of a weight of embarrassment. Now I feel I can speak to you as to a friend who will not abuse my confidence. The truth is, my approaching nuptials with Warncliff give me great uneasiness—but I know not how to avoid them, without offending my father."

"Would it not be well for you to go to him, and in plain language tell him, that to obey his commands in this respect would make you unhappy for life?"

Clara shook her head.

"You do not know him," she said; "he likes not to

have his wishes thwarted, no matter from what cause. He is self-willed; and once determined upon a thing, it is almost impossible to change him. In this case, I am certain he would remain inexorable, unless he himself should find cause to take offence at Warncliff; and that he is not likely to do; for the latter is one who, for self-interest, would sacrifice his right hand to please him."

"And pray who is this Warncliff, that has so strong a hold upon the regards of your father? and how has he managed to work himself so deeply into his favor?"

"He is the son of an early friend of my father's, who came to this country with him, and died here about six years ago. The elder Warncliff had buried his wife a year or two previous—so that Willard, an only child, was left parentless on the demise of his father. The latter left his son a small property, of which my father was appointed trustee, until such time as Willard should attain his majority, which took place about a year or so after the death of his parent."

"I have said that the elder Warncliff and my father were friends; and so warm is the attachment of my father, that I verily believe he would willingly sacrifice half his worldly possessions, rather than see one he calls his friend suffer. On his death-bed, Warncliff said to my father, that if agreeable to all parties, he should like to have Willard and myself united; and my father promised to do all in his power to bring about such a result."

"Well, to be brief, after the death of his father, Willard became a daily visitor at our house, and was treated as one of the family. Though much my elder, he ever showed me so much deference, and took so much pains to please me, that, though at first I was any thing but partial to him, I came to like him exceedingly; and when, a year or two after, my father one day took me into his

library, and informed me that he designed Willard as my future husband, I did not object, but laughingly replied—

“‘Better him than a worse.’

“This I suppose my father communicated to Willard; for a day or two after, he made me a formal proposal; which I, girl-like, thoughtlessly accepted; though he stipulated that the wedding-day should be distant, and of my own fixing.

“Time wore on; and the more I saw of Willard, the less I really liked him; till at last I began to look upon a closer connection with him with a feeling akin to abhorrence.

“He came not so regularly now as formerly to our house. Sometimes I would not see him for a month; and when I did see him, methought I could detect traces of recent dissipation. He gave out that he was speculating in lands beyond the Brazos, which kept him much away; and certainly his style of living when here, indicated an income he could never have derived from the small property left him by his father.

“At present he is stopping at the most expensive hotel, has two servants and a span of horses, and spends money with an extravagance that would soon impoverish a man of wealth. I do not know what to make of it; but I have sometimes thought—that—perhaps—”

“His resources are not honestly gained,” rejoined I, as Clara paused.

“Ay, even so,” replied Clara—“though I did not like to say it.”

“Fear nothing from me, Clara—your words will not be repeated.”

“I believe you,” she said, the color deepening on her fair features; “and to show you how much you possess my confidence, I now assure you that I have never

breathed these suspicions to a soul besides yourself—nor would I dare do so, unless I had substantial proofs to support them.”

“From my heart, Clara, I thank you for your confidence,” I replied, with very peculiar emotions; and it was with difficulty I could restrain myself from saying more: but I remembered my promise, and withheld the warmer expressions that rose to my lips. “Yes,” pursued I, recurring to the main subject, “I do not think Willard Warncliff any too honest; indeed, I believe him unprincipled, and one that would scarcely scruple at any thing necessary to the accomplishment of any purpose he may have in view; therefore, as to one standing on a fearful precipice, do I cry, beware! draw back! ere you take the leap from which you can never recover. Nor do I say this, Clara, with any selfish motive; but, as I know my heart, purely for your own good, and as I would warn you from any other danger. No, Clara, you have my promise that I will say nothing to you which I might not with propriety say were you already married; and to this I will now add, that were you to freely offer me your hand, I would not accept it without your father’s consent; and as this, according to your own showing, would not be likely to be obtained for one who had thwarted his wishes in a matter of so great a consequence as the disposal of your hand, you will readily see what little prospect there is of my ever having further claim on you than that which is accorded to disinterested friendship: hence, I pray you, if you value my counsel at all, let it join with your own honest convictions, and prove powerful enough to save you from irretrievable ruin and hopeless misery!”

“But what am I to do?” said Clara, dejectedly.

“Reject him! Tell him you have studied your heart,

and find you cannot love him, and that your hand can only go with your heart."

"But my father?"

"He may be angry at first; but far better brave *his* anger, than perjure yourself before God, and endure a wretched existence, by being irrevocably bound to one you fear, and perhaps abhor."

"Oh! I know not what to do!" groaned Clara, her fair features expressing great mental suffering. "Yes, I do fear him, and I tremble at the thought of telling him that I can never be his. But it must be so!" she said, more firmly; "and the sooner perhaps the better; for marry him I have now resolved I never will. I dread the storm that will follow—but better brave that than do worse. And he is so pressing of late—so urgent for me to name the day!"

"Ha! he urges you to name the day, does he?" cried I. "So-so! perhaps the gentleman finds his funds running low?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Clara, quickly; and she turned and looked me full in the face, with the expression of one suddenly struck with a new idea. "Yes! yes!" she continued: "I see it now! I think you are right; for on the day he marries me, he gets ten thousand dollars, already set aside as my marriage portion. Ah me! what an abyss have I escaped! and this escape I owe to you; for without the advice of some friend, warning me back, I fear I should have yielded to the force of circumstances, and gone forward to my doom. But as you, like myself, suspect his honesty—pray tell me in what way you think him dishonest?"

"I *know* nothing, of course; but I strongly suspect him of being a professional gambler, for one thing."

"Good heavens!" cried Clara, much startled at the

suggestion; "and Walter is his associate! Perhaps he is already winding the snares of hell around him! They were always very intimate," she added, musingly.

I remembered the almost startling vehemence with which Walter had adjured me never to gamble again—recalled the engagement of the morning, and the earnestness of his manner in replying to Warncliff, that I must not accompany them—and thought it more than probable that the fears of Clara had too good a foundation.

"But Walter has been absent a couple of years," I replied—"so that Warncliff has had no chance to corrupt him of late."

"True," rejoined Clara—"nor shall he now have an opportunity, if I can prevent it."

"You will have to be very cautious in what you do," said I.

"If I only had proof that Warncliff does gamble!" she rejoined, thoughtfully.

"How would it do to ask Walter the question, in plain, bold terms?" I suggested.

"I will try it," she replied; "and if he deceives me, it will be the first time." Then, after a pause, she continued: "I am sorry you struck Warncliff—for now you will be exposed to his insults and the censure of others."

"I should have been less than a man," I rejoined, "could I have stood quietly by and seen you plead in vain for your liberty. So far as it gives *you* uneasiness, Clara, I regret having struck him—but no farther. As to his insults, and the censure of others, I care not a farthing for them."

"He will force a quarrel on you, I fear," she rejoined; "or, what is worse, take secret revenge. Good heavens! perhaps he will challenge you!"

"Well, if he can prove himself a gentleman, I will give him satisfaction."

"Oh! no! no! no!" cried Clara; "you must not fight! for you would be killed, and he would triumph. Oh! promise me you will not fight him!"

"I would rather not make any such promise—but I will try and avoid him, for the sake of all parties, and take my departure as soon as I can after our return."

"What! will you then leave us so soon?"

"You see the alternative."

At this moment Clara looked quickly around, drew in her horse, and exclaimed:

"Ha! where are we? I have been so much engaged talking, and thinking, I fear I have missed my way."

CHAPTER V.

LOST ON THE PRAIRIE.

WE had followed the road, and were now about two miles beyond the town, on an open prairie, which, in a northerly and westerly direction, extended for miles, occasionally relieved here and there by what I may term an open wood, or a kind of grove clear of underbrush. To reach the residence of Clara's aunt by the nearest way, we should, according to her account, have turned off to the left, about a mile back, and made a bee line for a certain cluster of trees, which, some half a dozen in number, surrounded a clear spring of cold water, and were distant about three miles.

"But it does not matter riding back," she said; "I think I see the spot from here; so we will set off across the plain; and at a little quicker pace, too—for I had almost forgotten the illness of my aunt."

We did so accordingly—galloping over a smooth, luxuriant prairie, where the wild flowers, of rainbow hues, vied with each other in beauty, as they rose above the green, velvet-like turf. As Clara was to be guide, I rode by her side, without asking any questions concerning the way, but occasionally conversing with her on other matters. I had noticed a clump of trees on leaving the road, toward which we were directing our steps; and supposing that Clara knew the direct route to our destination, and that we were now going right, I thought nothing more about it. In something less than an hour, we found

ourselves near the grove; when Clara, giving a quick, eager glance toward the trees, exclaimed:

"Ha! I have made a mistake!—this is not the spring!"

"Well, that can matter but little," I replied, "if we have kept the proper direction."

"I fear we have not," she said, quickly; "and a slight variation would take us far out of our way."

We rode up to the grove, which was on slightly rising ground, and consisted of numerous trees, clear of underbrush, standing in orchard-like regularity, and covering a space of a hundred yards in length by fifty in breadth. The ground here was moist, and the vegetation rank—the grass, still green, coming nearly to our stirrups—though there was no regular spring. I have rarely seen a grove so beautiful, even when nature has been aided by art. Here, side by side, grew the ash, the cypress, the sycamore, and the oak, in majestic beauty—their numerous branches interlocking, as if in a fraternal embrace—and their different-hued foliage commingling in picturesque harmony. Vines were twined around the huge trunks of some; and some three or four were draped with the Spanish, or long moss; which, of a dark silver gray color, drooped over them like a veil; and, partially concealing their foliage, gave them a solemn, sombre, funereal aspect. This curious vegetation, I believe, is peculiar to Texas—at least I have seen it nowhere else; and somehow it always reminded me of a beautiful woman in mourning—it has something so attractive and sad in its appearance. It is much seen on the bottom lands, near the large rivers, but seldom in other places.

We stopped our horses in the shade; and the soft breeze, as it stole through the leafy arches, and fanned our brows, felt delightfully refreshing; for, although October, we had found it very warm riding in the noonday sun.

"How beautiful!" I exclaimed, as I glanced around the grove, and then ran my eye over the flowery plain, which stretched away on every hand for miles, and, in one or two directions, extended beyond my range of vision, apparently bounded by the blue horizon.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," replied my fair companion, with an anxious look; "but I can scarcely enjoy the scene, for fear I have lost my way."

"I think you need give yourself no uneasiness," I replied; "for surely, in this short distance, we cannot have varied much from our proper course."

"Enough, at least, to perplex me," she rejoined; "for, having varied from the right path at all, I know not how to regain it."

"Nothing is easier: we have only to retrace our steps and try again."

"But think of the delay! and I am so anxious to reach my aunt's."

"Well, as you know the point of compass, I think it would be risking very little to go forward as we have begun."

"Let me see!" said Clara, thoughtfully. "From the spring, I should shape my course in this direction (pointing with her finger); and that would take me to a woodland, about five miles distant, near which is a little knoll, from the summit of which can be seen the village where my aunt resides. Now yonder is a woodland, which, in appearance, and that of the country round—distance, too, considered—I think must be the point I wish to reach."

"From your description, I should judge so," I replied.

"We will ride forward to it on a venture," she rejoined; "for I dislike the idea of turning back."

We accordingly set off again, at a fast canter; but it was an hour, at least, before we reached the woodland—

proving that the distance was greater than Clara had calculated on. When we did reach it, it was only to be sadly disappointed—for it was not the spot of which she was in search. She looked alarmed.

"Good heavens!" she cried: "now, in truth, I fear we are lost!"

"Not so!" I replied—"for it is easy to find our way back."

"Well, that seems the only course left us: but only think what a loss of time!—and our horses will be completely fatigued: see how they pant now:—we must have come ten miles, at least."

"But surely," I pursued, "it must be needless to go back; we cannot be far from the right course; yonder is another woodland—perhaps that is the one we seek."

After some further discussion, we decided to ride forward to the spot I pointed out; and, if still wrong, we would retrace our steps. It was about three miles distant, and we reached it in less than half an hour—but it was not the place we sought.

There seemed nothing better to be done now, than to turn back and go the ground all over again; and reluctantly, dispiritedly, we began the task.

But, for some reason—perhaps because we had got a little bewildered in our repeated efforts to get right—and perhaps, too, because these numerous groves, dotting the broad prairie as islands do the sea, have such a striking resemblance to each other at a distance—we even failed to keep our course back, but strayed off to spots we had not before visited; and in less than two hours after setting out on our return, we were as much lost as if we had been in a wilderness a hundred miles from human habitation.

The first sensation of being lost on a prairie, or in a forest, is terrible; and, if any thing, this terribleness I think

increases, as time passes, and you find every effort to extricate yourself from your awful situation prove unavailing. That feeling of helplessness, loneliness, utter desolation and despair, which succeeds each vain attempt to right yourself, will make the stoutest heart quail, the strongest nerve quake. Death stares you in the face, if you dare to look into the future—and death in its most grim and ghastly and hideous form! Death is appalling at all times—for nature instinctively shrinks back from it; but even death has its degrees of terror; and one of the most striking is that which comes in the form of starvation—afar from the sound of a human voice—afar from all that can give you a faint hope of rescue. The thought of dying alone—without one consoling word, one sympathetic look, one parting adieu from those you love—and to know that your fate will ever remain unknown, an agonizing mystery to your friends—that your flesh will become food for ravenous beasts, and your bones will be left to whiten in the desert,—the thought of all this, I say, will make your frame quiver, and your blood almost curdle in your veins. And then, as you shudderingly contemplate this vision of horror, to have the phantom of bloody violence step in before it, and seem to warn you not to count on even these brief hours—or, in other words, to reflect that long before exhausted nature may loose her hold on your immortal spirit, the teeth of some prowling beast may suddenly despatch you over the fatal bourne—in no degree softens the aspect of the frightful picture. And if to all this be added the like doom for another, whom you prize even beyond life itself—and to save whom, from the fate described, you would almost willingly undergo it alone—the case becomes one of mental anxiety almost beyond the strength of reason to bear.

Oh! man—alone on the prairie, in the forest, or on the

ocean—surrounded only by the works of the Almighty hand—what is he? He who elsewhere boasts of knowledge, of greatness, of power—what is he here? How small, how infinitesimally small, does he now appear unto himself! and how insignificant, when compared with the vastness of all around him! He beholds nothing but the works of Almighty God; and feels that his own knowledge, however great, is not even as a shadow to a substance to that which could construct Nature and fix her eternal laws; that his greatness is a nothing in infinite space; that his power is less, far less, than the weight of an atom to a universe. And yet this same man, in another place, and under other circumstances, *dares*, it may be, through infatuated conceit, to argue against the perfection of creation—to impiously question the wisdom and justice of the God who made him! Oh, folly! human folly! the glaring exhibition of the frailty of the lowest order of being made in the image of Jehovah!

Such were some of my reflections, as, with my half-distracted companion, I dashed over the prairie, from place to place, under the terrible sensation of being really lost.

But though much alarmed, my fears had not yet reached that point at which hope takes flight and leaves one to despair. No! I felt we were lost; but I doubted not we should ultimately find the road, of which we were now in quest, and be able to gain the home of Clara in safety.

And why we had not yet found it, is a mystery, which, to this day, I am unable to solve. Surely, we had ridden far enough, and more than far enough, to have reached it, even allowing for the variation of several points from the course pursued on leaving it. Could it be possible that we had touched on some of the very woodlands we were seeking, without recognizing them? It might be so; for when one has become bewildered about his way, places the most

familiar have such a different appearance that he knows them not.

When we first turned back to retrace our steps, so confident was I of going right, that I would have wagered my life against a trifle that I would not vary twenty paces from striking the road where we left it. And yet hours had passed since then, more miles had been gone over than we had first traversed, and now I knew not where we were. Our animals, too, were fatigued; and Clara was so frightened, that it taxed all my powers of reasoning to keep up her spirits so as to enable her to sit her horse. As if to make matters still worse, the sun, which had all along shone out bright and clear, now became obscured by clouds, which floated up from the west, and I no longer had even that guide to tell me what direction I was pursuing.

At length we reached a woodland, larger than any we had before seen, which, gradually rising above the prairie around it, sloped off to the westward, with a small purling stream of pure water meandering through the centre. This woodland was about a mile in length; and on leaving it, the brook pursued its course through a slight valley, where, in the loamy soil, it had cut a channel for itself some twenty feet in depth. Fatigued and disheartened, we halted under the trees, and for a brief time silently gazed upon each other. Clara, pale and frightened, was the first to break the silence. Wringing her hands, in the agony of despair, she exclaimed:

“Oh! Mr. Walton, what is to be done now? We are lost! we are lost!” and may never behold our friends again. Oh, merciful God, protect us!”

“Do not despair!” I said, assuming a cheerful tone, though in truth my heart almost died within me. “We

shall certainly be able to find some habitation, if we pursue any one course far enough."

"And how long think you our horses will hold out, without rest and refreshment?" she returned. "See how they droop now!"

"Rest and refreshment they must have," I replied; "and what better place for both than this? Here is grass in abundance, and here is water; let us dismount and give them an hour to graze—by that time they will be able to bear us many a mile with ease."

"But an hour will bring us hard upon night," said Clara; "and oh! what will become of us then?" and she fell to weeping bitterly.

I endeavored to tranquilize her—but for a long time without success. At last she grew calm; but it seemed the calmness of despair, rather than hope. I assisted her to dismount, and seated her under a large oak, near which a spring bubbled up clear, cold water. Having watered the horses and turned them loose, I constructed a sort of cup, of fresh leaves, and gave Clara to drink.

"Would to Heaven," I said, as I handed it to her, "I could give you to eat also! but unfortunately we took no food with us."

"Starvation!" returned Clara, looking wildly into my face: "Starvation! yes, that is it—that will be our doom! Oh, Heaven! what a fate!"

"Nay, Clara, do not make matters appear worse than they are," I rejoined; "for I pledge you my solemn word, I can supply you with food for a month, should such a thing be necessary, though it may not be so palatable as I could wish."

"How?" she cried—"how can you get food here?"

"I have my pistols with me, and can shoot game when it comes near enough."

"Then you think it will be a month ere we find our way back to my father's?" she pursued, in the same wild manner.

"No, I think no such thing, Clara—for I trust you will see your father ere to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night!" she repeated, slowly: "to-morrow night!" And then quickly: "But to-night? what of to-night?"

"Why, unless we are so fortunate as to find some habitation soon, I fear we shall be obliged to pass it in the open air."

"Oh! good heavens!" almost shrieked Clara, as if the idea had struck her for the first time: "we shall be torn to death, and devoured by wild beasts!"

"No! I will build a fire and keep them off—you shall sleep as securely as in your father's mansion."

"Sleep?" she repeated: "why mention sleep to me? Think you I can sleep with the doom of death impending over me? Oh, great Heaven, what will become of us? what will become of us?"

I saw my fair companion was gradually getting more and more nervous; and unless I could rouse her from the weight of despair that was settling down upon her, I feared the loss of reason might be one of the consequences.

"Clara," said I, gravely and sternly, "you are the daughter of a pioneer and soldier—but to hear you talk, one would suppose the blood of a coward ran in your veins."

The effect produced by my words was what I had hoped it would be. She quickly started to her feet, and with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes, exclaimed:

"None but a coward would insult a lady unprotected and in distress."

"Nay, I meant not to insult you, Clara," I replied:

"but you must yourself admit, that neither your language nor your conduct, for the last three hours, has been that of a heroine."

"Indeed, sir! Well, you, I must say, have been exceedingly courageous, considering there has been no danger to try your nerves," she returned, haughtily.

"Exactly, Miss Moreland; there has been no danger; there is none to be apprehended; therefore your gloomy, desponding words have been out of place."

"Very well, sir! I will trouble you with them no more."

"Come, come," I said, "we must not be angry with each other. If I have said any thing to wound your feelings, I can honestly avow I have done it with the best of motives. In the way you were going on, you bade fair to do yourself an injury, and I took this course to prevent it."

After some further conversation of a like nature, the anger of Clara disappeared, leaving her far less despondent than before. I no longer had any fear for her reason.

"I know I am a foolish, timid girl," she said; "I always was; it is my nature, and I cannot help it; though I have sometimes thought, that in the moment of real danger, should such be my misfortune, I might perhaps show more courage than one who has only known me under other circumstances would naturally expect from me."

"I doubt it not," I replied; "for the bravest are not always those who exhibit the most courage at the first approach of peril; nor are the cowards always to be found among those who tremble and turn pale at the first alarm. But, honestly now, I see no good reason why we should get frightened at our situation. True it is, we have lost our way; and it is probable we shall have to undergo

much that is disagreeable—and, it may be, suffer some hardships, ere we get back to Houston—to say nothing of your disappointment in not seeing your aunt, and the alarm that your friends will feel, if they by chance learn of our mysterious disappearance: but beyond all this, I have not much apprehension; and if we only had where-withal for a couple of meals, I think I could even pass the night in tolerably good spirits."

"For myself," replied Clara, "I could not eat; and were the most tempting viands now before me, I would not taste a morsel. But what do you propose? what is now to be done? The sun is not more than an hour and a half above the horizon, and it behooves us to think about preparing to pass the night."

"Now, Clara, you speak to the point, in the right spirit; and it gives me pleasure to see that you are likely to adapt yourself to the circumstances without any vain repinings. Since finding this stream, the idea has struck me that it may be well to follow it. It will, I think, lead us to a larger stream—perhaps the Brazos; and once that is found, we are sure soon to reach some settlement where we can procure food and a guide."

"But suppose," suggested Clara, "it should, instead, lead us deeper into the wilderness, and further from human habitations?"

"We must run our chance, of course; but I know of no better plan, since I do not know the country at all."

"Well, Mr. Walton, do as you think best—I leave it all to you."

This being settled, and having waited a sufficient time to refresh our horses for another long ride, should we find it necessary, I caught and bridled them, and we set off down the bank of the little stream.

When we reached the open prairie—through which, as

I have said, the rivulet flowed in a deep channel—the sun was within half an hour of setting. This I knew by my watch—for the sun itself was so obscured by clouds, that its position in the heavens was not discernible. These clouds, though dark and thick, did not appear very humid; but I thought them precursors of a storm; and I felt deeply anxious to find some shelter, where Clara at least could be protected from the rain.

For miles in the direction we were going, an open prairie lay before us; but in the extreme distance we could see the line of a forest, extending away to the right and left as far as the eye could reach. Knowing that the bottom lands of the large water courses were in general heavily timbered, I now felt my spirits revived by the hope that we might be approaching a river; and if so, I doubted not we should soon discover some habitation.

Our anxiety therefore to reach the wood, ere night should fairly set in, may readily be imagined—and we urged our horses over the ground at their fastest pace. But after putting miles between us and our last stopping place, without seemingly drawing any nearer to the forest, I became painfully aware in how great a degree I had miscalculated the distance.

The truth was, we had first beheld this line of forest from high ground—which sloped off so gradually in every direction, that to us it appeared entirely level—and it would have been no easy matter for any one to realize that we stood more than a thousand feet above the objects at which we were aiming: yet such was the fact.

Could we have passed over this portion of country under pleasant circumstances, I should have been enraptured with the scene. Although at a season of the year when our northern forests put on the variegated hues of autumn; and the flowers, that have charmed us through the heats

of summer, begin to fade and disappear; it seemed as if Nature had just received the recuperative powers of gentle Spring, and was charging every thing with a fresh new life.

Never before had I seen so broad a field, so filled with beautiful flowers. Millions on millions of every kind, of every hue, spread over the teeming earth. Here were dahlias of every color, from snowy white to dark crimson; trumpet flowers of the three genera; geraniums, hearts-eases, lupins, lilies, honey-suckles, anemones, jessamines, golden rods, passion flowers, primroses, violets, ladies-slippers, and many others of whose names I am ignorant.

The sun had now fairly set, and the shades of advancing night were gradually stealing over the earth. Insects began their evening songs, night-hawks rose and swooped in the upper air, and bats flapped their wings around and above us; while more than once the howl of some distant wolf came floating on the breeze, causing our horses to snort with fear, and Clara to ride closer to my side, with maidenly timidity.

Although the moon was at the full, I knew that the dark clouds, which now stretched across the heavens from west to east, would render her light very feeble; and as I contemplated the long stretch of plain before us, ere we could reach even the shelter of the woods, I began to regret that we had quitted our last stopping place, where I could at least have collected fuel for a fire while the light of day remained, and made other preparations for passing the night with some degree of safety, if not comfort. For a few minutes, I had serious thoughts of turning back; but when I reflected that it would be dark before we could reach the woodland, I thought we might as well continue our course, and perhaps something better would turn up.

Accordingly we rode on at a fast gallop, keeping near

the bank of the stream, of which we had resolved not to lose sight. Night now came on very fast; and to increase our discomfort, it began to lighten in the west, and soon after we could hear the faint rumble of distant thunder.

"Oh, it will be awful, if we have to pass the night exposed to the fury of a tempest!" cried Clara, in alarm.

"We *may* find a shelter," was my only reply, as I quickened the speed of our horses.

We had ridden perhaps a mile further—and perceived with dismay the rapid advance of the storm, from whose fury there seemed to be no means of escape—when, looking away to the left, I fancied I saw a dark spot on the plain. The light was too dim, and the distance too far, for me to make out what it was; but thinking it might be a rock, a tree, or a cluster of bushes, either of which might afford some little protection, I determined to ride toward it. We had not gone many rods in this direction, when (joy inexpressible!) from the centre of this dark object we beheld the faint gleam of a light.

"Thank God!" I exclaimed, rapturously, seizing the hand of my fair companion—"we are at last drawing near something human."

Clara returned the pressure of my hand in silence, and wept for very joy. A few minutes later we rode up to this dark object, which we now discovered to be a bushy knoll, in the centre of which stood a small hut or cabin, through one of whose crannies streamed the light that had caught my eye. What the interior of this singular structure, standing thus isolated, might contain, I could form no idea; but even if the abode of desperadoes, I thought it better to throw ourselves on their hospitality, than bide the perils of the night on the open plain.

I therefore hallooed at once; but getting no answer, and hearing no movement within, I repeated my call; and

this meeting with a like success, I dismounted, and pushing through the bushes, applied my eye to a crevice.

I beheld a small apartment, containing nothing that could be called furniture. A rough kind of a slab bench or table stood before me, and on this was a horn cup, half full of grease, from which projected a burning wick. This was all I could distinctly make out; and returning to Clara, who still sat on her horse, trembling with hope and fear, I informed her what I had seen, adding:

"I cannot conjecture what sort of a human being or beings tenant this abode, nor whether we shall be welcome or not; but under our circumstances, I think it best not to be fastidious, nor to stand on ceremony. Come, let us enter."

Had there been any alternative less fearful than that of passing the night on the prairie, Clara would have embraced it; but as it was, she tremblingly alighted.

Fastening our horses to the bushes, I took her hand, and we proceeded to the hut. The skin of a wild beast hung at the entrance in place of a door; and pushing this aside, I led the way into the interior, my companion following, her delicate frame quivering like an aspen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HERMIT.

THE wretched hovel we had thus entered unbidden, contained at the moment no person but ourselves. It was a miserable affair indeed—being constructed of sticks and turf, and built against a large rock, which formed one of its sides. In two or three places the turf of the walls had crumbled away, forming those crannies through one of which we had seen the light. There was no chimney, and no outlet besides the door.

The bushes surrounding this singular structure had been left untouched; and they grew so high and so close, that one might have ridden past in broad daylight, without discovering the shanty at all, or even suspecting that nature was not sole master of the ground.

The interior was in keeping with all the rest. Besides the slab table and its primitive lamp, there were a couple of three-legged stools, a box, a kettle, a gourd, and on some wooden pegs hung a few coarse garments; while in one corner was a litter of dried grass, which probably formed the bed of its strange occupant.

But who could this occupant be? and why did he or she live thus isolated? Doubtless some anchorite, I thought, who, having renounced the world, and wishing never more to commune with the human race, had secreted himself on our approach, to remain hidden till our departure.

I communicated this idea to Clara, who, as she

glanced timidly around, exclaimed, in a low, nervous tone:

"I shall thank Heaven if the owner of this abode turn out to be nothing worse. Ha! hark!" she said, catching hold of me, and trembling with terror. "I hear steps!—some one comes!—oh, God! protect us!"

As she spoke, I heard a rustling of the bushes. Stepping in front of Clara, I drew one of my revolvers, and, keeping it out of sight, faced the door, ready for peace or strife, as the case might be.

At this moment the skin was thrust quickly aside, and a flash of lightning, that almost blinded me, displayed the outlines of a tall figure standing in the entrance. Then came a crash of thunder, that made the ground quake under me, and instinctively Clara threw her arms around me, with a cry of terror. I grasped my weapon firmly, and kept my eyes fixed on the stranger.

For a few moments he silently regarded us; and then, as the roar of the thunder died away, he said, in a clear, sonorous tone:

"Peace be between us!"

"Amen! with all my heart!" returned I.

The stranger then advanced into the room; but as he came near the light, so that Clara could see him distinctly, she uttered another cry of fear, and clung still closer to me, as if for protection.

Nor was I myself very favorably impressed with the appearance of the stranger, as I surveyed him for a moment by the dim light; and notwithstanding his peaceful language, I by no means felt disposed to throw aside my weapons and regard him as a harmless friend.

In height he was not much short of six feet—thin and gaunt—all bone and muscle. His face was long, pale, and cadaverous; and his large, black eyes, which seemed

to roll restlessly in their hollow sockets, had a wild, unsettled expression. Over the eyes were large, bushy brows, with a broad, high forehead, which, compared with the rest of the face, most of whose muscles were working in some manner, seemed to remain in grave repose, as if conscious it contained a master intellect. The nose was long, of the Roman type, and the mouth very large, with thick, projecting lips.

It was difficult to tell, after long and close study, what were the predominant propensities of this singular being; but it struck me, even at a cursory glance, that in him the animal and the intellectual warred for the mastery; and that in spite of reason and conscience, the former too often obtained a temporary victory. It was not a face I could wish near me under favorable circumstances, and I felt I could now have dispensed with it without a regret.

Not the least singular part of this strange being was his dress; and this, I think, had as much to do with the fears of Clara, as the look he bestowed upon her. From the neck to the knees reached a long, loose frock or gown, made of bear-skin, dressed with the hair on, which was worn outside. This had a belt around the waist, but was without ornament or sleeves. A skull-cap of the same material, which fitted close to the head, and concealed the natural hair, if there were any, completed his attire. Not a single other garment, that I could discover, had he on; and his long, bony arms, hands and feet were entirely bare.

In the belt around his waist was carelessly stuck a long hunting knife, and this appeared to be his only weapon. A large cup, which he placed on the table, containing water, led me to infer that he had just returned from filling it at the creek.

"Well," he resumed, looking hard at both of us, but

letting his eyes wander over the trembling Clara, with an expression I did not like—at the same time drawing in his breath, something like a sigh, and puffing it out with the sentence—"you have lost your way, I think."

"And why do you think so?" I returned.

"Because you are here, when you should be elsewhere. I cannot suppose you did me the honor to come here expressly to see me."

"You are right, sir; we have missed our way; and shall be very thankful for any information that will enable us to get back to our friends. We left Houston a little before noon, to cross the prairie to a small village called Centreville—but where we are now, neither of us have any idea."

"To the best of my knowledge," replied the stranger, "you are about thirty miles from Houston, and at least twenty from the nearest settlement."

"Strange, that we could so have missed our way!" I rejoined. "But in what locality is the nearest settlement?"

"The nearest is on the Brazos, due west from here."

"Too far to ride to-night," I returned, "with our tired horses—therefore we must claim hospitality of you."

"I had rather you would ride on," said the stranger, gruffly. "I like not to associate with my kind."

"Nor do I," I replied, sharply, glancing at his costume in a marked manner, "with such as make *beasts* of themselves, in more senses than one; but in this world, I find, persons have to put up sometimes with things that are very disagreeable. Surely," I continued, as the cabin shook under another crash of thunder, and the rain began to fall in torrents, "you would not be so inhospitable as to ask us to leave in such a storm?"

"No," he answered: "but the storm will not last long, and there is a moon."

"But our horses—"

"Oh! they will take us through," cried Clara, eagerly, who now spoke for the first time. "They will surely hold out twenty miles: let us go!"

At the first sound of Clara's voice, our strange host fixed his large, black eyes upon her; and an expression came over his countenance that made me tremble—it was so wild, so sinister, and partook so much of the baser animal. His dark eye-balls assumed a reddish, fiery cast—his nostrils expanded—his thick lips slightly parted—and his whole frame seemed to tremble with brute passion, partially suppressed.

At one moment I thought him about to spring upon the speaker, and seek to rend her like a madman; and I took care to so hold my revolver, that, in the event of such an attempt, I could interpose effectually.

Fortunately, Clara did not notice his manner; and when she ceased speaking, he pressed his hands to his eyes, for a moment—a shudder ran through his frame—and when I beheld his face again, it seemed more calm and composed than at any time since his entrance.

"She says well," he said; "instinct, if not reason, should teach her to fear her worst enemy. She desires to go and I pray to be delivered from temptation. I am a curse to myself, a wo to my fellow man, and a living disgrace to my name and race. There are times when a child could lead me to humble myself before the Cross of the Redeemer—and there are times when the arch-devil of hell is not more of a demon than I."

I gazed on this strange being as he spoke; and instinctively I shrunk back as from a madman; while Clara

clung to me in speechless terror. The awful idea that he was a maniac, began to chill my blood with horror.

He seemed to read my thoughts, as his large, black eyes, in their hollow sockets, rolled slowly over my person and fastened upon my face. A grim smile stole over his features, and he resumed:

"You think me mad—but alas! you are mistaken. Would to Heaven I were mad! for then I should not be accountable for my deeds. But reason is here," putting his hand to his forehead; "and conscience here," removing it to his heart—"dooming me to unutterable misery."

"You see me here, in this squalid place, afar from human beings. I sought this spot to avoid my kind; and with my own hands I built this hovel, where I thought none would find me. And this I did, that I might worship God in secret, do penance for my past transgressions, and avoid temptation. You seem astonished, as well you may be. It is not likely you ever before gazed upon a wretch like me, or ever will again. I hope not; for the old proverb, that 'misery likes company,' finds no hold in my heart."

"No," he continued, sadly, "bad as I am, I wish mankind well; and that I may do my kind no more wrong, have I left the haunts of men, I trust forever. Would you believe it, sir? I was well born, and well educated—had once many friends and kindred, who looked upon me with pride, and who even thought that I would be an honor to my name. Alas! how little they knew me. Passion—wild, uncontrollable passion—led me to destruction. In an evil moment I—"

At this instant a crash of thunder interrupted his speech. He started, and looking wildly around, exclaimed:

"You see the very elements would cut short a confession from which you would shrink with horror!" Thank God! I have not made it!"

He seated himself, and burying his face in his hands, rocked to and fro, muttering words to himself which I did not understand.

"As soon as the storm is over, Clara, we will go," I said, in a low tone, to my fair companion—"for I would rather trust myself alone on the plain, than here, in such company."

"Oh! yes, let us go—he terrifies me!" she answered, still clinging to me, and keeping her eyes on the object of her dread.

The lightning was now playing around us vividly—the thunder rolled and crashed—and the rain, driven fiercely by the blast, beat hard against our earthen tenement, and soaking through the turf, or pouring through the crevices, began to wet the ground under our feet. It was a dreary, dismal scene within, and a fearful night without. I thought of our horses, and felt very uneasy lest they might break loose and leave us, and thus sadly increase the disagreeableness of our situation. I dared not venture out to them, and leave Clara alone with the stranger, and I could not think of exposing her delicate frame to the peltings of the storm.

At length it occurred to me that perhaps the stranger would see to them, and I thus addressed him:

"Sir! you have said you are anxious we should leave you! and the moment this storm is over we will do so, provided our horses do not get away from us. I left them fastened to the bushes—could I presume on your kindness to see if they are still there?"

He raised his head, with an air of offended pride, and replied, sharply.

"Am I a hostler, sirrah? Why go you not your self?"

"Because of my companion, whom I neither wish to leave nor take with me."

"Ah! true," he rejoined, softening his tone: "I understand. Yes, I will go—for what care I for the storm?—it will hardly spoil *these* garments;" and with a grim smile he went out.

"Oh! let us begone from here, Mr. Walton—do!" cried Clara, in a trembling tone, as the other disappeared. "Heavens! what an awful being!—and how wicked he looks at us!"

"Do not seem to fear him," I replied; "and do not, in reality, be alarmed. I have my weapons safe, and he shall not harm you."

In a few minutes the stranger returned.

"I have brought your horses to the door," he said: "they will be safer here: but do you not think they would be better for a little corn?"

"If you have any for them, I will pay you well for it," said I.

"Pay!" he replied, again drawing himself up proudly. "I keep no hostelry, sir! I *give*—I do not *sell*! Pay, indeed! I would not touch your vile coin, that 'root of all evil,' except to cast it from me, and say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'"

With this he approached the dried grass before mentioned as serving for a bed, pushed it aside, raised a flat stone, and from a small cavity thus disclosed, took out several ears of corn. As he passed the slab-table, on his way to the horses, he laid a couple of the ears upon it; and on his return he pointed to them, with another grim smile, and said:

"You see, my guests, your horses fare as well as your

host. This is my evening meal. Come, will you not join me?"

I thanked him, but politely declined the tempting offer of eating dried corn in the kernel.

"Perhaps you do not like the way in which it is served up," he resumed, with a touch of sarcastic humor; "but Dame Nature has a way of her own in these matters; and though it is generally believed that she succeeded in pleasing our first parents, yet we moderns, having become very fastidious, are continually devising means to make improvements on what was before perfect, and tickle our palates to our own detriment. Did man take things more as Nature gives them to him, he would be longer lived, and have less need of poisonous drugs."

As he spoke, he raked off a large mouthful of the kernels with his teeth, and began to chew them.

"And so," said I, somewhat amused, and willing to humor this singular being, "you think our food should be devoured as Nature gives it to us?"

"Undoubtedly, in most cases," he replied. "Do animals prepare their food? and yet how seldom do you see animals require medicine!"

"And would you have intellectual man do as the brutes?"

"I would have him as *wise* as the brutes, sir, in the matter of eating, so as to preserve his health. I am an advocate, sir, for natural simplicity, in food and dress, as you can perceive."

"Yes," returned I, "it is easily seen that art has but little to do with your way of living. But though I were certain, that, by following your example, I should add a score of years to life, I do not think the temptation would be sufficient to make me a disciple of your school."

"No, you are like the generality of mankind—fond of

luxury, ease, and pleasure," he rejoined, with something like a sneer. "Go your way, sir, to destruction!—live a quick life, and get a speedy death."

As I made no reply to this, he proceeded to devour his corn, washing it down with water from the cup, and occasionally muttering to himself.

Having finished his meal, he laid his bare arms on the table, and rested his face upon them. In this position he remained for half an hour, I saying nothing to disturb his reverie.

By this time the fury of the storm was spent; and eager to get away, we began to move toward the door to remount our horses. He heard our steps, I suppose; for he started up rather quickly, saying:

"Are you going?"

"Yes," I replied, "we are about to leave you, with many thanks for your kindness, since you will accept of nothing more substantial."

"How beautiful!" he exclaimed, again fixing his gaze on the terrified Clara, while the same wild, fiery expression began to gleam from his dark eyes. "But go! go!" he added, quickly: "take her from my sight!—deliver me from temptation! In Heaven's name, go!"

Clara needed no further urging; and ere the words were fairly out of his mouth, she had vanished through the door-way—while I merely loitered a moment, to cover her retreat.

Our hermit host, however, showed no disposition to follow us; but resumed his seat at the table, the instant Clara was out of sight.

Seeing this, I made any thing but a slow exit, not knowing how soon some troublesome freak might seize upon this worthy advocate of natural simplicity.

It was still raining; but the body of the storm had

passed over; and a streak of clear sky in the west, with broken clouds overhead, their edges silvered by the rays of the moon, seemed to assure us we should have fair weather soon, and a delightful night above us, whatever might be our fortune below.

We found our horses at the door, and were quickly in the saddles; and then I experienced a feeling of security, to which, for the last hour, I had been a stranger.

I now called to the Hermit, and inquired the most direct route to the nearest settlement.

"I told you once, due west," he answered, in a gruff tone, from within.

"Are yonder woods the timber lands of the Brazos?" I inquired.

The answer being in the affirmative, we were on the point of starting our horses forward through the bushes, when Clara exclaimed, in a low, eager tone:

"Hark! what is that?"

I listened, and heard a dull, rumbling sound, which at first I thought to be distant thunder. But the noise, instead of dying away, seemed to draw nearer; and my next conjecture was, that it was a stampede of wild horses.

As the sound still continued to become more audible, I was fearful some of the animals might rush through the thicket; and to protect ourselves, we drew close up against the hut, on the southern side.

Scarcely had we done so, when a number of the animals seemed to be rushing past us, to the right and left, outside of the thicket; and the next moment our ears were greeted with a series of diabolical yells, that appalled us with horror, and sent the blood curdling to our hearts.

CHAPTER VII.

WE ARE MADE PRISONERS.

A SUDDEN stillness succeeded these horrible yells, the trampling of horses was no longer heard, and I knew that we were completely surrounded by a large body of Indians.

An awful sickening feeling came over me, as I contemplated our probable doom. Death, speedy and bloody—or, what was scarcely a less terrible alternative, a wretched captivity. Poor Clara! what a fate for her! In that fearful moment, could I have purchased her freedom and safety with my life, I would freely have given it.

A thousand thoughts now crowded themselves upon me at once—for in moments of extreme peril, the mind seems to expand so as to grasp a hundred subjects at the same time. I thought of home and the friends there, and what painful affliction the mystery of my fate would cause them. I thought of myself—young, just setting out in life, and with every thing to make life desirable—doomed to hopeless misery or death. I thought of Harley—of Viola—of Clara—of her parents—her brother—her aunt—what all these last must think and say of us. And all this, and much more, in that space of time which is measured by two vibrations of the pendulum of a clock! Surely, intellect is Godlike! and possesses, though in a very limited degree, the omnipresent attribute of Deity.

The yells of the savages had so terrified Clara as to

render her, incapable of speech or motion; and this I thought so far fortunate, that we had not betrayed ourselves to them; and if, as I hoped, they knew not of our presence within the thicket, there was a bare possibility we might yet escape. I dared not communicate this to my companion, even in a whisper—for I had often read of the keenness of the Indian ear in catching and distinguishing sounds—but I put my finger to her lips, as a sign that I wished her to remain perfectly silent. She did so, whether she understood my meaning or not.

Presently I heard a movement in the bushes; and directly after, a deep, guttural voice, addressing some words in an unknown tongue to the strange being within the hut. The latter seemed to understand the Indian, for he replied, apparently in the same language. I then heard him moving about inside, as if collecting some of his things for a sudden departure. In a few moments he quitted the hut, and spoke some words to the Indian outside, when both moved away together.

I now really began to entertain some hope that we should be overlooked and left to ourselves—though I trembled at the idea that our late host might betray us. I am inclined to think, however, I did him injustice by this suspicion; but, at all events, my horse, at this critical instant, gave a loud snort; and my heart died within me, for I felt that it was in vain to hope for concealment longer.

I now heard exclamations, as of surprise, among the savages; and then something uttered in a commanding tone, as by one invested with authority. Then the voice of the Hermit, as I will term the owner of the hut by way of convenience, called out to us:

“Ride out here, my friends, and surrender yourselves prisoners. Resistance will not avail you, and to attempt it will cost you your lives.”

“Alas! dear Clara, we are doomed,” I said.

“May God protect us!” she replied, in a low, sad tone, which, greatly to my surprise, seemed in no degree tremulous.

We now rode out of the thicket upon the plain, and were immediately surrounded by some eight or ten dismounted Indians, among whom was the Hermit. The latter came up to my side, and said:

“My friend, I am sorry for you—but it was no fault of mine.”

“What will be done with us?” I inquired.

“Of that I know no more than yourself,” he answered. “As you have made no resistance, I think your lives are safe for the present.”

“What tribe is this?”

“The warriors were originally from various tribes; but are now organized under one leader, and term themselves Wepecoolahs—which, in English, signifies Forest-Rangers. The name of their chief is Kenneloo, or Death-Arrow.”

“You are, then, no stranger to them?”

“Alas! no, we are too well acquainted.”

“Then since you know them, and can speak their language, perhaps you can prevail upon the chief to release us, or put us to ransom!” I rejoined, eagerly. “Oh! sir, if you can and will do this, I will hold my life as yours to dispose of.”

“I will do what I can,” he replied; “but count not too much on my influence with this bloody chief, for I am a prisoner myself.”

“How! you a prisoner?—you seem to be free.”

“I am not bound—for I have pledged my word not to escape, and Kenneloo knows he can trust me—but still I am none the less a prisoner.”

“And what do they intend to do with you?”

"They say I must go with them—but for what purpose I have not yet been informed."

While the Hermit and I were thus conversing, the group of dismounted savages had been walking slowly around Clara and myself, examining us, our horses and equipments. They put their hands on the necks of our beasts, and let them slide down their breasts; they felt of their flanks, and then of us, and peered into our faces. Apparently they were satisfied with the capture of what had cost them nothing, for they gave several grunts of approval, and then held a short consultation among themselves. They then called the Hermit to their council; and after an absence of a few minutes, he returned to me, and said:

"I am desired by Kenneloo to inform you, that unless you attempt to escape, your lives for the present are safe. You will also be allowed for the present to retain your horses, and will be sent off under an escort of four trusty warriors."

"Sent whither?" I inquired.

"I have not been informed—probably to the village of the Wepecoolahs," he replied.

"And what will become of the others, meantime?"

"Indians," he answered, gravely, "never venture this far into the territory of the whites, except for trade or plunder; and you may draw your own conclusion as to the purpose of the present party, when I inform you they carry nothing but deadly weapons."

"And go you with them, to aid them in their bloody designs upon your race?"

"I go with them, an unwilling prisoner, sir," he replied, haughtily; "and I thank you not for your base suspicions."

"I only meant to inquire if it were their intention to put you to so severe a trial," I hastened to rejoin, in a

conciliating tone. "If I wounded your feelings, I crave your pardon! But did you state my proposition to the chief, of putting us to ransom?"

"I did; but he will not do so for the present. Much will depend upon the success of this expedition, whether or not you ever regain your freedom."

"And are there no terms on which he will set my companion at liberty?"

The Hermit walked away to the chief, spoke aside with him for a few moments, and returning, replied:

"No, she must go with you; and if *you* attempt to escape, and succeed, her life will be sacrificed."

"Alas! poor Clara! would to Heaven I could save you, even with my life, from so dire a fate!" I said, taking her hand, as we sat side by side on our horses.

"I would not accept liberty at any sacrifice to yourself, Mr. Walton," she replied, in a tone that betrayed deep emotion. And then, after a brief pause, she added, with what seemed an impulsive gush of feeling: "No, Henry Walton—dear Henry—I would go with you even to the grave."

This language of endearment, expressive of the deepest and purest affection, coming so unexpectedly from the lips of Clara, made my heart beat wildly; and for a few moments I hardly knew which emotion predominated—joy at the avowal, or grief for the peculiar circumstances which drew it forth. I was at once the happiest and the most miserable of men: happy, in knowing that Clara truly loved me—miserable, in remembering that we were both captives to a barbarous foe.

"God bless you, dear Clara, for these sweet words!" I hastened to reply; "and whatever may be my fate, they shall mark a green spot on the waste of life; and I will treasure them in my heart of hearts forever."

At this moment the moon streamed her soft rays through the broken clouds, and bathed us in a flood of silver light. I caught at it as a favorable omen.

"Behold!" I cried; "light breaks in upon darkness, and tranquility again reigns where so late the elements waged terrific battle! The storm of adversity has fallen upon us; but, I trust, it will pass, and that the sun of prosperity will once more make glad our hearts, even as yon queen of night casts her mild radiance over a scene so lately wrapt in awful gloom."

As I said this in a low tone to Clara, an Indian rode in between us, and another on the other side of me; when both proceeded to fasten my arms in such a way that I could make no other use of them than to hold the reins and guide my beast. But I was thankful for even this privilege, when I might have been put to so much severer treatment; and which, in fact, I rather expected than otherwise.

Having made my hands fast, they proceeded to search my person, taking away my revolvers, my watch, money, and such other articles as I chanced to have about me. The watch, pistols, and money, seemed to afford them an agreeable surprise; for they uttered grunts of delight; and riding away a few paces, they dismounted, and collected their companions around them, to the number of more than fifty.

The moon now shining out bright and clear, I had a fair view of the whole party, as one after the other they busied themselves in handling the revolvers—whose numerous barrels seemed to strike them as very curious—and the watch, whose regular ticking caused them great wonder and delight.

They were a villanous looking body of men—half-naked, bedaubed with paint, their faces streaked black and

red, and their crowns shaved, all but a single tuft of hair in the centre, which was adorned with the feather of some wild bird—with bows in their hands, sheafs of arrows to their backs, and tomahawks and scalping-knives in their girdles; but notwithstanding their fierce, formidable, and utterly disagreeable appearance, and notwithstanding that I was their prisoner, who with only might release from captivity—I could scarcely avoid laughing at the comical gravity they displayed over the watch, each apparently attempting to be more wise and knowing than his companions. One would take it, examine it attentively, particularly its face, by the light of the moon, turn it over and over, put it to his ear, and then, with the manner of one who had made some important discovery, would point out something that had struck him as peculiar, and hand it to the next, with a self-satisfied air that was truly ridiculous.

Thus it went from one to another—the revolvers following next in the examination, and going the same round; and when the last one of the party had given an opinion of his own on the articles, the Hermit—who, with folded arms, had been standing silently apart—was called up to the group, and all seemed to turn to him, as to one unanimously chosen umpire, to decide which was right.

This proceeding probably occupied some quarter of an hour, which time I spent in conversing with Clara, in a low tone. I was agreeably surprised to find one who had been so timid at the bare thought of danger, so calm and firm in the real moment of peril; and I called to mind her words when speaking of such an event. Her face, as I beheld it by the light of the moon, was very pale—the lips seemed unusually compressed—and the eyes, those soft, melting blue eyes, had a clear, resolute expression, that bespoke a firmness of character far beyond what

I had ever given her credit for possessing. The look altogether was rather stern than timid—every feature was composed—not a single member of the body appeared to quiver—and I could not detect the slightest tremor in her voice.

She spoke of our captivity as a sad event; but said that our lives were in the hand of God—that in him she put her trust—and that whatever might happen, she prayed for resignation to say, "Thy will, O God! not mine, be done!" She said her loss would be a very severe blow to her family, and she feared that evil tongues might start some scandalous tale of our being absent together; but even of this—of home, and all connected therewith—she spoke with a calmness, a lofty resignation, that astonished me; and if I loved her before, as one loves a tender object needing protection, I now mingled with that love a certain feeling of admiration, which only superior qualities can excite.

As soon as the Hermit had answered the questions propounded to him, he and the chief advanced to my side. The latter was a large, athletic Indian; but save a few extra ornaments, in the way of feathers—if such things indeed could be called ornaments—I could perceive nothing to distinguish him from his fellows.

"Kenneloo," said the Hermit, addressing me, "would know how many watches you are willing to give for your ransom, and that of your companion?"

"Ask him to name the number he will accept," I replied, eagerly.

The two held a brief conversation, when the Hermit rejoined:

"He will take a hundred."

"And I will give them," was my answer.

Again the Hermit spoke with the chief; and then continued to me:

"But how, when, and where, is he to obtain them?"

"I will deliver them at any place he may name, within a reasonable distance, and within ten days from our reaching Houston."

This was translated to the chief, who only slightly understood English; and he was in the act of making some reply to the Hermit, when we were all startled by the report of a pistol.

Suddenly there was a great commotion among the Indians; and immediately some fifteen or twenty came running toward us, uttering yells of rage.

Their object, as I soon learned, was to sacrifice Clara and myself on the spot; but their bloody design was frustrated by the chief, who promptly interposed, and inquired into the cause of the disturbance.

It seems that in handling the revolvers, some one had discovered the trigger of one, had pulled it down to its place, and, bent on new discoveries, had pressed his finger hard against it, by which means one of the barrels had instantly been discharged, lodging a ball in the breast of another, who chanced to be standing directly in front of the muzzle. This had excited both consternation and rage; and the latter feeling was directed against us, for having, as they superstitiously believed, bewitched the weapon to do them harm.

As I have said, the interposition of the chief prevented the immediate retaliation, and gave the Hermit an opportunity to explain to them that they, rather than we, were in fault.

The result was, after a long discussion—during which the Hermit in some degree succeeded in his efforts to pacify them—that they agreed to relinquish present vengeance

But the treaty concerning ransom was abruptly broken off—the chief declaring that we should be held as prisoners, to be finally disposed of according to future circumstances.

This being settled, we were immediately joined by our guard—four stout, grizzled fellows—while the others, remounting by the chief's orders, dashed swiftly away, taking the Hermit with them, to whom they assigned the horse of the disabled warrior.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LONG JOURNEY.

ON the departure of the main body of the savages, two of our guard kept their station by us, while the other two proceeded to remove the wounded Indian into the hut.

They were absent nearly half an hour; and on rejoining us, I perceived a fresh scalp dangling at the girdle of one who appeared to be the leader of the four. He slightly touched it, in a significant way, as he came up; and then each uttered a long, low, mournful wail.

I concluded from this that their companion had died of his wounds, and that he had been scalped by his friends, to prevent such a barbarous trophy falling into the hands of an enemy.

It is strange what importance the red men of the forest attach to the small bit of skin growing upon the top of the head! But such is the disgrace attending the loss of this, among some of the tribes, that a warrior would much sooner part with his life; and instances are on record, of many a daring brave having rushed into the very jaws of death, to prevent the scalp-lock of a deceased friend becoming the property of his foe.

The returned savages having remounted their horses, they arranged themselves, two on either side of us; and the signal being given to start, away we dashed, in a northerly direction.

We crossed the creek, which our animals were made to leap; and away we sped over the plain. It was a glorious

scene, as, all traces of the storm having disappeared, the round, full moon poured her silvery flood through the blue arch of heaven down upon the teeming earth.

A ride of some three hours brought us to a small woodland, which, unlike most we had seen through the day, had a thick, almost impenetrable undergrowth; and as my beast and Clara's had showed signs of unusual fatigue during the last few miles, the Indians concluded on making a halt here.

Accordingly we all dismounted, and Clara and I were bound to a couple of saplings, to make sure against our escape. The Indians then proceeded to start a fire on the edge of the thicket, so that its light would be thrown far out upon the prairie, where the horses were allowed to graze, after first being hobbled to prevent their running away. They then produced some dried meat, and a kind of hard cake, made from Indian corn, something like a tortilla, with which they appeased their hunger, slaking their thirst with water from a near spring, which one of the party brought in a small gourd that they carried with them.

When their own meal was finished, one of them came to us, and made signs to know if we were hungry. My appetite had become rather keen from my day's ride, and I gave an affirmative nod, my head being the only part of me now at liberty.

"And you must eat also," I said to Clara, as the Indian returned to his companions to get us food; "for there is no knowing when the next meal will be made; and nature must have sustenance, or you will droop by the way."

"For this reason," replied Clara, "I will endeavor to eat—though I have no appetite."

On rejoining us, the Indian unbound our hands, and I had the satisfaction of seeing Clara devour more of the

coarse food than I had expected; while on my part, I made quite a hearty meal—not so much because I relished the fare, as because I thought it necessary to keep up my strength for the trial before me. Water was then given us from the gourd; after which such alterations were made in our fastenings, as would enable us to lie down upon the damp earth.

I confess that my bed was none of the best; nor was my situation, all things considered, a very agreeable one; but notwithstanding all this, I gradually fell asleep—and this the more readily, that one of the savages had intimated by signs to Clara and myself that we must hold no conversation with each other.

The last recollections I have of that night, are of seeing three of our guard stretched out on the earth, within the firelight, and the fourth keeping watch, leaning against a tree; and of wondering to myself if poor Clara slept, and what kind of a fate the great future had in store for us. With this I gradually closed my eyes; and with these thoughts, as it were flickering about my brain, I gradually went off into the land of dreams, and thence passed into the unconscious state of a deep, heavy sleep.

I slept for several hours; and was finally awakened by one of my captors, who signified that it was time to resume our journey. The moon I now perceived was far in the west, and already the gray light of breaking morn was mingling with her silver rays.

Clara was already up, and standing near, her soft, blue eyes fixed upon me with an expression of mournful resignation that went to my very heart. Her features were very pale, and I thought I could detect traces of recent tears.

"Have you slept any, Clara?" I inquired, in a tone which, in spite of myself, was tremulous with deep feeling.

"But little," she answered; and was about to add

something more, when one of our guard stepping in between us, and taking hold of her arm, silently pointed to her horse, which, together with mine, stood bridled and saddled close by.

In a few minutes we were all under way—the Indians riding their horses bare-back, and managing them with halters made of thongs.

For hours we dashed away to the northward, keeping clear of any thing like a settlement, or even the habitation of civilized man. This somewhat surprised me; for I knew there must be several towns and forts above us, to say nothing of the log-cabins of white settlers scattered in every direction; but our captors appeared to be perfectly familiar with their route—which led me to the conclusion that they knew a way of penetrating low into the country, perhaps to the very Gulf, without necessarily coming in contact with their white foes—and that this was neither the first nor second time the present party had been over the ground.

For hours, I say, we dashed away in a northerly direction; and during this time scarcely a word was spoken; and then only by the leader, who once or twice addressed his companions, probably to communicate something concerning the journey.

The sun meantime had risen bright and glorious, and was now half way to the zenith. My impression concerning our captors, now that I beheld them by the clear light of day, was in no degree more favorable than when I had first seen them by the rays of the moon the night previous. They were fierce, blood-thirsty looking savages; and as I gazed upon their half-naked, painted, hideous persons, I began to wonder why we had been treated with so much lenity—or why, in fact, we had not been murdered and scalped at once. But perhaps, I thought to myself—

and the very idea made my blood run cold—we are thus carefully protected and reserved for more inhuman treatment—that of dying at the stake by slow tortures.

During the morning's ride, no opportunity was allowed me of speaking a word to my fair companion. With an Indian on either side of me, I rode in advance of Clara, who was guarded in the same way. By turning my head, I could occasionally catch a glimpse of her sweet features. Her face was deadly pale, but still exhibited an expression of mournful resignation. Poor girl! how I pitied her! and how gladly would I have laid down my life to place her once more in safety within her father's mansion!

The prairie, which thus far had been nearly as level as a floor, now began to exhibit a rolling, wave-like surface, and the vegetation to be less beautiful and luxuriant. The grass grew taller, and the blades became more sparse, coarse, and wiry; while the flowers became less and less frequent, and exhibited far less variety of color.

At length we reached the timber-lands of some river, the name of which is unknown to me, and plunged into a deep wood, through which we rode to the bank of the stream, where our captors made a halt. Here we all dismounted, and our horses were again allowed to graze upon a sward that was green and rich, though shadowed with trees.

The Indians now broke their own fast, and on the same kind of food they had eaten the night before; and after they had done, a portion was offered us, which we were not loth to accept—for our long, weary ride now rendered even this coarse fare quite palatable.

We remained in this place some two or three hours, and then resumed our journey—fording the stream, and continuing on northward, over a hilly, wooded country, till the sun went down—when our captors, finding our beasts

were the worse for the day's travel, camped for the night, greatly to our relief and satisfaction, for poor Clara was so fatigued as scarcely to be able to sit her horse.

But I will not trouble the reader with a detail of our progress on our long and toilsome journey. One day went much as another, without the occurrence of any striking incidents to vary the tiresome monotony. We were nightly secured against even an attempt at escape, by being bound, and carefully watched by some one of the four; and at the break of day each morning we were obliged to mount our horses and ride whithersoever our captors willed.

During all this time, Clara and I seldom exchanged any thing more than looks—for the Indians liked not that we should converse with each other—and in fact they spoke but little among themselves.

A week's journey took us far to the northward; and already we could feel a great change in the temperature—the air being much cooler and more bracing through the day, and the nights often so cold as to render a fire indispensable to comfort. Here, too, we could perceive the marks of frost, in the variegated hue of the woodlands; and more than once I felt chilled to the very bone, by cold blasts that came sweeping down from the far distant mountains, on whose summits ice and snow hold an eternal reign.

At length we crossed a large stream—which, from its peculiar appearance, I am led to think was the Red River; and two days after this we ascended a steep hill, and looked down into a deep valley, where, along the bank of a small stream that flowed through it, we beheld some fifty Indian huts, being the first habitations of any kind we had seen since our capture.

The moment the Indians got a full view of their village

—for such it really was—they uttered loud yells of delight; and three of them darted away, running their horses as if on a race, leaving the fourth to follow more leisurely with ourselves. I took advantage of this departure of the majority of our guard, to ride up to the side of Clara; and as the only remaining Indian seemed more interested in watching his companions than us, we improved the opportunity by exchanging a few words in a low tone.

"At last, dear Clara," I said, "I think we have reached our present destination."

"Heaven send it be so!" she replied, with a sigh—"for I am nearly worn out."

"I am not surprised at it, Clara—but rather, that you have borne up so well, against so much fatigue and excitement, and you so delicately framed. I can see but little change in your appearance, save that exposure has darkened your complexion, and that you have the forlorn look of one who labors under grief without hope."

"I have no hope now," she replied, mournfully, "save in the grave."

"Nay, say not so; while there is life, there always should be hope; and the same Providence that has seen fit to place us in our present condition, may yet enable us to escape, and restore us to our friends."

"I would I could think such an event might ever be; but no, no—alas! no—I am doomed!" she mournfully rejoined. "But now that we are here," she pursued, "what think you will be done with us?"

"It is possible we may be well treated and put to ransom," I replied, with a view to excite some hope in her breast, that she might not altogether give way to melancholy. "You see we have not as yet received any rougher treatment than our captors may have thought

necessary to secure us against escape; and when the chief returns, with the Hermit to act as interpreter, I trust I can make it seem more to his interest and advantage to let us go, than to keep us prisoners, or put us to death."

"You say this to me—but do you truly believe yourself what you say?" cried Clara, quickly, turning full upon me.

"I believe we shall ultimately escape," I answered, somewhat evasively.

"God grant we may!" rejoined Clara, earnestly. "Oh! my mother! my poor dear mother! could you see your child now, how it would wring your heart! And yet," she quickly added, "I know not that it would add to her present grief—for even now she is mourning me as lost—buried in a dark uncertainty—and knows not whether to weep for my death, or a living woe more terrible. Oh! what will my friends think of my absence? how will they bear this cruel stroke of fate? My dear mother, and father—my dear sister, and brother—shall these eyes ever behold you again in life? Alas! alas! I fear they have looked their last upon your dear faces; and that if ever we meet again, it will be where none do part. Oh, God! support me! let me not murmur! but be ever ready to say, 'Thy will, not mine, be done!'"

The hill we were descending was steep, and some parts of it were heavily wooded; but directly before us, down to the village, the trees had been felled and burned on the ground, as the charred remains and blackened stumps every where proclaimed. Beginning at the village, and reaching half-way up the hill, was a field of corn, wherein some ten or a dozen squaws were at work, plucking the ripened ears. As they heard the shouts of the first party descending the hill, they stopped their work, and, collecting together, waited till the horsemen had passed them.

Probably some communication was made to them by the riders, concerning Clara and myself; for as the mounted party dashed by them, these squaws set up a series of screeching yells, and immediately started up the hill to meet us.

They were a coarse, brutal-looking set; and, if any thing, more hideous and disgusting in their appearance than the party of warriors that had made us captives. They were nearly naked—their only covering being skins girded around their loins. Unlike their male companions, their heads were not shaved; and their long, straight, coarse black hair swept down around their bodies, in some instances nearly to the ground. They were without paint, or ornament of any kind; and their filthy, weather-beaten skins—their flat, broad, unintellectual faces—and their round, hard, muscular limbs, indicated that theirs had been a life of toil and drudgery. They were, as I afterward learned, called Soolepcooms, or Squaw-workers; and were regarded as immeasurably inferior to the Lendcooms, or Squaw-wives, whose only duty was to wait upon the warriors—for the Wepecoolahs, not unlike their more civilized white neighbors, had established an upper and lower grade among both sexes.

On meeting us, the Soolepcooms renewed their dismal screeches; and completely surrounding us, they blocked our way, stopped our horses, and began to catch hold of us, in a very rough manner, occasionally turning their faces up towards us, and grinning savagely, like so many she-devils.

Clara became alarmed; and as one old hag, seizing her by the arm, half-dragged her from her horse, at the same time flourishing a knife in a rather dangerous proximity, she shrieked out:

"Oh! Henry—save me! save me! or I shall be murdered!"

Before I could act in the matter, however, our Indian guard, who had been riding apart—and who, on the approach of the women, had paid no attention to them—suddenly rushed his horse up to Clara's side, and striking the aggressor full in the face with the handle of his tomahawk, laid her senseless on the ground. On seeing this, the companions of the wounded hag drew back, with howls of dismay, and we were suffered to proceed without further molestation.

The Indian now kept his place by the side of Clara, as if to protect her—but manifested no further interest in what had happened—not so much as even turning his head to look after the discomfited Soolepcooms. I had more curiosity; and turning in my saddle, I beheld the whole party grouped around the fallen one, some of whom were stooping down to raise her.

Meantime the three warriors had reached the village—which, as we could now perceive, was in a state of some excitement—and our conductor signifying to us that we should quicken our pace, we did so, and rode down the hill at a fast gallop.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIAN VILLAGE AND A MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER.

THE village of the Wepecoolahs was very pleasantly situated on a level strip of open land, which at this point divided the base of one hill from that of the other by a distance of more than a hundred yards. What appeared rather singular, was the fact, that this level, open piece of ground—the very bottom of the valley, and which was a hundred yards in breadth by some three miles in length—should be entirely free from stones, and stumps, and covered with a smooth, thick green sward—while all around it either was, or had very recently been, a howling wilderness, untouched by a husbandry implement. It could not be the work of the present tribe, for every thing else indicated that the Wepecoolahs had been located here but a very short time. No, it was either one of nature's singular freaks, or else this spot had been cultivated many, many years ago, perhaps by a race anterior to the red man of our day. And I was further led to this latter conclusion, from perceiving, at a subsequent period, a steep conical mound, in the rear of the village—covered, like the flat, with a thick, smooth green sward—reminding me of the descriptions I had seen of similar ancient relics in some of the Western States.

The huts of our captors were constructed of sticks, bark, earth, and skins; and were arranged in a semi-circular form—the central arc touching the base of the opposite hill, (which rose steep and craggy a thousand feet above

the village) and the two arms extending across the valley, to the stream before mentioned, which ran purling along at the foot of the eminence we were descending. By this geometrical arrangement, a fine area was formed, which was common property, and upon which all the huts fronted. Here fires were built, in the open air, for cooking or other purposes, the huts being constructed without chimneys. Here the children played in harmony, and the elders met in social intercourse.

Near the centre of this area was the lodge of the chief, differing from the others only in size and position; and just in the rear of this was a circular building, of still larger dimensions, with a straight pole running up through the centre, not unlike a circus tent. This was the Council House of the tribe, where the chief and warriors were wont to meet to discuss and decide any matter of general interest.

In the appearance of the village, taken as a whole, there was a certain air of savage refinement, which I had not expected to find—and I was, in consequence, agreeably disappointed.

As we rode down the hill, the whole village poured out its inhabitants upon the common—men, women and children—the pappoose and veteran—and, stimulated by curiosity, all crowded down to the creek to get a near view of us. There might have been, taken collectively, a hundred and fifty souls—mostly women and their offspring—for the main body of the warriors were away on a daring expedition, as the reader already knows.

At first, when I saw them assembling in such a formidable manner, I had some apprehension that we might be greeted with rather rough treatment; but as we crossed the creek, they fell back respectfully—neither offering violence, nor seeking to annoy us.

The women of the village—the Lendcooms, or Squaw-wives—were habited in skins; but, unlike the Squaw-workers, with some regard to decency—the parts exposed being their arms, necks, feet and ankles. Their dress, however, was not calculated to display their figures to any artistic advantage—it being merely a straight gown, of prepared deerskin, seamed up the sides, with shoulder straps, and covering the person to the extent mentioned. All were costumed much alike—though some few, with more taste than the others, wore wampum belts around their waists. Some, too, had coarse ornaments in their ears; and more than one dangled a heavy ring from her nose; but this, in my opinion, did not improve their looks in the slightest degree. Taken collectively, they were not decidedly an ill-looking set of females; and a few of the younger were tolerably passable; though their low foreheads, and broad, flat, animal-faces, set a seal upon any thing like a near approach to beauty.

I must, however, make an exception in favor of one—though, from the first, I could not bring myself to believe that she was a full blooded daughter of the Indian race. This was a girl, apparently about eighteen years of age, who, on our approach, stood apart from the others, with some half a dozen warriors drawn up in a line behind her, among whom I instantly recognized the three of our escort who had ridden into the village in advance of us. I was struck at the same time with her personal appearance and the marked deference with which she was treated by young and old, not one venturing to approach her beyond a certain limit. As to who she was, I of course knew nothing—but that she was a personage of consequence, was easily to be seen.

And what struck me as the most singular was, that so much respect should be shown to one of her sex—for, as a

general thing, the savage esteems the female as far inferior to the male, and deems her totally unworthy to have a voice in the councils of the nation. And besides, I had seen the chief himself, and seen his warriors approach him with a familiarity that none displayed toward this mysterious being—so that, unless she were greater in the tribe than Kenneloo, which it was unreasonable to suppose, I knew not how to account for this general deference.

I have said that her age was apparently about eighteen, and that her appearance was so different from the others, as to lead me, at a first glance, to the conclusion, that she was not of their race—or, at all events, that her blood was not purely Indian. She was straight, symmetrical, and tall, with a dark complexion, and black eyes and hair—but here all resemblance between her and others of the Wepecoolahs ceased. Her face, instead of being broad, flat, and round, was rather oval, with the angular outline of the American or European. Her nose, too, of the Grecian cast, was prominent, with thin, dilating nostrils—and her forehead was broad, high, and intellectual. Her mouth, with its thin lips, had a classic shape; and her chin was well rounded, giving her a straight and beautiful profile.

Nor was it alone in the shape of the features that she differed materially from all the others. In her proud, queen-like deportment, and the lofty, intelligent expression of her countenance, she rose in the bright contrast to them of day to night. There was an air of superiority and command in her every look and gesture; and her black, brilliant, piercing eyes seemed to gleam and sparkle with the intellectual fires of no ordinary soul. She was beautiful—that I could not deny—but hers was a kind of beauty not to my taste. It lacked the softening traits so much admired in woman; and displayed too much pride.

haughtiness, fire, passion, and all the concomitants of a self-willed, unsubdued, unbending, masculine spirit.

How she had attained to her exalted position among the Wepecoolahs, was of course a mystery to me; but once obtained, it was not difficult to understand how she had retained it; for it is a law of nature that matter can be governed by mind—and the mere animal must ever yield to intellectual dominion.

The dress of this singular being was not unlike that of the other females, in its shape and extent—though rendered of a more showy appearance, by being covered with divers colored beads, worked into crude imitations of beasts, birds, and flowers. Besides, as a further distinction, she wore leggins and moccasins of scarlet; and her long black hair was swept back from her forehead, and braided into cues, that dangled about her neck and shoulders, something after the fashion of the Gipseys.

As we were escorted directly past her, single file, at a slow pace, I had an opportunity to observe the peculiarities which I have attempted to describe to the reader. She stood with folded arms, in an attitude of graceful dignity, calmly, but I fancied rather haughtily, regarding us. Her black eyes at once fixed upon mine with an intense, searching expression, as if she would read my very thoughts; and then fell upon Clara, who rode next in file. I watched her closely all the while—for somehow I felt that our fate, in a great degree, rested with her—and I was anxious to glean from her looks what that fate would probably be. But all was dark, cold, and reserved, as if she had schooled her thoughts and feelings against betraying themselves by outward sign. Once, I fancied, while she was looking at Clara, her black eyes shot a fiercer gleam, and that her thin lips slightly curled with

something like disdainful pride—but it might have been only fancy.

We passed on, leaving her standing motionless as a statue, gazing after us. Our Indian conductor, who was riding in advance, now led us straight to the Council House, at the door of which he dismounted and made a sign to us to do likewise. He then pointed to the door, and signified that we must enter; which we did accordingly, he remaining without.

We now found ourselves alone together, in a circular building of some fifty feet in diameter, constructed of sticks, bark, and earth, the roof of which sloped down nearly to the ground, and was from twelve to fifteen feet high in the central part. A few stakes had been driven into the earth at regular intervals, and around the walls were a number of rude seats. A few loopholes admitted light enough for us to see across the building.

We cast a hurried glance about us, and then gazed at each other.

"Clara!" said I, in a low, tremulous voice.

"Henry! dear Henry!" she rejoined; and the next moment, weeping and half fainting, her head reclined against my breast, and my arms, encircling her slender form, drew her more closely to my heart.

"Oh! what will become of us?" she added at length, looking up tearfully into my face—for in the ratio that personal danger appeared to decrease, her timidity seemed to return.

"I apprehend nothing more serious than temporary imprisonment," I replied, assuming a cheerful air, in order to raise her spirits. "You see we have not been very roughly treated as yet."

"What think you of that strange female we passed just now?" she inquired. "She does not look like an Indian;

and she is either possessed of authority, or is a prisoner herself, closely guarded, I know not which. Such eyes—such black, fiery, piercing eyes—they seemed to burn into my very soul."

"I know not what to think of her, Clara," I replied; "but that she is a personage of authority, and no prisoner, is evident from the manner in which she is treated. Perhaps she is either the daughter or wife of the chief."

"Hush!" interrupted Clara, grasping my arm; and at the same moment the subject of our conversation entered the Council House with a lofty carriage and graceful step.

She advanced straight toward us, till within a couple of paces, and then halting, drew herself up more haughtily than ever, and keenly surveyed us from head to foot. Clara shrunk from her piercing gaze—and, in spite of her efforts to appear calm and composed, her whole frame trembled.

Perceiving this, the thin lips of the other curled with something like a sneer; and then, to our great surprise, these words, sharp, clear, and distinct, rang forth:

"Is the daughter of the white man an aspen, that she quivers thus in the presence of Dundenah, the Leaping Fawn?"

"Oh! lady, whoever you are, thanks be to God you speak my native tongue!" cried Clara, joyfully. "Oh! lady, tell us why we are here prisoners?"

"Call me not *lady*!" returned the other, scornfully. "I have a name! I am Dundenah, the Leaping Fawn!"

"That name sounds pleasantly in our ears," I interposed—"for the fawn is a gentle creature."

"Perhaps I am not rightly named, then," she rejoined, turning almost fiercely upon me. "It is a name the great chief gave me in infancy."

"By your language, you should be of our race," said I.

"Wandewah, the Great Spirit, hath given Dundenah many tongues," she replied, proudly.

"Can you tell us what will be our fate?"

"Ask yours of Kenneloo, when he comes in from the war-path." Then turning to Clara, she touched her on the shoulder, and, pointing to the door, continued: "The Blue-Eye must go with Dundenah!"

"Are you going to separate us?" cried Clara, with a look of dismay.

"The Blue-Eye must go with Dundenah!" repeated the other, sternly.

"Oh! no! no!" pleaded Clara: "let us remain together in our captivity!"

Dundenah looked from Clara to me, and said quickly:

"Is the Blue-Eye already a wife?"

Clara drooped her head, and a blush of confusion spread over her lovely features.

"She is not wedded," I replied.

"Then she must go with Dundenah!" returned the Leaping Fawn.

"I trust Dundenah will do her no harm!" I hastened to rejoin.

Again those black, piercing orbs became fixed upon me, and fairly flashed fire, as she made answer:

"Dundenah is mistress of her own actions; and when she needs advice, she seeks it of the mighty chief of the Wepecoolahs!"

"I meant no offence," I rejoined, in a humbled tone, anxious to appease her irritation, but more on Clara's account than my own.

She looked at me fixedly a moment, and then turning toward the door, struck the palms of her hands together three times. An Indian quickly entered, to whom she addressed a few words in his native dialect. The savage

replied only with a nod—thus silently indicating that she was understood and would be obeyed.

Dundenah then touched Clara on the shoulder again, and pointed to the door. Clara started, and seemed for a moment or two to stand irresolute, while an expression of deep, intense anguish passed over her lovely countenance. Then, with a quick, impulsive movement, she rushed into my arms, exclaiming:

"Farewell, dear Henry! may God protect you! This may be the last time we shall behold each other on earth—but I trust we shall meet in a better world. To God I commend you! Farewell!"

"Farewell, dear Clara!" I replied, in a choking voice of deep emotion. "Whatever may happen, rest assured your dear image shall never be effaced from my heart! Adieu! and may all holy angels guard you!"

I drew her fondly to my heart, silently imprinted a kiss upon her pale forehead, and then turned away to conceal the tears that I found myself unable to suppress.

When, after the lapse of a few minutes, I ventured to look around, I found myself alone with the Indian whom Dundenah had left with me as a guard. The savage was seated near the door, the only point of entrance or exit to the building, and, with his black eyes fixed upon me, looked more like a hideous figure in wax than a human being.

I knew by this, that for the present I was to be guarded without being bound; and I felt grateful to Dundenah, who had the ordering of all, for even this little act of kindness. I took advantage of my liberty, therefore, and seating myself upon one of the rude benches, gave way to such reflections as my peculiar situation naturally called forth.

I thought of home, and the friends of my youth, from

whom, not three months since, I had parted with feelings of exultation—not because of leaving them—but because I was going abroad into the great world, a free man, to follow the bent of my own inclinations; and now how I envied them! and what would I not have given to have been once more among them! I pictured to myself the grief of my father, and sisters, and Old Moll, when the news should reach them that I was lost, with an awful uncertainty hanging over my fate; and in imagination I saw poor Tom, even now, breaking his faithful heart at my long absence.

Then I went over my adventures with Harley and Viola, and tried to calculate the chances of my ever seeing them again. Fortunate Harley! so happy in inventions, in cases of emergency! were he only with me now, I somehow felt that I could presume upon ultimately escaping from captivity through his resources and good fortune.

Again I was at the mansion of Colonel Moreland, and fancied I could see the gloom and distress of the family at the unaccountable absence of Clara—while I, though innocent, was even now, perhaps, being denounced as a heartless miscreant, who had led her astray from the paths of rectitude and honor; and this reflection caused me many a keen pang, valuing as I did my reputation more than my life. That my rival would every where proclaim me as a base, unprincipled, and perhaps cowardly villain, I felt to be certain; and I fairly groaned at the thought that I could not soon be there to clear myself of the calumnious charges.

Then my thoughts reverted to Clara. Poor girl! what would be her fate? Perhaps doomed to a miserable life of captivity, toil and drudgery—wedded, it might be, after the Indian custom, to one of her brutal captors. But no! no! this idea was too horrible—I could not bear to dwell

upon it—death in any shape were a thousand times preferable to such a doom. I felt Clara would think so also; and, should the worst come to the worst, would rather end her life in self-defence—go unpolluted into the presence of her Maker—than suffer so demoralizing a degradation!

Dear Clara! how her sweet, sad image dwelt in my mind! and how her last words still rung in my ear, mournfully, like a knell for one departed! Had we indeed said the last farewells? should we meet no more on earth? God forefend! for then, even with life and liberty, I felt I must be ever miserable.

But who was she that had separated us? that strange, mysterious, beautiful being, who spoke our tongue with such fluent ease and lofty diction? If a native of the tribe, how had she acquired such a command of our language? and if of another race, how had she attained to such power over the barbarous Wepecoolahs?

Strange being! would she have a voice in the council which must decide our fate? and if so, would she lean to the side of mercy, or give her influence for the heaviest doom? Wonderful being! I had not been able to read her; and knew not if her heart were of adamant, or susceptible of the tender touches of pity.

While occupied with these reflections and speculations, a hand lightly touched my shoulder. I looked up, and Dundenah again stood before me.

CHAPTER X.

TRYING EVENTS.

For a few moments the black, piercing eyes of the Leaping Fawn remained fixed upon mine, with a penetrating intensity: then her thin lips parted, and she inquired:

"Is the home of the Dark-Eye far away?"

"Far, very far, toward the rising sun," I replied.

"Within the dominions of him they call the Great White Father of the States?"

"It is."

"Lives the Blue-Eye near the home of the Dark-Eye?"

"Scarcely nearer than the Leaping Fawn."

"How comes it then that both are here, the captives of the Wepecoolahs?"

I narrated to her how we were riding out to visit a sick friend, and how we lost our way and were taken prisoners at the hut of the Hermit.

"That was Langee," she rejoined: "I learned so much from those that brought you here."

"You know him then?"

"Yes; it was he, and one other, that taught Dundenah to speak the language of the Dark-Eye."

"And pray who is that mysterious being?" I inquired.

"We know him only as Langee, which in your language signifies the Learned, or Man of Knowledge. He first came among the Wepecoolahs when Dundenah was very young. He professed to worship Wandewah, the Great Spirit—but his actions were not in accordance with the

principles he proclaimed. After living with the Wepecoolahs for years, he went to a neighboring tribe, where, for some immoral conduct, he was seized, tried, and condemned to death. He escaped by stratagem, and fled; but his retreat has been discovered, and he is now a prisoner."

"And is he to be punished by the Wepecoolahs for an offence against another nation?" I inquired.

"Dundenah can answer after his trial," she replied. And then fixing her black eyes steadily upon my countenance, she continued: "Does the Dark-Eye prize liberty?"

"What so dear as liberty, Dundenah?" I said: "what is life without it?"

"Would the Dark-Eye go, and leave the Blue-Eye in bondage?"

"No, Dundenah—no!" I replied, quickly.

"Then the Blue-Eye is dearer to the Dark-Eye than liberty?" was the quick rejoinder.

"I confess it is even so, Dundenah. But tell me of the Blue-Eye—is she safe and well?"

"And if not?"

"If not?" cried I, forgetting where I was, and springing to my feet with an energy that caused my companion to take two or three steps backward.

"Well, and if not?" she repeated, drawing herself up proudly, and motioning the Indian near the door to approach.

"I shall grieve in silence," I replied, softening my tone. "Pardon my excitement! I had forgotten I was a prisoner, unable to redress the wrongs and insults that might be heaped upon me, or my companion in captivity," I added, in a tone of some bitterness.

Dundenah looked at me sternly for a few moments; and

then turning abruptly away, went out. My savage guard glared upon me for a while after she had gone, and then resumed his place by the door. I was thus again left to myself, and to my own not very pleasant reflections.

I saw no more of Dundenah that day; and this gave me no little uneasiness; for if I had offended her, it would doubtless be the worse for myself and Clara; and that I had offended her, I thought more than probable from her manner of leaving me.

Left to myself in solitude, a closely guarded prisoner, among savages, with a terrible uncertainty hanging over my fate and Clara's, the day, as may naturally be supposed, dragged wearily to a close. At sunset my guard was changed, some food and water were given me, and then my limbs were tightly bound, and in this condition I was left to pass the night.

And a horrible night it was to me; for I could not sleep; and thought was busy conjuring up a thousand frightful fancies. At break of day, however, greatly to my relief, I was freed from my cords; when, throwing myself upon the ground, I managed, in spite of circumstances, to lose myself for a couple of hours.

Somewhere about midday, Dundenah again made her appearance; but to my eager questions concerning Clara, she returned me no answer. In fact, she seemed resolved to hold no further conversation with me; for after walking up and down the Council House a few times—occasionally stopping in front of me, in a proud attitude, and fixing her black eyes upon me, with a cold, penetrating expression—she waved her hand loftily, and went out. She did not return again that day, which went much as the one preceding; and at night I was secured as before, though I managed to get some sleep.

In short, a week passed away in this dull, monotonous

manner; and at last I grew so wearied with my confinement and suspense, that I fancied I could welcome any change, even though it were to pass from imprisonment to death. During this time Dundenah visited me daily; but her lips were sealed; she would utter no word; and I could learn nothing as to the fate of Clara.

On the eighth day of my imprisonment, Dundenah came to visit me earlier than usual. She entered with a quick step; and as she advanced straight to where I was seated, I saw by her manner, and the expression of her features, that she had something of importance to communicate.

"Kenneloo, the great chief of the Wepecoolahs, has returned from the war-path," she said, in a quick, excited tone. "He has not met with the success he expected, and has to mourn the loss of many a gallant brave. As a consequence, he brings a clouded brow and an angry heart. Let the Dark-Eye beware of his words, when he speaks to the great chief through the lips of Langee! Let him say nothing to stir the heart of Kenneloo to revenge, or the life of the Dark-Eye will not last him to look upon the sun of Wandewah. So speaks Dundenah, who would not see the earth drink the blood of the Dark-Eye."

"But the Blue-Eye, Dundenah—what of her?"

At this moment a long, loud, mournful wail, of many voices, came borne to our ears.

"Hark!" cried Dundenah: "'tis the death howl of the Wepecoolahs: already they mourn their dead. Let the Dark-Eye remember the caution of Dundenah!"

Saying this, she turned, darted away, and disappeared from my view through the doorway of the Council House.

Scarcely had she gone, when I heard various cries, whoops, yells, and the trampling of a large body of horse. My guard still maintained his position by the door—but his whole attention was now fixed on what was taking

place without. A few minutes after, he stepped aside, with an air of respect; and Kenneloo, accompanied by Langee, or the Hermit, entered the Council House.

There was a dark frown on the brow of the chief, a compression of the lips, and a fierceness in the glance of his black eyes, as he advanced directly toward me, that I fancied boded me no good. He came close up to me, glared upon me savagely for a few moments, and then grasped my arm so roughly, that I could scarcely avoid uttering a cry of pain. I felt my blood boil at this indignity; and but for the warning words of Dundenah, I believe I should have resented it by a blow, chief though he was. But by a great effort I controlled my feelings, and returned his rude gaze calmly and unflinchingly.

He was a powerful personage, physically considered, being over six feet in stature, and finely proportioned, with strength and grace in every limb. His features, now that I had a fair view of them, I could not call ugly in themselves, though horribly disfigured by paint, and by two long, deep scars, one of which ran obliquely across the nose, and led me to infer that that member had been severed by the sharp cut of a sword, or tomahawk, during some conflict. His eyes were black, and now seemed to gleam with meditated vengeance; but still I could see in them a look of intelligence far superior to most of his tribe. The forehead, too, was high and broad; but I did not altogether admire the phrenological development of the shaved head—from the crown of which dangled the scalp-lock, with the feathers, intended to adorn it, now soiled with dust and mud, and otherwise in disarray. His loins were covered with a panther skin, belted around his waist; and this, with moccasins, comprised his whole costume. In his belt were stuck his tomahawk and scalping-knife—and these were all the weapons he had about him.

With the exception of the feathers attached to his scalp-lock, and a couple of coarse, heavy rings, dangling from his ears, he was devoid of any attempt at ornament—and there was nothing by which to distinguish him from his followers as the chief of his tribe.

After grasping my arm in the manner related, and impudently thrusting his face so close to mine that I was obliged to inhale his breath, while his black, snakey eyes fairly gleamed with what seemed a fiendish thirst for vengeance—and finding I made no attempt at resistance or resentment, and neither uttered a cry of pain, nor showed signs of surprise or fear—he threw me from him with such force, that, in spite of myself, I fell heavily to the ground. Then turning to the Hermit—who was watching me, with what I fancied to be a look of commiseration—he made an exclamation in the Indian tongue, to which the other nodded in reply.

The chief then spoke a few words to Langee, in a rapid tone; and as I rose to my feet, the latter advanced to me and said:

“Young man, your presence of mind, and the restraint put upon your passions, under the insult offered you, has prolonged your life, perhaps saved it. When Kenneloo entered here, I trembled for your safety; for had you offered the least resistance, or exhibited the least sign of fear, he would have brained you on the spot. He now deems you a fit subject for the torture, to which he intends to devote you, as an offering to Kailwanondah, the Evil Spirit, to appease his wrath for the signal failure of his expedition against your countrymen.”

“I am much obliged to Kenneloo for his good opinion and kind intentions,” I replied, with sarcastic bitterness; “but though I am duly sensible of the honor he would thus confer upon me, yet I would rather decline it; and,

if I must die, would prefer to be killed outright, where I stand, even though my courage should suffer in savage estimation. Had I known for what purpose he was testing my presence of mind and forbearance, rest assured the insult had not been tamely borne—of which he may even yet convince himself by attempting to repeat it. But I had been warned to be guarded against giving offence—though not till your explanation was I aware for what diabolical purpose.”

“You allude to Dundenah?” said Langee.

“I do.”

“Wrong her not with that suspicion then: the Leaping Fawn would save you.”

“Ha! say you so? But how do you know this?”

“I had it from her own lips.”

“You have seen her then?”

“I have. She spoke with me as I was about to enter here with the chief; and her last words were: ‘Save the Dark-eyed prisoner.’”

“Who is she, pray tell me?”

“The daughter of Kenneloo.”

“Indeed! but her features are not like the others of the tribe.”

“Her mother was of another race. But I will tell you more at some future time, should opportunity permit. At present it is my painful duty to inform you, that Kenneloo will reserve you for the stake, and he waits to see how you will bear the announcement of your doom.”

“Good heavens! you seem as cold-blooded as he—and speak of my sentence as though you were conferring a favor.”

“I speak of your sentence as something better than certain death; and in order to give you a chance for your life, I will tell you what to reply. You must demand a

trial by Council—which, according to the laws of the Wepecoolahs, cannot be refused.”

“And will this proceeding save me?”

“We hope to save you by this proceeding.”

“Then make such demand for me.”

Langee turned to the chief, who seemed to be getting impatient, and spoke a few words in the Indian tongue.

Kenneloo started, with a look of surprise and anger; and then replying in a loud, fierce tone, stalked out of the Council House, leaving the Hermit alone with me.

The latter now turned to me, with a troubled expression, and said:

“To save you, young man, I fear I have sealed my own doom.”

“How so?” I inquired, in surprise.

“He says that I either dictated your reply, or have translated it falsely; and that be it which it may, I shall answer for it.”

“And what will be the consequences to you, my friend?”

“If you escape the torture, I shall probably be tried by Council; and if condemned, must suffer in your stead—for Kenneloo declares he will have a victim.”

“Then do not save my life at the sacrifice of your own, Langee,” I replied. “I could not ask that, even were you a tried friend, instead of a stranger.”

“God’s will be done!” returned the Hermit, calmly. “You are more worthy to live than I—and there are ties binding you to earth—while I have none. No, no,” he continued, reflectingly, sadly, and touchingly—“there are none now to mourn the loss of a wretch like me—life is become a burden rather than a pleasure—and the sooner I sleep in death the better. Nature, it is true, shrinks from death, even when the spirit longs for it—and nature

doubly revolts at physical torture—but we must all pass the great bourne, in some way, sooner or later; and if this is to be my fate, I will try to bear it with Christian fortitude and resignation, as a portion of the punishment due to my transgressions, and say, ‘God’s will be done!’”

I was struck with the manner and language of my strange companion; and believing him sincerely repentant, I felt that, however great were his sins, they would be forgiven.

“God is above all, and rules all, generous stranger!” I said, seizing his hand; and “peradventure He will yet deliver us both from the hands of our enemies. But tell me—know you any thing of my fair companion?”

“Ha!” he said, starting—“the lady that was with you—I hope no harm has befallen her?”

“Then you know nothing of her?”

“Nothing: I have not seen her since we parted on the night you were made captives. Was she not brought to the village with you?”

“Yes; but immediately after we were separated by Dundenah; and for more than a week I have neither seen nor heard from her, and know not whether she is living or dead.”

“And did you question Dundenah?”

“Yes, many times—but she would give me no answer.”

“This is strange!” returned Langee, musingly, and shaking his head, as one in doubt: “this is strange! Can it be?” he proceeded, rather thinking aloud than addressing me: “Can it be? There is something to favor the suspicion; and then she was always wayward, wilful, and even passionately rash when a child. But then again it was too soon for her to stake all upon so bold a stroke. You say you were separated almost immediately after your arrival in the village?” he continued, raising his large,

dark, wild-looking eyes from the ground, and fixing them upon me.

“Yes—we were scarcely together here a quarter of an hour. But what do you fear, Langee? Speak! tell me the worst at once?”

“Could Dundenah have known from your manner that you loved the maiden?”

“Undoubtedly. But what could this have to do with our separation?”

“Nothing, perhaps, with your separation—though much, perchance, with what followed.”

“I do not understand you.”

“Well, let it pass: I must see more, ere I venture to tell you my conjectures: they may be erroneous ones.”

“But what think you has been done with Clara?”

“I cannot say.”

“You surely do not think any harm has befallen her?”

“I hope not.”

“Hope not?” cried I. “Good heavens! you alarm me with even a vague suspicion—you who so well know Dundenah and the Wepecoolahs.”

“Well, I know nothing of this matter, and therefore you should not get alarmed at my words. In truth, I rather think the girl is safe and unharmed.”

“If otherwise, they may lead me to death as soon as they like,” said I, despondingly.

“Then you prize her more than life?”

“I would give my life for hers.”

“That is true love, and springs from a noble heart,” rejoined Langee. “But were the maiden dead, have you no other ties to bind you to earth?”

“Yes, many,” replied I, as my thoughts reverted to home and my friends.

"Then you are to be envied, even in your misfortune," rejoined the Hermit, gloomily.

And turning aside to one of the benches, he seated himself, hid his face in his hands, and commenced rocking to and fro, as I had seen him do in his own hovel on the prairie.

I seated myself also; and for several minutes gave way to such poignant reflections as my own situation, and the uncertainty shrouding the fate of poor Clara, naturally awakened. I thought in silence, till thought without utterance became too painful to bear; and I resolved to renew conversation with my strange companion. At the same time it occurred to me; that I had forgotten to question him concerning the expedition of the Wepecoolahs; and approaching him at once, I touched him on the shoulder—but I had to repeat this, and even to shake him, before I could rouse him from his deep reverie.

At length he raised his head, and looking around somewhat wildly, fixed his eyes upon mine, and said, with a kind of sigh:

"Ah me! you have recalled me from the past to the present—and I suffer by the transition. Rare thing for me! memory was busy with the early and happy scenes of my existence—and they have been all too few."

"I crave pardon then!" I replied. "Had I known you were occupied with pleasant reflections, I might have envied, but certainly should not have disturbed you."

"Well, well—no matter," he rejoined, gloomily: "the present had to return, and you only hastened it by a few moments."

"I wished to ask you concerning the last expedition of the Wepecoolahs?"

"Thank God, it was for the most part a failure!" he said, earnestly; "for though I would mingle not with my

kind, for reasons of my own, yet I bear no ill-feeling toward them, and really wish them well—least of all would I voluntarily be an accessory to blood and plunder, even were the parties assailed my enemies.

"The object of the expedition of the Wepecoolahs was revenge upon their natural foes, the whites; and their intention was to steal, like a cat upon her prey, upon a certain frontier settlement, and achieve a sudden and awful victory, by indiscriminate massacre, fire and plunder. I went with them the more readily, that, in the first place, resistance was out of the question; secondly, I could do nothing to prevent the diabolical attempt being made; and thirdly, I thought if I could not by any means warn the inhabitants of their approach, I might perhaps succeed in rescuing some poor fellow being from the general doom.

"But Providence frustrated their bloody design, and made it recoil upon themselves. They crossed the Brazos, and penetrated the country low down toward the Gulf, without being discovered; and one stormy night, about the mid-hour, having left their horses in a neighboring wood, they stole down upon a small settlement, and, simultaneously uttering their terrible war-whoop, rushed on, as they supposed to easy conquest.

"But it so chanced that a gallant band of Texas Rangers were just entering the village to quarter for the night, and they met the savages in their fierce career.

"The result was a signal defeat to the latter, with a loss of some ten or twelve killed outright, and several others wounded. The Indians made a precipitate retreat to their horses; and such of them as were fortunate enough to reach them in advance of their pursuers, effected their escape; but there are nineteen notches to be cut from the tally-stick of the tribe; and among the missing, who will

return no more, they number some of their best and bravest fighters."

I could not but rejoice at this signal defeat of the Wepecoolahs, although it rendered the mere chance of escape from such a body of disappointed and infuriated beings next to a miracle, and I so expressed myself to Langee.

"Yes," he replied, "in all probability we shall be the victims, on whom will fall most heavily their retaliatory vengeance. I could have escaped during the *melee*—but I had passed my word of honor to Kenneloo, not to do so under any circumstances, and I would not forfeit that to save my unworthy life. If he, an Indian, an uncultivated savage, and a foe to my race, had faith enough in my integrity to take my unsupported word for the security of my person, it would be a burning shame, I thought, for me to be the first to convince him that a Christian white man values life more than honor, to say nothing of the sin of deliberately telling a falsehood."

"You may be in the right," I rejoined; "but the very fewest number would have reasoned so under such circumstances."

"That may be," he pursued; "but a thousand wrongs never made a right; and he who attempts to act on principle, should keep principle paramount to all other objects or considerations."

"What to me seems the most wonderful part of the whole matter is, that Kenneloo should have accepted your word as sufficient security for your person," I said.

"He had seen me tried before," said Langee.

"And think you, after all this, he will deliberately put you to death?"

"He may do so—for there is no calculating on the whims of an untutored savage."

"And does your word bind you not to escape now?" I inquired.

"I do not know that it does."

"Then were I in your place, I would avail myself of the first opportunity to get out of the clutches of such dangerous enemies."

"It is no easy matter to escape now," replied Langee, "even were I so inclined. Kenneloo, as I have already informed you, has become suspicious of me; and it would not surprise me to find myself ere long deprived of my liberty. But I will go," he pursued, "and endeavor to ascertain the state of feeling among the sarg-es with regard to both of us; and also learn, if I can, what has been done with your fair companion."

"Do," I said, "and let me see you at the earliest moment practicable—for I am in a state of anxious suspense."

The Hermit rose, and went to the door, where he spoke a few words with the Indian guard; and then returning to me, said:

"It is as I feared—I am already a close prisoner: the sentry has orders not to let me leave the Council House."

At this moment we heard voices without; and directly after, Kenneloo entered the building, followed by some twenty of his most distinguished warriors.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOOM AND THE HOPE.

FOUR of the warriors immediately separated from the others, and, without a word being spoken, proceeded to bind the arms of Langee and myself behind our backs. We were then conducted out of the house into the open air, where we were closely guarded by six of the party just returned from the expedition; while those within proceeded, in due Indian form, to settle the question as to what should be our fate.

Never did I think nature so beautiful, as when I first beheld it after a week's confinement; and were I but free once more to enjoy it, I fancied I could be content with almost any other fortune. The day was clear, the air delightful, and the sun stood in mid-heaven, pouring down his bright rays and giving to every object a charming mellowness of aspect, which appeared the more beautiful to me, because I believed I should soon lose sight of all forever.

Presently I heard Indian voices in the Council House—but not understanding their language, I knew nothing that was said. Langee did, however; but he was not allowed to communicate with me. Once, after a rather long, loud, fiery speech, Langee turned his dark, hollow eyes mournfully upon me, and slightly shook his head, which I understood to mean that our doom was, or would be, sealed.

The deliberations of the Indians lasted some two or three hours—during which time the villagers, of all ages,

surrounded us, peering at us curiously, but observing a decorum that surprised me, considering that they were savages. None were allowed to advance within the ring made by our guard, which was perhaps ten feet in diameter; but outside of this they formed a complete circle, and conversed in low, quiet tones. Occasionally hands clenched, and fierce eyes glared upon me; but being a stranger to them, and of a race which they esteemed natural enemies, I thought if they did not maltreat me, I had reason to be grateful for their forbearance.

Toward Langee, however, whom most of them had known in former years, and whom they evidently regarded as more Indian than white, the looks directed were those of sympathy; and I fancied I saw enough to warrant the conclusion that the popular vote would go against his condemnation, at the same time that it would approve of mine.

In vain I looked among the crowd, in every direction, for one glimpse of the sweet, sad face of Clara—for if alive, and permitted to do so, I knew she would endeavor to see me. But no! no—alas! no—she was nowhere to be seen; and I began to entertain the horrible suspicion that she had been put to death. If so, the guilt I believed rested with Dundenah, as the supreme authority of the tribe in the absence of her father; and the bare idea that her hands were imbrued in the blood of her I loved, made me regard her as a demoness of hell's worst type—the more devilish, that her knowledge and intelligence should have ennobled her above those by whom she was surrounded.

While occupied with these thoughts, Dundenah made her appearance. All moved respectfully aside, to give her an opportunity to approach us.

"Why is Langee here, thus guarded?" she said, addressing the Hermit in English, that none of the others might understand.

"Because, in following your directions, with regard to this youth, I unfortunately incurred the displeasure of your father."

"How so?"

"By telling the youth, when doomed to die, to demand a trial by Council. Kenneloo says I either told him how to answer, or translated his answer falsely."

"And is the great chief not satisfied to allow him, a trial by Council?" cried Dundenah, with flashing eyes. "Would he doom him to the stake without a consultation?"

"You see I am a prisoner for obeying you—that will best answer your questions," replied Langee.

"But Langee shall not suffer for obeying the Leaping Fawn," she returned, quickly. "Dundenah will save him. She swears it, by the great Wandewah!" Then turning to me: "Would the Dark-Eye content him with life and liberty and a home among the Wepecoolahs?"

"Ere I answer, Dundenah," I returned, with compressed lips, fixing my eyes keenly upon hers, "you must tell me what has become of the Blue-Eye?"

For a few moments she looked at me as though she would annihilate me on the spot; and then slowly and impressively replied:

"No prisoner so bold as to decline answering the daughter of the great Kenneloo, ever lived to boast of it."

"Well," I rejoined, with considerable asperity in my tone, "you can take my life, for it is in your power, but force me to answer you cannot."

For some moments Dundenah fairly glared upon me, so enraged did she seem at the audacity of my reply. Then compressing her thin lips, as one trying to speak calmly, under the excitement of the most intense passion, she rejoined:

"And does the Dark-Eye thus show his gratitude to Dundenah for her endeavors to save his life?"

"I acknowledge no cause for gratitude, when you have taken from me that which is dearer than life," I replied. "Only tell me the Blue-Eye is safe and well, and I am your slave, to obey your slightest command; but if you have wronged her, I solemnly invoke the curse of Heaven upon you!"

"The Dark-Eye is sealing his own doom," she rejoined, sharply.

"Be it so; I can die but once, and death puts an end to your tyranny."

For perhaps a minute after I said this, her keen, black, searching eyes remained fixed upon mine, while every feature seemed to quiver with the struggle of pent up rage. Then stamping her foot upon the ground, she fairly hissed forth:

"The Dark-Eye has chosen;" and darted into the Council House.

I now indeed felt that my last hope was gone, and regretted that I had been so hasty; for my death could not benefit Clara, whether living or dead herself; and if living, the news of my untimely end would only add a lasting grief to her misery. It was too late, however, to recall my words; and not knowing what moment I might now be called upon to play my last part in the great drama of life, I turned my thoughts inwardly, and strove to make my peace with Heaven.

It was perhaps an hour after this, when a messenger came from the Council, and bade our guard conduct us into the presence of our Indian judges.

As we entered, Kenneloo was seated at the far end of the building, with Dundenah standing just behind him, and the warriors, equally divided, ranged along the circular

walls on his right and left. As we drew near to the chief, I did not fail to perceive a peculiar expression of triumph, which assured me that the question of life and death had been settled to his satisfaction.

I next glanced at Dundenah. She was standing just behind her father, motionless as a statue, with her arms crossed on her bosom, and her eyes bent on the ground. I was struck with the aspect of her features. The look of fiery, haughty pride was no longer there; but in its place one of dejection, if not of sorrow. The change was for the better; and as I now beheld her countenance, I could truly pronounce it lovely. Could it be that one who looked thus, was an incarnate demoness, devoid of the more gentle feelings which belong to her sex? No! it was impossible. Such an expression could never find place upon the countenance of one whose heart was steeled to pity, mercy, and all the nobler and holier emotions!

As these thoughts passed through my mind, Dundenah raised her eyes, and their glance encountered mine. At first she seemed disposed to resume that look of haughty pride, which, till now, she had ever displayed in my presence; but from some cause, perhaps because she perceived on my features an expression more in unison with her own feelings, she finally let her dark eyes rest upon me with a gleam of gentleness, and even of pity, that I had never before believed her capable of feeling, and I began to wonder what could possibly have occurred to effect so great a change so suddenly.

The chief, however, soon claimed my attention. After surveying us for a few moments in silence, with a savage smile of triumph upon his repulsive features, he rose and addressed himself to Langee. His words were few—but the utterance was slow and harsh. When he had done, he resumed his seat, and fixed his black, snakey eyes upon my

countenance, to note the manner in which I would receive my sentence from the lips of the Hermit.

"It is as I feared, my young friend," began Langee; "you are already doomed to die by torture."

I started, and felt the blood rush to my temples, and then retreat to my heart, as these horrible words fell upon my ear; for notwithstanding I had believed myself fully prepared to hear this sentence without exhibiting any emotion, I now found that a faint hope that so severe a one would never be passed upon me, had all along been mingling with the contemplation.

Recollecting that the eyes of my foes were upon me, and that they were secretly enjoying the triumph of seeing a white man pale and tremble, I immediately regained an outward composure, and, in a calm, even tone of voice, inquired:

"When is this sentence to be executed?"

"To-morrow," he replied, sadly.

"And in what manner?"

"You are to die at the stake, by a slow fire."

"And you, my friend?"

"In case you suffer, my sentence is not so severe," he replied; "but if aught should occur to prevent your dying at the stake, I am to be put to death in your place."

"Then it seems they think it possible something may occur to prevent their sentence being carried into execution?"

"Kenneloo has provided for such a contingency, that he may not be cheated of his horrible sacrifice," replied the Hermit.

"And when I am dead, are you to be set at liberty?" I inquired.

"No! the revengeful Kenneloo has effected a sentence of degradation. I am to take my place among the Sool-

epcooms, or Squaw-workers, the drudges of the tribe, till such time as his savage chiefship may see proper to restore me to equal fellowship with his heathen followers."

This seemed to come forth with more bitterness than any sentence which I had heard Langee utter since my captivity; and it was accompanied by a wild rolling of his hollow eyes, and a look generally, that presaged the stirring up of those dark, fierce passions, which, ere now, had torn and rent him like one possessed of a devil, and which perhaps had cost him years of suffering and prayerful struggle to subdue and control.

"But you may find an opportunity to escape," I said, in a low tone; "and if you do, oh! use it! and, for the love of Heaven! bear tidings of my fate to Colonel Moreland, of Houston, Texas, and tell him that his daughter is either dead or here a prisoner!"

The chief here spoke to Langee in a harsh tone, who said to me in English:

"Kenneloo is getting impatient; he thinks our interview unnecessarily prolonged. A thought strikes me! Would you not rather die a sudden death now, than wait for the stake to-morrow, and undergo the most excruciating tortures?"

I reflected a moment, and replied:

"You forget, Langee, that were I to die now, you would be required to take my place."

"And you forget," he said, "that Dundenah has sworn by Wandewah I shall not suffer."

"What then do you propose?"

"Rush at once upon Kenneloo, as he sits there, and, my word for it, he brains you on the impulse of the moment."

I considered my chances of escape, and resolved to do it; for better a speedy death to-day, I thought, than a

lingering one of torture to-morrow. I implored Langee, if it were possible for him to get away from the savages, to do so, and let the friends of Clara know what had become of her. I then bade him farewell, and turned to rush upon the chief—when, to my surprise, I found myself confronted with Dundenah. Her proud, haughty look had now returned, and her glance and air were stern, as she said:

"The design of the Dark-Eye and Langee is known to Dundenah, and she has foiled it."

She then spoke a few words to her father, who immediately arose and broke up the Council. He passed out of the Council House, followed by his warriors, with the exception of the six who had charge of us. These latter placed both Langee and myself on our backs, on the ground, and proceeded to bind our limbs, so that we had no use of them. They then went out, leaving one as sentry at the door.

Dundenah did not immediately follow them. For a few moments she stood with her arms folded on her bosom—a favorite attitude with her—and her eyes bent on the ground. Then she took two or three hasty turns up and down the Council House, and paused between Langee and myself, as we lay on our backs about six feet apart. Fixing her piercing black eyes on the Hermit, she said, in a low, but severe tone:

"Till Dundenah's ears heard the base counsel of Langee, she did not think him treacherous to the Leaping Fawn and Kenneloo."

"If you call my counsel to the Dark-Eye, to save himself from torture, treachery, I have nothing to say—only, that I am sorry my plan did not succeed," replied the other.

And had it succeeded, Langee would have relied on the oath of Dundenah to save him from the stake?

"Well, was that treachery to believe you would keep your oath?" queried the other.

"No! but it was treachery to seek to snatch the prisoner from the hands of the Wepecoolahs," replied Dundenah; "and it is well none understood Langee but the Leaping Fawn, or he would scarce be living now. Dundenah fears Langee has given her oath too broad a license. She swore he should not suffer for obeying her—but to urge the Dark-Eye to speedy death, was none of her command."

"Well! well! what would you?" said the Hermit, rather impatiently.

"Dundenah would warn Langee against rashness. Had the Dark-Eye died by his counsel, the blood of the Dark-Eye would now be on the head of Langee."

"I venture to say the Dark-Eye does not view the matter in that light himself!" rejoined the Hermit.

"By no means," I replied: "I sincerely believe you meant your advice for the best, Langee; and I thank you for it; although, as matters turned out, it failed to benefit me."

"Then the Dark-Eye wishes death?" cried Dundenah, turning sharply upon me.

"No, I do not wish for death; but I am already doomed; and I prefer a speedy death to one of torture."

"And the Dark-Eye would rather die now than take his chances of escape?"

"What chances? I know not there are any."

"And think you Dundenah is powerless among her tribe?"

"By no means; but you will make no effort to save me."

"How knows the Dark-Eye that?"

"I judge it from what passed between us at a former interview."

"Was it not by the advice of Dundenah that the Dark-Eye demanded the trial by Council?"

"I was told so; and then I was also led to believe that Dundenah would make an effort to save me."

"And does the Dark-Eye think otherwise now?"

"I have reason to think so. Am I not already condemned?"

"Would the Dark-Eye content him with a home among the Wepecoolahs?"

"No," I replied—"I certainly could not be contented here."

"Not even with the Blue-Eye for a companion?" queried my singular interrogator, closely watching my features.

"Ha! does the Blue-Eye live then? is she safe and well?" cried I, quickly.

"Would the Dark-Eye content him to remain among the Wepecoolahs, with the Blue-Eye for a companion?" repeated Dundenah, in a tone that I fancied was a little tremulous.

"I cannot say I would be contented here, Dundenah," I answered; "but if assured that the Blue-Eye is safe and well, and that we may be permitted to be together occasionally, I will accept my life with almost any conditions."

"Let the Dark-Eye beware then how he seeks to hasten his existence to a close!" replied Dundenah; and turning on her heel, she immediately quitted the Council House.

After reflecting for a short time on what she had

said, I asked the Hermit, in a low tone, what he thought of it.

"I am inclined to think that your companion is uninjured," he replied; and was about to add something more, when the sentry came running to us, spoke to him in the Indian tongue, and made signs to me that we must hold no further communication with each other.

Wearily, wearily the hours passed away, and the day dragged to a close. The position in which I lay would have been continually painful, had not my mind been so much occupied with other matters. I recalled the words and manner of Dundenah, and hope of two kinds began to faintly dawn in my breast,—first, that Clara was alive and well; and secondly, that by some means my life would be preserved.

Granting that this hope would not prove fallacious, the sequence which I ventured to calculate kept my brain active, and on the wings of conjecture I travelled far into the future. Should my life be preserved, and should Clara and I again meet, I thought that on the strength of so much good fortune I could safely found the greater hope of providential escape from the savages with my fair companion—and, with her also, ultimate happiness.

But the mental structure I thus reared and enlarged, I found, upon reconsideration, had a very small foundation, and I knew that the slightest adverse force would topple it down a mass of ruins.

Night came on—but no one came to visit us—not even to offer us food. This did not surprise me in my own case; but I thought it strange that Langee should be treated thus severely, unless it were the intention of the Indians to put him to death also.

Several times I was on the point of asking him, in a low tone, what construction he put upon this treatment;

but as often I remembered the warning of the sentry, recalled the conversation I had had with Dundenah, and thought it best to keep silent, and not draw upon myself any further savage displeasure.

Hours of deep, lonely silence thus passed away, with the Hermit within six feet of me, when an incident took place which I will record in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPE OF LANGEER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

FROM the setting in of night, I lost sight of my strange companion; and though I had every reason to believe that he was still lying within six feet of me, yet for hours I had heard no sound, not even a movement or a breath, to assure me that such was the case. My natural conclusion was, that he was asleep; but still I thought it very singular that he should lie so quietly, and sleep so easily; and I could have fancied he was not there now, only that I knew I had not lost myself, even in a dose, for a single moment, and regarded it as next to impossible that he could have got away without making any noise.

Through the first part of the night, I had been so occupied with thoughts peculiar to my own situation, that this had not struck me as any thing remarkable; and when I did think about it, I lay for some time pondering upon the mystery of this silence.

At length, near what I judged to be the midnight hour, I heard a slight movement, and a sound like the parting of a thong. Then, for a few minutes, all was still, when the same kind of noise was repeated.

Could it be that my strange companion was breaking loose from his bonds? I hoped so, yet feared to ask, even in a whisper, lest I should be heard by the sentry at the door, and, by attracting his attention, peradventure spoil some design of Langee.

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Soon after this, the same sounds were again repeated; and then I fancied I heard a footstep stealing softly away.

For perhaps ten minutes after this, all was again silent—then I was startled by hearing sounds like persons struggling together at the door. There was no outcry—but, instead, a smothered groan, a fall of some heavy body, and labored breathing, like one strangling. This gradually died away to silence; and though I laid awake all night, listening and wondering, and pondering upon my own hard fate, I heard nothing more.

The night, as may readily be believed, was to me one of physical and mental torture. I was so bound that I could move nothing but my head; and my limbs gradually swelling, by reason of the tightness of my cords, the ligatures became deeply buried in my flesh, and for a long time pained me exceedingly. To this a numbness succeeded, scarcely less pleasant; and for hours I felt as if portions of me were dead.

And would any portion of me be living when the sun of to-morrow should set? I asked myself; and the awful idea that I might then be in the Spirit Land, made the blood, where it did circulate, seem to run cold in my veins.

Daylight came at last; and with the first ray that penetrated my prison-house, I turned my eyes to the spot where I had last seen the Hermit. As I had anticipated, he was no longer there. He had escaped; and the sounds I had heard at the door, were doubtless his struggles with the sentry, whom I readily conjectured he had strangled.

This conjecture seemed confirmed, when, so soon as it was light enough to see around the building, I lifted my head from the earth, and beheld a dark object stretched across the doorway.

But how had Langee got away? had Dundenah aided him? and what bearing would his escape have upon my

own fate? were mental questions to which I could append no answers. Strange, too, I thought, if he were friendly disposed toward me, as his words all along had implied, that, after making his way clear, by killing the sentry, he had not returned to set me free also, which he might then have done with little or no risk.

But had he really escaped? and if so, for what purpose? and would he seek to make his way to a white settlement, and spread the news of our captivity? or would he return to his hermit life, and bury all other thoughts in those of self?

While thus mentally occupied, I chanced to espy, by the increasing light, some marks upon the hard, well-trodden earth where Langee had lain. I fancied they took a systematic shape; and raising my head, I was both surprised and rejoiced to perceive that a finger had traced on the ground, in large letters, the single word:

“HOPE!”

He had not forgotten me then, and had left this as a token that I must not despair; though why he had not communicated something of his design to me, after overpowering the guard, which he might have done so easily, was still a mystery I could not solve.

It was with no little anxiety I listened for the sound of approaching footsteps, and strove to conjecture what would be the conduct of the savages, when they should find one of their party killed, and one of their prisoners escaped.

At length some one came to the door, and was about to enter; but started back on seeing his prostrate companion, and, uttering an Indian ejaculation, stooped down to examine him. The next moment he sprang to his feet, and with a wild, shrill, prolonged whoop, disappeared.

This alarm-cry was quickly answered by a dozen throats; and immediately after a number of savages came rushing

into the building; and while some stopped at the door to examine their dead comrade, the others directed their steps to me, with fierce looks and menacing gestures.

I thought my time had now surely come—for in their rage I believed they would kill me—and commending my soul to God, I awaited the result with all the fortitude I could summon.

On coming up to me, however, and finding me fast bound, and Langee gone, they appeared to see at once that I had had no hand in the death of the sentry, or the escape of the Hermit; and grouping themselves upon the spot where the latter had lain, they held a brief consultation among themselves, of which of course I understood nothing.

Then turning to me, they uttered the word “Langee,” in a deep, guttural tone, and made signs to know what had become of him.

I shook my head, the only part of me I could move, as a sign that I knew nothing about him; and muttering among themselves, and fiercely brandishing their tomahawks, they went back to their companions at the door; and soon the whole party disappeared, taking the corpse with them.

I had scarcely been left to myself, when Kenneloo came stalking into the building, followed by Dundenah.

As the chief drew near me, I could perceive, by the fiery gleam of his black eyes, and the fierce expression of his countenance, that he was in no amiable mood. There was a frown upon the brow of Dundenah, and her thin lips were compressed—but the general aspect of her features seemed to betoken as much of grief as of anger.

The chief halted by my side, and fixing his snakey eyes upon my face, closely watched me while I was being interrogated by Dundenah

"Where is Langee?" asked the latter.

"I know no more than yourself," I replied.

"Did he tell the Dark-Eye nothing before he left?"

"Nothing—not a word passed between us."

"But the Dark-Eye knows when he escaped?"

I narrated to her what I had heard in the middle of the night.

"And this is all the Dark-Eye knows?"

"All, I assure you."

Dundenah translated my answers to her father; who replied in a fierce, angry tone; and glaring upon me, more like some savage beast than a human being, he immediately quitted the Council House.

"This is most unfortunate," said Dundenah, in what seemed a dispirited tone; "and the Dark-Eye, I fear, will have to suffer for the baseness of Langee."

"How so?" I inquired: "It is easily seen that I am not to blame for what he did."

"But who shall stay the vengeance of the Wepecoolahs," she pursued, with a kind of poetical wildness, "against him who is of the race of him who has broken from their bondage and laid one of their race low? Can the Dark-Eye stop the mountain torrent as it rushes toward the valley? Like the mountain torrent is the rage of the Wepecoolahs against the paleface for the deeds of his brothers! They have counted the moccasins that went on the warpath and came back no more; and while the death wail is fresh in the lodges of the fallen braves, a new wail is heard for a son and a brother slain within the sacred limits of their Council House, by the hand of one whose language is that of the Dark-Eye, and the hue of whose skin proclaims him of the same hated race! Who shall dare step between them and the victim of their wrath? Who has power to do it and live?"

"I understand you, Dundenah," I said, as she paused and fixed her gaze, with a kind of mournful solemnity, upon my features: "I understand you. Whatever hope your previous language gave me, that you might in some way avert my awful doom, I now give over, and pray God to aid me to die with fortitude, forgiving those who do me this wrong because of my race, and not because I have ever done an injury unto them."

"Is it not hard for the Dark-Eye—so young—to say farewell to sun, and moon, and stars, and earth, forever?" inquired my singular companion.

"Yes, Dundenah—to say nothing of my friends, who peradventure will never learn my fate—or learn it to shed more bitter tears than at the uncertainty in which it was previously involved."

"The curse of Wandewah be upon Langee for what he has done!" she cried, vehemently, with flashing eyes.

"And yet you cannot blame him," I replied, "for seeking life and liberty—and, above all, escape from such painful bonds as these."

"Can the Dark-Eye excuse him, when he left him to suffer the consequences of his selfishness?" asked my companion, quickly.

"I blame him not for embracing the means of escape which Providence seems to have given him," I answered. "Could I have got away, I should not be here now."

"And were the Dark-Eye free, and his companion in bondage, would he leave him so, when he could set him at liberty with no risk to himself?"

"No, I certainly would not."

"Then the curse of Wandewah be upon Langee for his inhumanity and selfishness!" she again cried, with lofty scorn.

"Shall I infer from this, that Dundenah would have me free?" I inquired.

"Dundenah would have the Dark-Eye free, but his home among the Wepecoolahs."

"Have me live among the enemies of my race? No, no—that can never be."

"But Dundenah would have the Dark-Eye and the Wepecoolahs as brothers."

"As well ask the fawn and the tiger to be playmates," I rejoined. "No, no, Dundenah—I thank you sincerely for the interest you have manifested in my fate—but what you wish can never be. Between the Wepecoolahs and myself there can be no affinity—for we differ so much in manners, customs, thoughts, and feelings, that what would delight them, would probably prove an annoyance, not to say an abhorrence, to me. But, Dundenah, I am suffering much from the manner in which I am bound—is it necessary that I should continue in this position, with these thongs cutting into my flesh?"

"It is usual for captives condemned to the torture, to remain so bound till taken hence," she replied; "but the Dark Eye shall suffer thus no longer, be the consequences what they may."

Saying this, she took a knife from her girdle, and severed the ligatures; but I was so benumbed, that for several minutes I could make no use of my limbs.

"I thank you, Dundenah, for your kindness," I said, in a voice of emotion, while tears involuntarily started to my eyes.

For, placed as I was among savages, condemned to death, with no friend by to pity or condole with me, such an act of mercy, trifling as it may seem to others, touched me to the heart; and for the time I was almost wrought upon to

regard my beautiful companion as a ministering angel, sent for my deliverance.

My language, the tone in which it was spoken, and the look which accompanied it, seemed to touch the feelings of Dundenah; for she turned aside her head, and it was some moments ere I again had a full view of her features.

I have mistaken her, I thought to myself; she is not the stony-hearted, cold-blooded creature I have been led to esteem her; beneath her proud, chilling, haughty exterior beats a warm, affectionate heart; and now, while that heart is stirred by gentle feelings, I will question her concerning Clara.

Accordingly, throwing much feeling into my voice, I said:

"Since the Leaping Fawn has been so kind as to free me of much bodily pain, will she not continue her kindness by relieving my mental anxiety concerning my companion in misfortune?"

She turned quickly upon me, and her black eyes remained fixed upon mine for some time, with an expression so peculiar that I was at a loss to understand the workings of her mind.

"What would the Dark-Eye know?" she at length inquired, in a quiet tone.

"I would know what has become of the gentle maiden who was taken prisoner with myself?"

"If the Dark-Eye lives to see the sun go down, he shall be answered," she replied; and abruptly turning away from me, she quitted the building.

What means this mystery? I asked myself.

But I could not solve the riddle.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STAKE.

FOR perhaps an hour after Dundenah left me, no particular notice was taken of me, although the savages passed in and out, and appeared to consult together in small groups. At last a fierce, hideous-looking warrior approached me, and made signs that I should rise and follow him—for though feeling had returned to my limbs, and I was at liberty to walk about, I was in reality so much exhausted for want of rest and food, that I had only used my freedom to raise myself to a sitting posture.

I obeyed the Indian, and he led me out of the Council House.

The first sight that greeted my eyes, as I passed through the doorway, was a large crowd of both sexes—consisting of warriors, squaws, children, and papposes—grouped around a stake driven firmly into the earth, some twenty paces in front of Kenneloo's lodge, and about central way of the area formed by the encircling huts.

The moment this motley assemblage caught sight of me, they all left the stake, and at once surrounding me, set up such a series of frightful yells, that I have only to think of them now to fancy they are still sounding in my ears like the orgies of demons.

Mingling in this crowd were the Soolepcooms, already mentioned as being the female drudges of the tribe, generally selected for this purpose from their intellectual inferiority, and consequently the lowest order in the savage

scale of savages. On the execution of a prisoner, these she wolves are permitted to join their superiors and exercise their hellish invention in the way of insulting and torturing the victim; and as this is a rare holiday for the unbridled license of their passions, they fail not to make the most of it in a way becoming to their degraded and brutal condition.

If, as has been asserted, there is a connecting link between man and beast—between human beings and angels—then may we also look for a connecting link between flesh and blood and demons; and I can conceive of nothing more nearly approaching this last than the Squaw-workers of the Wepecoolahs.

They were the first to press upon me; and being abandoned to them by my conductor, they immediately formed a close circle around me, and began a wild dance, which I can liken to nothing earthly—while their still wilder screeches and yells made my very blood run cold. I looked beyond them, to the crowd outside, in the hope of catching the eye of Dundenah, or of beholding one face having the least expression of sympathy for my fate; but I was disappointed; for the Leaping Fawn was not among them—and every look directed toward me was savage and revengeful.

All appeared to regard me as the victim on whom they were to vent their rage for the loss the tribe had sustained in their vindictive expedition against my countrymen, and also for the death of the warrior slain by Langee. Even the children took deep interest in the hellish sport already begun, and laughed, and clapped their little hands with savage delight, or glared upon me with eyes scarcely less fierce in expression than those of their older companions.

For a few minutes the Soolepcooms danced around me in the manner related—thrusting their filthy and hideous

faces, with their blood-shot eyes, close to mine—and then they began to inflict the first degrees of those tortures which the Council of the Wepecoolahs had sentenced me to undergo.

They commenced their personal inflictions by pinching me, biting me, and striking me in the face and on the body with their hands, fists, and sticks.

I bore this for some time, with what patience I could, knowing that resistance were in vain; but at last, stung to madness, and my limbs being free, I determined to make what use of them I could, hoping that, out of impulsive revenge, some one would put me out of my misery, by dispatching me at once.

I therefore struck a posture of defence, and commenced knocking down all who got within the reach of my arm; but this so far from producing the consequence I desired and expected, only added to the amusement; and my pugilistic display was greeted with screams and yells of laughter by the greater portion of the crowd, who kept at a safe distance from my blows, and seemed to urge the Soolepcooms (who, as I said before, formed the inner circle) to retaliate in a becoming manner.

These latter—several of whom had already felt the weight of my clenched hands, and showed it in bruised and bloody faces—now fairly screeched with rage; and, drawing their knives, they at once pressed upon me, and began to prick and cut me on all sides—ever taking care, though, not to inflict a mortal wound—well knowing that to kill me was the very poorest revenge they could have.

Finding I could effect nothing with my blows, I now endeavored to rush through the crowd—not with any expectation of escape—but merely because I knew not what better to do with myself; but every where I turned, these she-wolves, as if anticipating my design, gathered

thickest; and a dozen sharp blades were continually lacerating my legs, hands, arms, breast and face, till I was literally covered with blood from head to foot; while the spectators laughed loudly, and cheered on my inhuman tormentors.

At last, goaded to desperation, like a wild beast at bay, I watched my opportunity, and suddenly pouncing upon an old hag, I wrenched the weapon from her grasp, drove it up to the haft in her naked breast, and hurled her back upon her diabolical companions, greatly to their astonishment, rage, and dismay. I was now armed as well as themselves; and fiercely brandishing my knife, I caused them to fall back, till I had cleared a circle around me beyond the reach of my arm, within which the old hag I had struck down lay weltering in her gore, whether living or dead I neither knew nor cared.

Finding that I was now sufficiently armed and desperate to keep the Squaw-workers at bay—and fearful, I suppose, that I might either kill myself or some of their number—several of the warriors, who had been looking on and enjoying the *sport*, now thought it time to interfere.

As I saw them approaching to overpower and disarm me, and thought of the dreadful fate to which I was doomed, I raised my arm, with the intention of burying the knife in my heart; but I remembered the words of the Holy Book, which denounce eternal woe upon the self-murderer, and reflected that it might be better for me hereafter to bear more worldly pain, and go into the presence of my God and Judge by other hands than my own. I therefore uttered a mental prayer to the Almighty for mercy, and aid to sustain me through my awful trials, and lowered my arm, resolved to be taken without further struggle.

The warriors consequently came up, took the knife from

my unresisting hand, and, to prevent a repetition of my daring act, bound my arms behind my back. I was now, of course, completely at their mercy, and expected the cowardly attack of the Soolepcooms to be renewed; but the men held a short consultation among themselves; and coming to the conclusion, probably, that the preliminary sport had lasted long enough, they led me away to the stake.

Encircling this stake, at a distance of several feet from it, was a pile of fagots; and attached to the stake was a rope of skin, which, when fastened to the ligature that bound my arms behind me, would allow me to approach within two feet of the fuel—but no nearer. I now comprehended the diabolical design—which was to set fire to the combustibles, and cause me to literally roast alive by degrees—for I could not approach near enough to the flame to terminate my sufferings speedily.

When arrived within the circle of fagots, the warriors loosened my cords, stripped all of my upper garments from my lacerated body, and then rebinding my arms as before, fastened the rope of the stake to the ligature, leaving me just so much play as I have mentioned.

All now being ready for the last horrible proceeding, which was to pass me from time to eternity, the spectators formed themselves into a large circle, so that all could get a view of their victim, and set up a series of demoniacal yells, which, as they continued them for some time, without any action on their part toward firing the combustibles, I took to be the signal for the chief to make his appearance.

This idea was confirmed, when, a short time after, I saw Kenneloo come stalking from his cabin, his repulsive features wearing a look of savage triumph and satisfaction.

I had all along believed, that when the chief appeared,

he would be accompanied by Dundenah; but the latter was no where to be seen; and under the impression that her design of saving me—if, in fact, she had seriously entertained one—had failed, and that she did not wish to see me die, I now resigned the last faint hope that had lingered, like a flickering, dying flame in my breast, and employed my moments in silently commending my soul to its Maker.

The chief of the Wepecoolahs came within the circle of spectators, drew close to the circle of fagots, deliberately folded his arms on his brawny chest, fixed his black eyes upon me, and regarded me for some moments with a grim smile of satisfaction. Then stepping slowly backward to the others, he waved his arm, as a signal to fire the combustibles.

An old, withered, toothless, filthy crone—who, from her diabolical appearance, seemed fit to serve Satan as executioner, should the arch-fiend ever need one—now entered the circle of spectators from without, bearing in one long, skinny hand a burning brand. Instead of placing this at once to the fagots, however, as I had expected to see her do, she stepped over them, came close up to me, fixed her hollow, bleared eyes upon mine, and, with a grin, which the devil himself might have envied, suddenly thrust the brand against my naked body.

I of course started back, and involuntarily uttered a sharp cry of pain.

At this the spectators set up a shout of laughter; and the old hag chuckled and cackled in concert, till she was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which I hoped and prayed might terminate her existence.

As soon as this was over, she straightened herself up as well as she could, and again approached me, with the intention of repeating the brutal act and creating fresh

mirth; but now I at least knew her design, and determined to punish her with a severity that would at once put a check to her own merriment, and give her cause to remember me for the rest of her life. Retreating a pace or two, therefore, as she advanced upon me, I suddenly raised one foot, and striking her full in the breast with it, hurled her back upon the fagots, over which she fell; and her head striking upon the hard earth, she lay motionless, like one dead.

This second daring act of mine was greeted with yells of every description—but whether of mirth or rage I was unable to tell—though I think it not improbable there was a mingling of both. Some of the women stepped forward, picked up the old hag, and bore her away in a senseless condition; while another of their number seized the brand, which had fallen from her hand hard by, and at once thrust it among the combustibles.

These combustibles, many of which were resinous pine, splintered fine, and dry as tinder, quickly ignited; and as the flame rose, it spread away to the right and left along the encircling pile. This was the signal for the renewal of savage yells; but unmindful of these now, I fixed my eyes upon the fire, and my thoughts upon that dread eternity to which I was fast hastening.

It was a beautiful day, and the sun shone brightly down through a clear, cloudless atmosphere; but it shone not for me, who had bidden a mental adieu to all I had ever seen or known, and was now preparing my spirit, by silent prayer, for its eternal flight.

Suddenly I was startled from my meditations by a shrill, piercing scream; and as I looked around, a female burst through the ring of spectators, who seemed as much astonished as myself, rushed straight toward me, leaped

over the fagots, threw her arms about my neck, and exclaimed:

"Henry! dear, dear Henry! we meet again to part no more—I have come to die with you."

How shall I convey to the reader the unbounded astonishment I felt, as these words, in thrilling tones, fell upon my ear from the lips of the lovely Clara Moreland? It was like the voice of one from the dead—it was like the apparition of one from the grave—so suddenly were my senses of hearing, seeing, and feeling, greeted by one I never thought to meet again on earth—never thought to look upon again with mortal eyes; and but for the weight pressing against me, as she hung, half-fainting, around my neck, I might still have been tempted to believe that all was unreal, the fantasy of a feverish brain.

Till Clara spoke I had not recognized her; and no wonder; for her own habiliments had been taken from her, and she was now costumed much like Dundenah, with her long sunny hair braided in the same Gipsy style. I at once comprehended that she had been adopted into the tribe—but for some moments my emotions were too great for utterance.

"Whence come you, dear Clara, at this awful moment?" I at length articulated.

"From the lodge of the chief, to die with you," she said, hurriedly. "They have kept me a close prisoner; they would not let me see you; but I heard their awful yells, and caught a glimpse of your person as they dragged you away; and with superhuman strength I tried my bonds; and here I am, to die with you."

At this moment Kenneloo and two or three of his warriors came up to separate us. Seizing Clara roughly by the arm, the chief made angry signs to her to begone.

"No! no! no!" cried Clara, wildly, clinging to my

neck: "you shall not part us! you shall not part us! I have come to die with him!"

I could do nothing to assist the poor girl, for my hands were bound behind my back; and the next moment her arms were violently torn from around my neck, and, with a buffet in the face, from the hand of the chief, she staggered and fell to the ground.

Oh! in that awful moment, had the arch fiend of hell appeared to offer me vengeance upon the inhuman monster before me, I fear, in my excited state of mind, I should have purchased it at any price. What were the physical sufferings and tortures I had undergone, and was to undergo, compared to the mental torture of seeing her I loved, beyond self or every thing earthly, struck down in that unfeeling, brutal manner? But I was powerless—I could do nothing—and I fairly gnashed my teeth in impotent rage, and invoked the curse of Heaven upon the diabolical chief and his infernal followers.

Perceiving that any pain inflicted upon Clara would cause me to suffer more than if done to myself, Kenneloo assisted her to rise; and then turning upon me a grim, malignant smile, he grasped her arm in such a way as to force from her a piercing scream; and then another, and another—till I was so overcome with conflicting emotions, that I felt as if my brain were on fire, and fancied that my reason was leaving me.

How long this might have continued, I know not; but suddenly Dundenah made her appearance, accompanied by a squaw of rather better appearance than the generality of the females of the tribe. She advanced straight to her father, and, with fierce gestures and flashing eyes, addressed him in his native tongue. Instantly he released his hold on Clara; when, turning to her, Dundenah exclaimed, in English:

"How is it that Dundenah finds the Blue-Eye here, when she bade her remain in the lodge of the chief?"

"I came to die with my companion in captivity," replied Clara, bursting into tears.

This seemed to touch the feelings of Dundenah—for she said, in a milder tone:

"The Blue-Eye is as a child, and knows not what is for her own good. Return to the lodge, and await my coming."

"No, no, Dundenah—since he must die, rather let me suffer with him—for I have no desire to live any longer."

"Away!" cried Dundenah, fiercely, stamping her foot: "Begone! and do my bidding! or, by the spirits of the slain! the Dark-Eye shall suffer tenfold for this disobedience!"

"Oh, God! have mercy on me and on him, and soften the hearts of his tormentors!" cried Clara, wringing her hands. "Farewell, Henry," she continued, turning to me with streaming eyes: "I shall soon follow you, and we may meet in Heaven. Farewell! farewell!" and with a burst of anguish, she clasped her temples with her hands, and darted away, as if she feared to trust herself longer in my presence.

As soon as Clara was out of sight, Dundenah addressed a few words to the chief, and pointed to the female who had accompanied her. Kenneloo started, and instantly his face grew still more hideous with rage; and fairly gnashing his teeth in fury, he drew a knife from his belt, and raised it as if to strike his daughter.

Dundenah returned him a look of stern, haughty defiance; and throwing back her body, pointed to her heart, and seemed to dare him to strike.

Kenneloo paused; but for some moments kept his hand raised, as if undetermined whether to take her life or not;

while the spectators, crowding forward, regarded the two in breathless silence, none caring to interfere in a quarrel between the chief and his child.

Suddenly Kenneloo lowered his arm; and stamping his foot, and uttering a fierce ejaculation, he turned on his heel and strode away, all eyes following him.

Meantime the fire had kept upon its devouring course, and had already reached half-way round the circle—though by retreating the length of my rope, to the other side of the stake, I had thus far avoided any suffering from the heat. The scene I have described between Kenneloo and Dundenah, had taken place within a few feet of me; and as the former disappeared, the latter turned to me, and for several moments regarded me with an expression so peculiar, that I knew not how to interpret it. Then, methought, as her eyes ran slowly over my person, lacerated and bloody, her look softened to something like compassion.

"The Dark-Eye has been roughly handled," she said.

"I have suffered indignities almost unbearable," I replied, in a dejected tone.

"And did the Dark-Eye think Dundenah had deserted him?"

"I thought that, being unable to save my life, and not wishing to see me suffer, she had intentionally kept out of sight," I rejoined.

"And why should the Dark-Eye think that the Leaping Fawn had no wish to see him undergo the tortures?"

"Because she seems more like one of my race—has intelligence and refinement far beyond those of her companions—and there have, at times, at least I have fancied so, been kindness and sympathy expressed in her looks, tones, words, and manner."

"But, withal, the Dark-Eye thought Dundenah powerless to save him?"

"Even so."

"And does he still think so?"

"I know not your power, Dundenah," I replied; "but I know that unless I am rescued soon, I shall soon be beyond the help of any thing mortal. See! it is fast doing its work;" and I pointed to the fire.

"But will not do it so fast as the Dark-Eye thinks," she rejoined. "It is true, the heat may become oppressive, and blister the flesh; but it would take hours to deprive the Dark-Eye of life, or even to put him beyond feeling pain. No, no—the Indian knows too well what his victim can bear; and in a case like the present, he is ever careful about putting him too suddenly beyond his reach."

"The invention is worthy of such a race," I said, bitterly.

Dundenah frowned, bit her lips, and seemed about to make an angry retort; but apparently checked herself, and substituted:

"The Dark-Eye has seen his companion in captivity?"

"Yes," I sighed; "but I would she were dead."

"How?" cried the Indian maiden, eagerly.

"Yes, I repeat, I would she were dead! since I know in what vile manner she is treated."

The dark features of Dundenah flushed with passion, and her eyes gleamed like fire, as, drawing herself up with a haughtiness I have never seen equalled, she rejoined:

"Has the pale-face maiden then made such bitter complaints to the Dark-Eye?"

"No need," I said; "my own eyes were witnesses of the brutality."

"And what did the eye of the Dark-Eye behold?"

"I saw her struck down by the hands of the chief, and afterward so roughly handled that she was forced to scream for pain."

"But had she obeyed Dundenah, this had not happened," was the quick reply.

"And were she dead, it would not be repeated," said I.

"If the Dark-Eye would have her dead, it is but a moment's work," rejoined Dundenah; and her features bore such a strange, wild expression, as the words slowly passed from her lips, that I fairly shrunk from her gaze. "Would the Dark-Eye have her dead, and live himself?" she continued, after a long pause, her eyes still rivetted upon me.

"No! no! Dundenah: if I were to live, I would have her live also."

"Then is the Dark-Eye selfish," she said; "he would either have her with him here or in the Spirit-Land."

"It is even so, I acknowledge—self governs us all, in a greater or less degree."

"But if the Blue-Eye must live, would the Dark-Eye live also?"

"Yes—for life is sweet, and nature shrinks from death."

"Would the Dark-Eye consent to become an Indian, even as those he sees around him?"

"Yes, I would accept life even on such conditions," I replied, "provided I could be allowed to meet my companion occasionally, and cheer her drooping spirits."

"It sounds strange in the ears of Dundenah to hear a prisoner fix the terms on which he will accept his own life," rejoined the maiden, with something like irony. "But Dundenah led the Dark-Eye to hope that she would make an effort to save him, if he followed her counsel; and she is here to make her word good, even at the peril of

her life. By a law of the Wepecoolahs, a mother, who has lost an only son, can replace him by adopting a prisoner who has been condemned by Council, and around whom the torture-fire is already kindled; but her own life and another's must stand pledged for his good behaviour; and if he prove false, one or both of his liberators must undergo the sentence from which they rescue him. This woman, (pointing to the one who had accompanied her) is the mother of a brave who lost his life in the last expedition of the Wepecoolahs against your race; and though revenge is sweet to an Indian mother, yet the great Wandewah has so softened her heart, that the words of the Leaping Fawn have prevailed upon her to save the life of the Dark-Eye, by substituting him for the slain; and she whose life stands pledged with hers for the good faith of him they liberate, is the daughter of Kenneloo."

"Noble Dundenah!" cried I, as she ceased speaking: "how have I wronged you in thought!—but if I live, and it is ever in my power, I will convince you of my gratitude for this unselfish act, by something more than idle words."

"Let the Dark-Eye then show his gratitude, by never seeking to escape from those who will henceforth call him brother and son," she said. "Remember!" she continued, as she marked the change in my countenance, produced by these words—for in truth the idea of becoming an Indian, and remaining so, was so revolting to my feelings, that, but for the thought that I might be able to protect Clara from insult and abuse, I think I should have preferred death to life on such conditions: "Remember!" pursued Dundenah—"should the Dark-Eye abuse the confidence reposed in him, we must suffer in his place!"

"Enough!" I rejoined: "may the curse of Wandewah be upon me, when I prove so base a wretch as treacher-

ously to cause my generous deliverers to take my place at the torture!"

"When the fire encircles the stake, the Dark-Eye shall be free, or Dundenah and he shall together seek the Spirit Land!" returned the maiden, in a tone of much solemnity.

"What mean you?" I inquired, in surprise.

"As yet the Wepecoolahs know not that they are about to have their victim snatched from them," she replied; "and there is no saying what they may do in their first burst of fury. Let the Dark-Eye be firm and composed, and trust in Wandewah!"

Saying this, she withdrew from the circle of fagots, and, drawing her form up to its full height, began to address the spectators, who, during her conversation with me, had been looking on, with an air of eager curiosity, but evidently without comprehending a sentence that had passed between us.

I of course understood nothing that she said now; but I watched the faces of the crowd, to gain from their looks an index of what would be the result of her communication. The first prevailing expression was that of surprise, which was succeeded by anger, and finally by rage of the most diabolical kind, during which the voice of Dundenah was drowned by yells of fury, while knives and tomahawks were fiercely brandished with menacing gestures. Dundenah, proud and imperious as a queen on her throne, calmly withstood the storm of passion; and so soon as she could make her voice heard, again proceeded. Gradually the loud tumult subsided to low, deep mutterings; and the warriors, collecting together, seemed to hold a consultation; while I caught many an eye turned upon me, with an expression that boded any thing but safety to myself.

Meantime the fire had completed its circuit; and the flames now roared and crackled around me; while the

heat, from being almost suffocating, now began to burn and blister my flesh, rendering my position at the stake, to which I had withdrawn as the point farthest from the blaze, one of torture almost unbearable.

Suddenly the light, graceful form of Dundenah burst into the burning circle, and the next moment her knife had freed me from my bonds.

"Follow me!" she said; "but be composed—be prudent—for even now the life of the Dark-Eye hangs in the balance."

It may readily be supposed that I did not wait for a second invitation to quit my place of torture, even though I rushed into the midst of an assemblage of beings all thirsting for my heart's blood, or a punishment still more terrible.

Dundenah kept close to my side; and as the crowd pressed around us, with looks of savage ferocity and baffled revenge, she waved her hand, and commanded them back, with an air of such calm, lofty dignity, such proud superiority, that none upon whom her dark eye fell, with its piercing glance of intellectual fire, seemed willing to brave her displeasure.

Still the press continued; for though the crowd drew back from my companion, wherever she turned, yet no sooner was her eye off of them, than they came up behind, with menacing looks and gestures. The most ferocious of the assemblage, were, as before, the Soolepcooms, who glared upon me like so many wild beasts, and seemed terribly eager to revenge themselves upon me, both for the disappointment of their hellish gratification, and for the loss of their fiendish companion, who had fallen by my hand.

I kept my eye upon them as much as possible, well knowing that they only sought an opportunity to take me

unawares, and obtain some revenge by killing me on the spot, since there was no longer a prospect of my undergoing the torture.

Suddenly I felt a sharp pain in my side; and uttering a groan, I told Dundenah I had received my death-wound. Never shall I forget the look of agonised horror which she turned upon me—nor the expression of fiendish rage which the next moment distorted her beautiful features, as her eye fell upon an old hag close by, who was in the act of brandishing a bloody knife.

With a yell of concentrated fury, which I can liken to nothing earthly, and which still seems to be ringing in my ear, she fairly bounded upon the aggressor; and in less time than it has taken me to record the fact, she buried her own knife a dozen times in the breast of the assassin.

I saw this, but no more. My brain reeled—the earth turned dark—all objects disappeared—and I fell to the ground in a senseless condition.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RECOVERY.

THE first recollection I have after the events described in the foregoing chapter, I opened my eyes in a small cabin or hut, constructed of sticks, bark, earth and skins, and found myself lying upon a mat in one corner, with a few skins thrown over me to protect me from the cold. There was no person present; and I looked around with a bewildered air, trying to recollect where I was, and what had happened. Then something vague, but horrible, began to float through my mind, like the confused remembrance of a hideous dream; and from this it gradually took the form of reality; till, one by one, memory placed before me the incidents which are already known to the reader.

I recalled to mind my captivity, and all that had followed, up to the time when I received what I then believed to be my death-wound; and this led me to try and feel the nature and extent of that wound.

But when I attempted to raise my arm for the purpose, I found it stiff and sore, and that I was in reality almost as weak as an infant. This set me into a train of calculation as to the amount of time which had elapsed since my hurt; but I soon found that I really could not determine whether I had remained unconscious an hour, a day, or a week; while the dressing of my wounds, though in a rude way, seemed to denote that my heroic deliverer had so far triumphed that I had fallen into friendly hands.

While my mind was thus occupied, a female entered the hut; and as she drew near me, I recognized the features of the mother who had accompanied Dundenah to adopt me as her son.

It was no pleasant recollection, that fate had so ordained it that I must henceforth have an Indian mother; but since it was to be so, I was rejoiced to perceive that the features of my new parent were by no means repulsive, and that she at least had a clean and tidy appearance.

As she came up, I fixed my eyes upon her, and inquired how long I had lain there? and what had become of Dundenah?

She evidently understood nothing but the name of the Leaping Fawn; but she looked pleased to hear me speak; and pointing to the door, made some reply in the guttural tone peculiar to the Indian of nearly every tribe.

She then made signs that she would call Dundenah, and immediately went out. In a few minutes she returned, and, to my great delight, was accompanied by the object of her inquiry.

The step and bearing of Dundenah were still as graceful and proud as ever; but I noticed that her eye had lost its fiery fierceness of expression, that the brown hue of her cheeks had faded, and that her features generally were softened by a shade of sadness amounting almost to melancholy.

These changes, though they added the charm of loveliness to what was before a cold, rigid beauty, I was not pleased to see—for they betokened sorrow in the heart of one, who had, no matter from what motive, generously and heroically perilled her life to save mine.

As she came up to my side, she bent down, and fixing her dark eyes upon mine, gently touched my hand with hers, and said, in a tone of deep feeling:

“Does the Dark-Eye know Dundenah?”

“Yes,” I replied; “and may I cease to know any thing, when I forget that I owe my life to your noble conduct!”

Tears involuntarily started to the eyes of the maiden; and bowing her face upon her hands, she wept for the first time in my presence.

I was deeply moved at this display of feeling; and in a gentle tone, I asked her the cause of her sorrow: but she only wept the more, without making me any reply.

At last she raised her head, and looking upward, said, solemnly:

“Thanks to the Great Wandewah, that the Dark-Eye is restored to his senses!”

“And how long have I been unconscious?” I inquired.

“Ten suns have set and rose since the knife of Ochlee pierced the side of the Dark-Eye.”

I could hardly credit the statement, that ten days had passed since I had been rescued from the tortures of the stake. It seemed rather like a horrible dream—from which, after a few hours of troubled sleep, I had awakened—and I so expressed myself to my companion.

“Yes,” she replied, “ten weary days and nights has death hung over the Dark-Eye; but the Great Wandewah has been pleased not to call him to the Spirit-Land.”

“And where is the Blue-Eye?” I inquired, with no little anxiety. “I trust no harm has befallen her?”

The face of Dundenah instantly flushed to the temples; and again fixing her eyes upon me with one of those peculiar expressions—which, as I have before remarked, I knew not how to interpret—she said:

“Does the image of the pale-faced maiden ever dwell in the mind of the Dark-Eye?”

“She is seldom absent from my thoughts,” I answered.

Again she regarded me, for a few moments, with the same singular expression of countenance; and then slowly turned aside her head, with what I fancied was a sorrowful, melancholy air.

"But you have not answered my question concerning the Blue-Eye!" I persisted.

"She is safe and well," was her reply.

"Thanks, Dundenah, for this cheering news!" I rejoined. "Is she a close prisoner?"

"She has the same freedom as others of her sex. She has long been a member of the tribe."

"Has she ever been here to see me?"

"Daily."

"And how does she bear herself?"

"She weeps when with the Dark-Eye, and at all times seems sad and dejected."

"Poor Clara!" I ejaculated: "would to Heaven she were with her friends!"

"Could the Dark-Eye content him to remain with the Wepecoolahs, were the Blue-Eye absent?" inquired Dundenah, quickly.

"I would that she were with her friends; and I know too well the obligation that binds me here, to think of accompanying her," I replied.

"There are many who will promise much in the hour of difficulty and danger, and forget their promise when difficulty and danger are past," said Dundenah.

"It may be so, Dundenah, but count not me among their number."

"And the Dark-Eye would have his companion in captivity among her friends, and yet himself remain with the Wepecoolahs?"

"Even so. But can she be sent home?"

"It is far—very far—to the home of the Blue-Eye,"

said my companion, reflectingly: "but Kenneloo is powerful to accomplish his will."

"And who can so plead with him as Dundenah?" I rejoined, with a ray of hope that, through her, I might yet accomplish the deliverance of Clara.

"But if Kenneloo is powerful to do his will, he is also wilful in his power," returned Dundenah. "He will be loth to give up a prisoner; and I fear his daughter might plead to him in vain."

"But you will try, Dundenah?" I said, watching her countenance: "For my sake!" I added, a few moments afterward.

"For the sake of the Dark-Eye, Dundenah will try," she replied, in a tone of earnest simplicity, turning upon me a look so sweet and gentle, that I could hardly realize she was the same cold, proud, haughty being I had first known her.

"Thanks! thanks! a thousand thanks for your kindness!" I rejoined, in a tone of exhilaration. "And now will you render my obligation to you still greater, by letting me see the Blue-Eye at once?"

Dundenah shook her head gently.

"The Dark-Eye is too weak to-day," she said—"he must not be overtaxed. He needs rest to bring back his strength—for now he is like an infant."

She then turned to my Indian mother, and said a few words to her in her native tongue. The latter immediately took down a bladder from a peg in the wall, and poured therefrom into a horn-cup some kind of liquid. This cup she handed to Dundenah, who handed it to me, saying:

"Let the Dark-Eye drink this, and forget his sorrows in sleep."

"Perhaps," said I, as I took the cup and looked at its

dark contents, "it will send me to that sleep which has no waking."

Dundenah frowned, bit her lips, and rejoined, rather sternly:

"Is the Dark-Eye then suspicious of those who have periled their lives to save his?"

"Forgive me!" I returned: "I meant no offence: I will drink it presently. But first tell me of my wound!"

"It is healing—though thought at the time to be mortal," she replied.

"And she who struck the blow?"

"Died by the hand of Dundenah," cried my companion, with something of her original fierceness. "She was a Soolepcoom, and unworthy to live."

This, be it remarked, was the second time I had heard the word Soolepcoom mentioned; and though I have explained its signification to the reader, by way of convenience, yet it was not till afterward, during my captivity, that I learned it myself.

"And she whom I struck down with the knife?" I pursued.

"Is still living. There—drink!"

"One question more, Dundenah: What became of Langee?"

"He escaped the vengeance of the Wepecoolahs," she replied, with another frown.

"Was he pursued?"

"Yes, by twenty warriors."

"Thank God that he has escaped!" was my mental ejaculation.

I now again looked at the contents of the cup—and not, if truth must be told, without strong misgivings that it might prove a deadly narcotic.

Not that I thought Dundenah or my Indian mother

wished my death—for if so, why had they endangered their lives to save mine? or why not have sent me to my last sleep during my unconsciousness?

No! I had no fears that they meant me ill—but rather that they might have mistaken the quantity they were giving me.

Had there been an opportunity to have thrown a part of it away, without being observed, I certainly should have done so; but the eyes of Dundenah were upon me; and I could not think of offending her, or of wounding her sensitive feelings, by exhibiting to her such a want of confidence in her prescription. I therefore raised the cup slowly to my lips—but probably with an air of hesitation—for she said, in a quick, proud tone:

"If the Dark-Eye fears to drink, give the cup to Dundenah, and she will drain it."

I hesitated no longer; but, without a word in reply, instantly drank off the liquid. It had a slightly bitter, pungent taste—but was neither nauseous nor unpleasant. Its effect, however, was quick and powerful; for scarcely had I swallowed it, when I felt a soft delicious languor begin to steal over me. I no longer had any animation or energy; and if my own father had then appeared to me, and told me I was free, I should not have taken the trouble to make him a reply. Soon the lids of my eyes began to close—slowly, gradually, as by their own volition—and then, free from care and sorrow, and perfectly happy, I sunk into a sweet oblivion.

When I again opened my eyes, it was night—but what time of night I had no means of knowing. The hut was dark—or rather, only lighted by the ruddy gleam of a fire, which was burning on the common, and which shone in through a few crannies at the door, where hung several

skins to keep out the cold, for it was now late in the fall, and the nights here were frosty.

I felt refreshed by my sleep, but somewhat faint for want of food, and very thirsty. I peered around the hut, as well as I could, but could see no person in attendance.

Thinking there might be some one within the sound of my voice, I spoke in a loud tone. Instantly a bundle, rolled up in one corner, appeared endowed with life, and presently a human figure stood up, and, going to the door, withdrew the skins, so that the fire on the common could shine in upon the spot where I lay. Then the figure advanced to my side, and I recognized the features of my Indian mother.

I made signs to her that I was both hungry and thirsty. She seemed to have anticipated this, and prepared accordingly—for she immediately brought me a cup of water, and some kind of gruel, of which I drank to my satisfaction and felt much strengthened and refreshed. She then looked to my wounds—taking off the bandages, wetting them in some kind of solution, and replacing them again—and all with a care and tenderness that won upon my feelings.

This done, and having carefully covered me with skins, she held up her open palms, as a sign that she had finished. I nodded, and pointed to her pallet; and she immediately retired, leaving me to myself. I regretted I could not make myself understood in language—for there were several questions I wished to ask—but as this could not be, I again composed myself to sleep; and, aided by the narcotic, of which I still felt the influence, I was soon in the land of dreams.

When I again awoke, the sun was brightly shining; and my Indian mother—or Omema, as she was called—was standing in the doorway, looking out upon the common.

She instantly came to me, brought me some more gruel, and, while I was engaged in drinking it, went out.

In a few minutes, to my surprise and joy, Clara entered hastily; and, approaching me with a quick, nervous step, she dropped upon her knees by my side, and burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

"Clara!" I said, in a choking voice; "dear Clara—God bless you!—do not weep!"

But the sound of my voice only appeared to increase her emotion—for she fairly sobbed aloud, and swayed back and forth, her eyes still covered by her hands, through the fingers of which the hot tears were trickling fast. I spoke to her again—but she took no notice of me; and I thought it best to remain silent till her overcharged feelings had found proper vent.

At length she grew calmer; and suddenly clasping her hands, and turning her soft, tearful eyes and pale face upward, fervently ejaculated:

"God be praised, that he lives to speak to me again! God be praised!"

"Clara! dear, dear Clara!" I said, and then stopped: for my heart was too full to say more; and already my own eyes were dim with tears that I had in vain tried to repress.

"Oh! Henry," she said, turning her soft blue eyes upon me, in whose liquid depths was a soul of earnest tenderness: "Oh! Henry—I have prayed for this—daily, nightly, hourly—and God has granted my prayer. I have shed many, many bitter tears of sorrow; but these you see are tears of joy—thankful joy. Oh! to meet you living—conscious—and to hear you speak my name—is happiness enough for once—more would turn my brain. And you will recover, and need no longer fear the stake! Oh!"

this is too much ! too much !" and drooping her head upon her breast, she sobbed anew.

"Bless you, dear Clara ! Heaven bless you !" was all I could utter in reply, as I clasped her soft hand and bedewed it with tears.

At length we both became more composed, when I continued :

"But tell me, dear Clara, how has it been with you in your captivity ? I can see by your pale, wasted features, that you have suffered greatly in mind—but have you been roughly treated and abused ?"

"The day you were to undergo the tortures," she replied, "Dundenah confined me in the lodge, by binding my hands and feet—for she said if I were at liberty, my imprudence would ruin all her plans—though what those plans were, I knew not at the time, and had no idea that she intended to save you. I caught a glimpse of the Indians hurrying you away to the stake ; and thinking I should never see you again in life, I became almost frantic. How I broke from my bonds, I scarcely know ; but I did break from them, and ran to you, in the hope that they would let me die with you."

"God bless you, Clara !"

"You saw how I was then treated by the chief—but it was the first and only time he ever laid violent hands upon me. I believe he might have done so, at other times, but that he seems to fear offending Dundenah, who has great influence over him, and I am under her special protection."

"And how has she treated you ?"

"Her acts have been kind—but her words and manner cold and constrained. It is only when she speaks of you, dear Henry, that she exhibits any thing like tender or sympathetic feeling ; and as if ashamed of this, she ever tries to hide it under a still more haughty exterior."

"She does speak of me then ?" I said, quickly.

"Often—in fact, she seldom holds any conversation with me, without in some manner introducing you into it."

It was now for the first time that a startling suspicion flashed across my mind, of what undoubtedly the reader has ere this fixed upon for a certainty—namely : that the Indian maiden had conceived for me a passion, the nature and extent of which might be determined from her previous acts, her powerful energies, and the firmness of her character. A hundred things I had not before thought of, now rushed upon my recollection, all tending to confirm this startling idea.

And startling it was ; for if it really were as I feared, I foresaw that serious, if not terrible, consequences must ultimately ensue to one or all of us.

This then, perhaps, was why Clara and I had been separated, and not allowed to meet, till fate or Providence had unexpectedly thrown us together : this then accounted for the strange manner of Dundenah, whenever I had inquired after my companion in captivity, and her steady refusal to answer my questions, leading me to the inference that she had been foully dealt with : this then was why she had seemed so ready to take her life, or set her at liberty, at my request : and this, to conclude, was the secret spring of her noble conduct in saving my life, and trusting in my honor to remain forever with the tribe.

All these things, I say, now flashed upon me at once ; and I involuntarily sighed, as I thought of what might be the result.

"Why do you sigh, Henry, and seem so dejected ?" inquired Clara, tenderly.

"Is it not enough to make me sigh and be dejected, to recollect that I am doomed here to hopeless captivity ?" I replied, evasively—for if Clara suspected nothing, I

thought it better not to add to her troubles by telling her my suspicions.

"And is our captivity indeed hopeless?" inquired she, sorrowfully.

"Mine, I fear, is—but I hope better things for you," I replied.

"How so?" she asked, quickly.

I repeated the conversation I had the day before held with Dundenah concerning her.

"And you really think I may be set at liberty?—or rather, be escorted home to my parents?"

"I think I may prevail upon Dundenah—or rather, that Dundenah may prevail upon her father, to have this effected," I replied.

"And you, dear Henry—what will become of you?"

"I must remain here," I sighed.

"But surely, if you can accomplish so much for me, you can do as much for yourself? If Dundenah will let me go, she certainly will not refuse you the same privilege?"

"She cannot liberate me without endangering her own life, Clara."

"How so?"

I explained to her how that, in saving me from the torture, Dundenah and Omema had become responsible with their lives for my becoming an Indian, and remaining with the tribe.

"But perhaps," suggested Clara, "Dundenah might prevail upon the Indians to consent to your departure?"

I had good reason to believe that Dundenah would make no such effort in my behalf; and I gave Clara to understand it was hopeless to expect it, without saying wherefore.

"Then will I remain also," returned Clara, firmly.

"But think of your parents? your friends?"

"Oh! my dear parents!" cried she, bursting into tears—"how have they borne my loss? I fear it has killed my poor mother already."

"The more reason, then, that you should return to them, without delay," I urged.

"And leave you here a prisoner?"

"But I shall be a prisoner if you stay, dear Clara—so that your going will make my fate no worse."

"But I should be afraid to go if you were not along, dear Henry. No! no! I will remain and take my chance with you."

I thought of Warncliff, my rival, to whom her hand was pledged—and of her stern father insisting upon having the fatal ceremony performed that would indeed separate her forever from me—and I urged her no more; for in her present captivity there was hope in life; but in that other captivity, her hope of release must be fixed on the grave.

I therefore changed the conversation, by inquiring how it was that, if at liberty, she had never come to visit me in the Council House?

"I was not permitted," she replied. "Dundenah warned me, that should I either see you—or, by my voice, in any way make known to you that I was living—she would take care to make good the separation in future, by sending me to a neighboring tribe. To have been so separated, would have been worse than death, and fear kept me silent."

"And how was it you saw not the Hermit?"

"On the return of the warriors, I was secreted by Dundenah, lest, seeing me in their wrath, I should be slain. By her instructions, I had previously been adopted into the tribe—so that I could not be tried for the stake as you were."

"In what manner were you adopted into the tribe?" I inquired.

As Clara was about to reply, the Leaping Fawn appeared, and said that for the present our interview must close, as I must not be fatigued with too much conversation. Clara accordingly took her departure; but seemed, I fancied, in better spirits than at any time since our capture.

CHAPTER XV.

TEDIOUS CAPTIVITY.

I AM not writing a journal of daily transactions; but rather throwing into a connective narrative such important incidents and events of my life as will be most likely to interest the reader and conduce to the *denouement* of my story. Hence I trust I may be permitted to arrange my narrative, with regard to time, scene and dialogue, according to my judgment of what is most effective in description, or necessary to be told to a true understanding and comprehension of the whole.

If, therefore, I endeavor to compress into a few pages what occupied months in reality, the reader must not think I have conducted him thus far in my adventures, to insult his good nature and perseverance by slurring over the remainder; but rather that I dismiss with a few words what might otherwise prove tedious, in order to do justice to his expectations, by portraying scenes and events of a character not less exciting than any he has witnessed.

I recovered gradually, but slowly, and weeks rolled away ere I fully regained my wonted strength. I saw Clara and Dundenah daily—so that the time passed less tediously than it otherwise would have done.

The more I saw of Dundenah, however, the more was I convinced that my suspicions, regarding the motive of her peculiar conduct toward Clara and myself, were well founded; and yet to combat these suspicions was the fact, that she permitted us to meet daily, and converse without

interruption; and this, too, without exhibiting any of that jealousy which seldom fails to be aroused by the presence of a powerful rival. Perhaps she had seen enough to be convinced that my affections were unchangeably fixed upon Clara, and that in her absence she would have no more hope of my returning her own passion than as matters now stood, and therefore thought it best to silently acquiesce in a decree of fate beyond any power of hers to alter.

Be this as it may, it was not without painful interest that I beheld the brown hue of her cheeks gradually change to a sickly pallor; that I saw her proud, haughty look gradually give way to dejection and melancholy; that I perceived the fiery expression of her dark eyes gradually superseded by a mild, tender gleam; and that I noted an unusual languor in her steps, and a sad abstraction in her manner. Something had certainly occurred to produce so wonderful a change; and what that something was, I fancied I knew too well.

During her intercourse with me, I learned, at different times, somewhat of her own history, and that of her tribe—which, not to weary the reader with detail, I will compress into the smallest possible space.

It appears that many years ago, at a friendly council of several of the western tribes, a number of young braves, of the different nations, banded together for a grand buffalo hunt, choosing one of the party to act as leader. The hunt over, and being well pleased with each other, they conceived the idea of remaining together, and forming themselves into a distinct tribe. The leader chosen for the hunt was formally declared to be chief; and for laws of government, they selected such as were most popular among the different tribes to which they formally belonged. They named themselves Wepecoolahs, signifying

Forest-Rangers; and in course of time the different languages of different members assimilated, and words became added, till at last they might be said to have a distinct tongue of their own.

When they first united, they were all young and single; but most of them soon took wives after the Indian fashion, and in course of time became fathers of numerous offspring. For some reason Kenneloo was the last to marry; and then he chose for his bridal bed a white captive, taken in one of his expeditions against the frontier settlements of Texas. The only living issue of this union was Dundenah, who inherited her mother's beauty with much of her father's fierceness, while she had peculiarities belonging to neither. The Wepecoolahs had no permanent abode—but, as their title indicated, led somewhat of a roving life. They had located themselves in this valley three several times; and it had so chanced that here it was the Leaping-Fawn first saw the light.

The mother of Dundenah had died when she was quite young; but the daughter still remembered her, and spoke of her with tenderness. From what I could gather from Dundenah—for on this point she was not inclined to be communicative—I conjectured that the captive wife of Kenneloo must have led a sorry life of it; and doubtless death came a welcome messenger to summon her to a happier existence. That she loved her child, is not unreasonable to suppose; but I do not think that one of the refinement I conceive her to have possessed, could ever have regarded the vindictive and bloodthirsty Kenneloo in any other light than that of a savage master and tyrant. Yet Kenneloo, in his rude way, might have loved his gentle captive; for Dundenah said that at her death he was greatly agitated, and for a long time after seemed very much dejected.

It appears that the mother of Dundenah, in the course of her captivity, learned the language of the Wepecoolahs, so as to speak it fluently; but her daughter, and her only, she taught her native tongue, the English; and this probably, partly from the habit of talking to her in infancy in the language most natural to her, and the rest that she might have one ear into which she could pour her sorrows, and not be understood by the others of the tribe, who would not be likely to sympathize with her in her misfortunes.

But though Dundenah had first learned of her mother sufficient English to converse with her in that language to some degree, yet it remained for Langee to perfect her in that freedom of thought and expression—I may call it poetical fluency—of which the sentences already recorded form a very fair specimen. And as this brings me to Langee, I will, as next in order, proceed to speak of that strange being.

Who he was, or whence he came, was not known to my informant. He had first appeared among the tribe while her mother was living, bringing with him a Pawnee to act as interpreter; but finding the wife of Kenneloo could speak English, he soon dismissed his Indian attendant, and addressed his conversation to her, and through her to the tribe, receiving his answers from her lips. In a very short time, by close application and retentive memory, he was able to converse in the Wepecoolah tongue.

His counsels, it appeared, were ever good; but his conduct, unfortunately, too often reprehensible; and as example goes farther than precept, he failed in producing the good effect he might otherwise have done. He had some good traits of character, and many bad ones. He was honorable in the keeping of his word, but a man of most ungovernable passions, which oftentimes made him appear

like a madman. In fact, from what I myself saw of him, and from what I gathered from Dundenah, I do not think that he was at all times sane. Woman seemed to be the cause of his frenzy; and when in one of his moods, he was the terror of all the females of the tribe, with the exception of the mother of Dundenah, whom he never failed to respect. Several times was he on the point of losing his life, which was only saved by the interference of Kenneloo, through the intercession of his wife or daughter.

To Dundenah, as a child, it seems he took a great fancy; and he would sit and talk with her for hours in English, telling her strange tales of distant lands, and always correcting her pronunciation and language whenever either were wrong in her replies. He never taught her to read or write; but from what I have recorded, the reader can see that in speech at least she became under his tuition quite a proficient in the English tongue. She respected him; but rather feared than loved him; for his manner at times was so wild and strange as to cause her uneasiness and even alarm.

Langee remained several years among the Wepecoolahs, and then went to a neighboring tribe; where, for some criminal act, he was seized, tried, and condemned to death—but effected his escape. On the day previous to my capture, an Indian scout had accidentally discovered his retreat; and subsequently communicating the information to Kenneloo, the chief resolved, for purposes of his own, to take him prisoner. Accident having thrown Clara and myself into the hut, we were seized also at the same time; and the rest is known to the reader.

When I had so far recovered as to be able to walk about, and in some sort endure fatigue, Dundenah informed me that I should now be obliged to pass through the ceremony which would transform me from a pale-face to

an Indian. This announcement took me by surprise; and when I learned that one part of the proceeding was to shave my head, leaving only a single tuft of my fine head of hair, it may readily be believed I was in no degree elated at the contemplated metamorphosis.

But I was in the hands of Fate—or at least in those of the Indians—resistance would have been worse than useless—and so I submitted with what grace I could. My hair was accordingly all shaved off, with the exception of the aforementioned tuft or scalp-lock, and the place of tonsure was immediately bedaubed with a thick coating of black pitch. I was then stripped of my clothing, by some half a-dozen rough warriors, and painted from head to heels a dirty brown. To increase my savage beauty, my face was next streaked with red; which so transformed me, that I doubt if my own father would have known me. I was then costumed in the real savage style, and led out upon the common, where the whole tribe was waiting to take part in the concluding ceremony. This consisted in forming a large ring around me, dancing wildly in a circle, whooping, shouting, screeching, and yelling, and singing some kind of a refrain, of which of course I understood not a word.

When this to me heathenish gibberish had lasted some two hours—during which I had been pulled and hauled by one and another till I was fatigued and sore—I was triumphantly escorted into the Council House, where Dundenah, who had taken no part in the proceedings, appeared to inform me that I was now installed a regular member of the tribe of Wepecoolahs, with all the immunities and privileges of other savages. It seems needless to add, that I was particularly proud of my new position.

Autumn ran into winter, and winter passed tediously away, notwithstanding I saw and conversed with Dundenah

and Clara daily, when in the village—for more than once, by way of variety, I accompanied my brother warriors in a hunt for game among the neighboring mountains. During this time, I learned so much of the Wepecoolah language, that I could hold some conversation on the most ordinary topics. I was uniformly well treated, and could not perceive that I was regarded with an eye of suspicion; and had it not been that I felt in honor bound to remain with the tribe, for reasons known to the reader, I should certainly have made an attempt at escape.

I had never forgotten Langee, and the "HOPE" he had left behind him on the earthen floor of the Council House; but as months passed on, and I heard nothing from him, I felt indeed that my hope in that quarter was written in sand.

The winter here proved very disagreeable—not so much on account of ice and snow, as cold, sleety rain-storms, and sudden, piercing blasts from the snow-capped mountains of a more northern latitude. It would sometimes be so warm at night as to render a fire unnecessary; and before morning I would be shivering with the cold, and chilled to the very bone. In consequence of these sudden and severe changes, and exposure from the want of such clothing as we had been accustomed to, both Clara and myself took violent colds, which more than once threatened each of us with serious illness, but from which latter affliction kind Providence spared us.

During this period, the deportment of Dundenah toward me was ever kind; but toward the last she appeared more reserved and abstracted—and it pained me to observe the deep melancholy which had come over her. She would often remain pensive and silent for hours; and many a time, when I turned suddenly toward her, did I catch the glance of her dark eyes, which had been fixed upon me, but

which she immediately averted, while a flush of confusion would instantly mantle her features. It was impossible for me to be mistaken as to the cause of this change; but so far from feeling any exultation, it was a source of regret to me that her affections had not been centered upon an object that could reciprocate them. Clara, however, seemed to suspect nothing of the kind; and believing it better for her to remain ignorant thereof, I kept the secret close-locked in my heart.

I felt really grateful to Dundenah for her kindness—and more especially, that I saw it extended to my companion in captivity. Clara was immediately under her charge—both occupied the same lodge—and my heart warmed toward the unfortunate Indian maiden, when, instead of displaying jealousy toward her companion, because of her affection for me, I saw her use every means in her power to render her contented and happy in her captivity. Clara was grateful also; and more than once, when speaking to me of Dundenah, I saw the tear of heartfelt emotion dim her eye.

Poor Dundenah! with all her faults, she was indeed worthy of a better destiny; and my heart bleeds as I recall her untimely end.

But let me not anticipate.

It was with no pleasant feelings that, toward spring, when the weather had become more mild and agreeable, I saw the Wepecoolahs begin to make preparations for another expedition against the frontiers of Texas. They sharpened their knives and tomahawks, put their bows and arrows in order, painted their persons as hideously as possible, and held their war-dance on the common, in which all were obliged to participate, Clara and myself not excepted. They did not carry matters so far as to attempt to force me to go with them—neither did they slight me

by not giving me an invitation to make one of their number.

At length, when all was in readiness, they set out—on horseback, as before—numbering no less than sixty athletic warriors, with Kenneloo at their head—leaving some ten or fifteen trusty braves to look after the women and children, and protect the village in their absence. It was now that, but for the promise involving the life of Dundenah and Omema, which bound me to remain, I should certainly have attempted to make my escape.

But it often happens that the plans which, in our human wisdom, we have laid, would, if carried out, prove disastrous to ourselves; and it as often happens that Providence is secretly working for our good, when, in the despair of tribulation and adversity, we are led to think ourselves forgotten by Him who notes even the fall of a sparrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTACK.

THE Wepecoolahs, headed by their vindictive chief, had been gone upon their war-path some two or three days, when, having passed a restless night, I arose one morning before the break of day, and went out to take a walk in the open air. All was dark and quiet in the village—for the fires had burned down, and no one was stirring.

I strolled up the valley some quarter of a mile, in a troubled mood—for I was thinking of friends far away, and of the feeble prospect of my ever seeing them again—and then turned aside, and began to ascend a steep hill to the right, with no definite purpose in view, unless it were to note the breaking of day, and the rising of the sun, which had often been a delight to me in happier times.

Having reached a height which gave me a fair view of the eastern horizon, I seated myself upon a rock, and fixing my eyes upon the point where the sun would first be visible, I let my thoughts wander to far-off scenes, and reflected that the great luminary which I should soon behold, was already shining upon my native soil, and that even now friends dear to me might be gazing upon it, and, peradventure, wondering what had become of the wanderer who had so often been a welcome partaker in their scenes of festivity and joy.

Would they ever behold me again? or would I ever again behold that happy land? which time, distance, and

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the peculiar circumstance in which I was placed, now rendered as dear to me as the sacred spot which holds the mortal remains of some dearly loved friend is to the afflicted mourner.

While buried in reflections like these, and just as the first golden streaks of morn began to shoot up in the orient, I was startled by hearing loud Indian yells, screeches of terror, and reports of fire-arms. I bounded up from the rock, and for a few moments stood bewildered, like one who hears some joyful news and yet is afraid to credit his senses, lest he light the beacon of hope only to have it quickly extinguished in the gloomy waters of disappointment.

But the sounds still continuing—shrieks, yells, shouts and reports of musketry commingled in one terrific din—I knew that the village was attacked; and, as I had good reason to believe, by my countrymen—for the Indians of this quarter seldom fought with fire-arms.

It was therefore with feelings strange, wild, and indescribable, that I uttered a yell a little less savage than those of my late companions, and set off for the scene of contention, a prey to a thousand alternate hopes and fears. Thoughts whirled through my brain with a wild, dizzy sensation; but above all rose the image of Clara; and fearful of what might be her fate in this scene of strife and dire confusion, I went bounding down the steep mountain-side to the valley, like a stag pursued by the hounds. How I escaped without injury was almost a miracle; but I reached the valley in safety, and continued my course toward the village, with unabated exertions, and scarcely unabated speed.

The dull, leaden hue of early morning was just beginning to chase away the darker shades of night; so that objects could be seen at some distance, but only distinctly

when within a few feet of the eye. By this dim light, therefore, as I neared the clustering huts of the Wepecoolahs, I could faintly perceive dark figures flitting to and fro—some evidently flying in terror to save their lives, and pursued by others eager for blood and vengeance—while above the agonizing shrieks and groans of the assailed, and the cheers and shouts of the assailants, I heard a hoarse voice, saying:

"These are the heathen that know not God! Slay, and spare not! let the curse of eternal damnation be upon them!"

As I drew close upon the huts, running with all my speed, an Indian passed me, making for the cover of the mountain, followed by a white man in eager chase, who seemed to be gaining upon his victim at every step. Neither took any notice of me; but hearing a yell of agony a moment after, I naturally turned my head to learn the result; and I had just caught a glimpse of the Indian and white man falling,

"Hard grappled in the affray of death,"

when my foot, striking against the dead body of another Indian, I came to the ground with almost stunning force. At the same moment a ball from a pistol, aimed at my life, whizzed over my head; and the person who fired the shot, finding he had missed his mark, sprung toward me with gleaming knife, to take advantage of my accident, either to despatch or secure me a prisoner.

Somewhat bewildered with my fall and previous excitement, I still had sufficient presence of mind, as I saw my assailant rushing upon me, to exclaim:

"In the name of Heaven, man, would you murder one of your own countrymen?"

"Eh! what!" he cried, stopping suddenly—"who are you?"

Heavens! what a thrill went through me, as I heard that voice! Could it be possible? I started to my feet, and looked him in the face. Yes, it was he; I was not mistaken; and fairly shrieking forth my joy—for it was too excessive to yet find vent in words—I threw open my arms, and rushed toward him. He sprang back, mistaking my purpose; and instantly presenting a revolver, cried:

"Two good shots yet: yield you a prisoner, whoever you are, or I'll lodge both in your body."

"What!" cried I, in astonishment, now finding my tongue—and forgetting, in my excitement, that my Indian costume, shaved head, and painted face and body, was a disguise which neither the eye of friend nor foe might penetrate—"is it possible that Morton Harley has forgotten me?"

"In the name of all the saints!" cried he, thunder-struck in return—"what—why—how—no—yes—this greasy face—can it be?—Harry, is it you?"

"It is I, Morton—truly I—Harry Walton, your old friend."

Down went knife and pistol, and the next moment we were locked in each other's arms, weeping and laughing alternately, and feeling very happy and very sad, and a great deal more that I cannot describe. When our first transports had so far subsided, that we could again find speech, Harley said:

"I came to seek you, Harry, it is true; but not finding you in the onset, I concluded the savages had put you to death, and I was for taking deep revenge on the accursed race. In fact, my dear friend," he added, his eyes filling with tears at the thought, "I was nigh revenging you on

yourself; for mistaking you for an Indian returning to the affray, I fired; and had you not fallen as you did, I fear my shot had been fatal, for I seldom miss my mark. Great Heaven! only to think how near I was to slaying my best friend! Ah! it makes my blood run cold!"

"But in the name of all that is wonderful!" cried I, a thousand questions rushing upon me at once, so that I scarcely knew which to put first—"how came you here?"

"Do you hear that noise?" said Harley.

And again, above the shrieks and din of strife, I heard distinctly the words:

"'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay! Slay, and spare not! for the curse of Heaven is upon the heathen that know not God!'"

"It is the voice of Langee," said I.

"Man, madman, or devil—I know not who he is—but he it was that guided us hither," replied Harley.

"In the name of humanity!" cried I, "let us stay the massacre! See! the fugitives are flying in every direction, and the pursuers seem to spare neither age nor sex. And Clara!" shrieked I, as the thought of her danger again recurred to me. "Holy Saints! perhaps she, too, has fallen a victim! for in her Indian costume she might easily be mistaken for one of the tribe;" and I bounded away between the huts to the common, where the scene of human butchery that met my gaze made me shudder with horror.

No less than fifteen dead bodies, mostly women and children, mutilated and gory, lay scattered about, having been indiscriminately slain, as they rushed from their huts on the first alarm. The first I gazed upon was Omema, my Indian mother, who lay weltering in her blood, shot through the heart. I uttered a cry of horror and grief, for she had been very kind to me, and looked eagerly at

each of the others, trembling with fear, lest my senses should suddenly be appalled by a sight of the gory form of her I loved best.

But Clara was not among the slain, so far as I could discover; and I hurried to the lodge of the chief, which she had occupied with Dundenah.

The common was at this time deserted by all the living save Harley and myself; but the cries of pursuers and pursued could be heard in various directions, each moment growing more distant, as the bloody chase led away from the village. I looked into the lodge of Kenneloo; but finding it deserted, I ran, half-distracted, to the Council House, Harley keeping close to my side, but neither of us exchanging a word. As I was about to enter this building, I felt myself rudely seized, and a knife gleamed before my eyes. I was too much taken by surprise to have spoken in time to save my life; but Harley, who was pressing in with me, instantly seized the uplifted arm, and cried:

"Hold! hold! it is Henry Walton."

"Good heavens!" cried my assailant—"is it possible!" and stepping back a couple of paces, he regarded me with astonishment.

I was no less astonished to recognize in the speaker the person of Walter Moreland; but bent on finding Clara, I only greeted him with:

"Your sister! your sister! where is she?"

"There," he said, pointing to a distant part of the building, "in the arms of her father."

"What!" cried I, still more astonished, if that were possible—"Colonel Moreland here also?" and I darted away to a group of three figures, whose outlines I could just distinguish by the dim light.

As I approached, I recognized the Colonel, who was

seated upon one of the benches, supporting his daughter in his arms, whose pale features and apparently lifeless form led me to infer the worst. Dundenah, who was standing beside the others, had turned toward me on hearing my voice; and as I came up, she clasped her hands and exclaimed, in a tone of deep emotion:

"The Dark-Eye is safe—thanks be to Wandewah!"

But I had no thought for any thing but Clara; and in my excitement, I fairly shrieked forth:

"Is she dead? is all over? Who did the deed?"

"What intrusion is this?" cried the Colonel, sharply, looking fiercely at me.

"It is Henry Walton," said Harley, coming up behind me, in company with Walter.

"It is not easy to recognize a friend in such disguise," said the latter, "and I was nigh putting an end to his life, mistaking him for one of the savages."

"And I also," chimed in Harley.

"Perhaps it would have been a just judgment of Heaven, if one of you had succeeded," said the Colonel, in a cold, dry tone, as he bent over his inanimate daughter, and commenced chafing her limbs.

I was so thunderstruck by this answer, that I stood staring upon the speaker, and wondering if I heard aright. Not so Harley.

"What means this language to my friend?" he quickly demanded, with flashing eyes. "Is this the reception you give one who has unfortunately borne a long and tedious captivity with your daughter?"

"If I had not entrusted my daughter to his care, and he been false to the trust, the affliction I have endured on her account had been spared me," replied the Colonel, in the same harsh, chilling tone.

"Who says I have been false to my trust, utters a lie!"

cried I, forgetting every thing in my excitement but the foul aspersion cast upon my character.

"Hold! hold! Mr. Walton!" interposed Walter, soothingly, taking hold of my arm. "Say nothing rash now—all will be right in time. Let father's words pass: he is excited, and his mind has been poisoned against you."

"I know by whom," returned I—"that villain Warn-cliff—but we shall meet again, perhaps."

"Sooner than you expect, probably," said Walter.

"How! is he here too?"

"Yes, he is the leader of this party."

"Then that may account for their hellish ferocity," returned I. "Their acts are worthy of such a leader, and prove them villains of the same stamp—for none but such would slay defenceless women and children."

"Hush! hush! for if overheard, it may be the worse for you."

I was about to continue in the same bitter strain—but my eye falling upon Clara, I forgot every thing but her.

"Is she dead?" cried I. "Oh! tell me—is she dead?"

"No, only in a swoon," answered Walter. "Her joy at meeting us, combined with excitement and alarm, proved too much for her nerves, and she fell senseless into her father's arms, who bore her here from the scene of horrid strife, accompanied by this damsel, who seems to be a captive also."

"The white man is wrong—Dundenah is no captive—she is the daughter of a chief!" exclaimed the Indian maiden, looking from one to the other with that air of proud defiance which she had been wont to exhibit on my first acquaintance with her.

At this moment a slight motion of Clara, accompanied by a groan, drew the attention of each to her; and while we were all gazing upon her, in anxious suspense, Langee,

followed by Warncliff, burst into the Council House, exclaiming, in that hoarse voice which I had heard above the din:

"Slay! slay! slay! Let the blood of the heathen run in rivers! for they are unworthy to live;" and he came bounding toward us, gnashing his teeth, frothing at the mouth, and his hollow eye, glaring with maniacal wildness.

"He is insane!" cried I: "he must be secured!"

"Here is another heathen—let him be slain!" he shouted, rushing at once upon me with uplifted knife.

I sprung back to avoid the blow; and at the same instant Dundenah, with the speed of lightning, darted between us; and, ere any one was aware of her purpose, buried her knife to the very hilt in his heart. As he fell, she exclaimed:

"The curse of Wandewah be upon Langee for a vile traitor!"

Astonishment for a moment paralyzed us all. Warncliff was the first to speak.

"Seize her!" he cried: "she has slain our guide, and her life shall answer for his;" and he sprung toward her, knife in hand, with the evident intention of dispatching her on the spot.

It was now my turn to interfere; and, rushing hard against him, I threw him to the ground, exclaiming:

"Coward! villain! would you slay a woman?"

"Who are you?" he cried, regaining his feet with great dexterity, and confronting me with a fiendish look.

"Your mortal foe, Henry Walton."

"Ha! have at you then!" and drawing a revolver, he discharged it full at my breast—but, fortunately for me, missed his mark.

The next moment he was seized by Harley and Walter, while the voice of Colonel Moreland thundered:

"Peace all! there is blood enough spilled already; and the first who renews this quarrel, makes me his foe for life."

At the same moment Clara started up and cried:

"Merciful Heaven! where am I?"

"Here, my child, in your father's arms," said the Colonel. "Fear nothing—you are safe."

During this excitement and confusion, Dundenah had effected her escape from the Council House; but while Harley and Walter were still holding Warncliff—who, too insane with passion to heed any thing that was said, was still struggling to free himself—Dundenah reappeared at the door, with a drawn bow in her hand.

"Take this!" she cried.

There was a loud twang of the bow; and an arrow, sped with certain aim, passed through the right arm of Warncliff, and made a slight incision in his side. He uttered a yell of pain; and the Colonel starting up, cried:

"Secure that she-devil, or we shall all be murdered!"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when we heard the crack of a rifle; and Dundenah, who had turned to fly, fell back into the Council House, with a groan. I ran to her, and lifted her in my arms. There was a deep wound in her breast, and the warm blood was flowing freely. Her eyes were closed, and I thought she was dead. I spoke her name, and it seemed to recall her spirit back to earth. She looked up, fixed her dark eyes mournfully upon me, and said, in a feeble voice:

"Farewell! May the great Wandewah bless you! The race of Dundenah is run."

And as she said this, she gave a convulsive gasp, and expired.

As I gently laid her down, with tearful eyes, some one darkened the door, and a hoarse voice exclaimed:

"Here's another of the — red niggers—knock him on the head;" and, again mistaken for an Indian, a tomahawk was hurled at me by the same hand that had slain poor Dundenah.

It barely grazed my face, but did me no other injury; and ere any further violence could be offered, Harley interposed, and informed the ruffian that I was one of the captives the party had come to liberate.

"Oh! that alters the case," he said, with an air of brutal indifference. "Thought he was a Injun, by —! She's one on 'em, arn't she? (pointing to his bloody victim)—for I'd hate most powerful to know I'd shot a white gal, though she did sling an arrer in here. Eh!" he added, looking down the Council House: "Eh! what! the Cap'en hurt?" and swinging his rifle over his shoulder, he deliberately picked up his tomahawk and strode away toward his leader.

I was still bending over the corse of the poor Indian maiden, half stupified with the conflicting emotions which the events of the last half hour had excited, when the voice of Clara, close beside me, exclaimed:

"Merciful God! they have murdered our kind protectress! Poor Dundenah! poor Dundenah!" and kneeling beside her, she paid a grateful tribute of tears to her memory; at the same time murmuring: "Father in Heaven, give peace to her soul!"

"Amen!" said I solemnly.

"And you are saved, dear Henry!" she added, turning upon me a look that expressed even more than her words.

"It is a woful deliverance, Clara; and but for your sake, I could wish that mine had not been bought at such a price."

"Come, daughter," said the voice of Colonel Moreland, sternly, who had come up behind us—"this is no fit sight for one of your weak nerves."

"Nor for the sight of any one born in a land of civilization and Christianity!" said Clara, quickly, and with spirit. "Oh! father, could you not have prevented this?"

"No! and if I could, she deserved her fate—for she had already killed our guide, and wounded our leader."

"Your leader, father?" cried Clara, in surprise. "Is there one above you, then, in command of this expedition?"

"Yes! this party was raised by Warncliff, who wished to have the honor of rescuing his betrothed."

"Warncliff?" repeated Clara, with a visible shudder. "Oh! I would sooner remain in captivity than owe my deliverance to him."

"Ungrateful girl! what means this language?" cried her father, angrily. "But it is easily seen who has been your tutor;" and he glanced pointedly at me.

"My own heart has been my tutor," rejoined Clara, with spirit; "and sooner will I suffer death than be the wife of such a man."

The Colonel bit his lips, and his eyes flashed fire. He seemed about to make an angry reply, but checked himself, and merely said:

"Come, this is not a time and place to discuss such matters;" and taking hold of Clara's arm, he led her away.

They met Warncliff a moment after, who came forward with his arm bleeding, the arrow having been extracted. He stopped and spoke to them; but I could see that Clara treated him very coldly. He then came up to the bloody corpse of Dundenah; and after gazing upon it, with a grim smile, muttered, between his set teeth:

"Hell's curses on you and all your friends!" and he

looked at me in a way to show that I was included in this malediction.

It was with the greatest difficulty I could restrain myself from striking him to the earth; and perhaps I should not, but that I felt Harley's warning grasp on my arm.

Warneliff then turned to the ruffian, who came stalking up behind him, and added:

"Tom, this is the best piece of work you ever performed, and I will make it prove so;" and with another savage glance at me, he went out.

"Be prudent, Harry," whispered Harley; "this is no place to quarrel; but he shall not escape the chastisement which is his due."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOMETHING OF HARLEY, VIOLA, AND LANGEER.

ALL the events I have described as taking place after my entrance into the Council House, had occupied but a very few minutes in reality; and as one scene of horror had been closely followed by another, since my return from the mountain, the effect of the whole had been in some degree to stupefy my mental faculties and dull the keener feelings, as blows repeated upon the body gradually benumb it and render it less sensible to pain.

It is impossible for me to describe the strange and mingled emotions which I experienced as I stood and gazed around me. On the one hand I had cause for rejoicing—on the other for anger, vexation, and sorrow. I had just been deploring the hard fate which consigned both Clara and myself to Indian captivity, far away from our friends, whom we could not reasonably hope ever to see again; and now we both stood liberated, unharmed, and she was with her father and brother, and I had one beside me whom an hour before I would almost have sacrificed my right hand to behold; but then again, I had also in a measure been liberated by my worst enemy—my rival; a foul aspersion had been cast upon my honor, by one in whose eyes I had hoped at least to stand well; I had been insulted in a gross manner, and my life actually attempted in a spirit of revenge; and to crown all, she who had both now and heretofore saved my life at the

peril of her own, had been shot down like a dog, and lay weltering in her gore at my very feet.

Yes, here lay poor Dundenah, and yonder Langee—both having died violent and bloody deaths within a few moments of each other—and to both of whom, had they lived, I should have felt myself under deep obligations: to the one for having rescued me from a horrible death—to the other for having been the means of rescuing me from a scarce less horrible captivity. True, Langee, in his mad passion, had sought to take my life; but this I knew was owing to my Indian costume and savage appearance, and not to any ill-will which he bore me personally. No, so far from the latter being the case, he might be said to have lost his life from a too rash zeal in my cause—for had he not gone to the friends of Clara, as I requested and urged him to do, and returned to guide them hither, he might even now have been in the enjoyment of life, peace, and safety.

While reflections like these were passing through my mind, Harley took hold of my arm, and said:

“Come, my friend, let me conduct you to the other end of the building—for here you are in danger of being mistaken for an Indian by the different parties that will soon return from the bloody chase, and you know how narrowly you have several times escaped with your life already.”

“My friend,” returned I, grasping his hand—“for you are my friend, and have proved it in adversity—God bless you!” and so overcome was I with various contending emotions, that I burst into tears, and wept like a child.

“Cheer up, Harry! cheer up, my dear friend! do not be cast down!” he said, his own voice thick and choked; while tears, that he in vain tried to suppress, swam in his eyes.

“Let me weep!” I rejoined; “let me weep! it may

appear childish, but it will relieve my aching heart;” and impulsively I threw my arms around his neck, and sobbed upon his breast.

This flow of tears indeed proved a great relief to my overcharged soul; and in a short time I became quite calm, and accompanied Harley to the other end of the building.

On our way, we passed the corpse of Langee—who was lying where he had fallen—and also Colonel Moreland, Clara, and Walter, who were grouped together at no great distance, conversing earnestly in low tones. The eye of Clara, as I passed, rested upon me with mournful tenderness, and I could see that she had been weeping; but the faces of the Colonel and Walter were turned from me; whether intentionally or not, I did not know. I waved my hand to Clara, and turning to Harley, said:

“It is hard to be suspected of wrong by those whom we most desire should esteem us well!”

“I understand to what you allude,” returned my friend; “but you have an advocate in that fair girl that will set you right, depend upon it. She loves you, Harry—I can see that; and I am well pleased that your choice has fallen upon one so lovely, so sweet and amiable, and so every way calculated to render you happy.”

“Ah! Morton, do you know that she is betrothed to this villain Warncliff? and that her father is one not likely to let her forego the fulfillment of the pledge thus made, in favor of another to whom he has taken a dislike?”

“I have heard something of this; but do you know, in return, my dear Harry, that the plans of fathers are not always carried out? and that I, at least, have good reason for saying so?”

“My dear Morton,” cried I, seizing his hand, “I crave a thousand pardons, for having in my own selfish griefs

and vexations forgotten to inquire after your dear partner, Viola! I trust she is well?"

"May Heaven grant it to be not otherwise!" replied my friend, solemnly. "I left her well—but that was some weeks since."

"And where did you leave her?"

"In Galveston."

"Indeed? alone with strangers?"

"No, her parents were with her."

"Ah! then she has seen her parents since her marriage? and you have been to Mexico and returned?" said I, quickly.

"She has seen her parents since her marriage—but we have not been to Mexico," replied Harley. "Listen! and you shall hear how it happened. After parting from you at Galveston, we went to New Orleans, as you know, for the purpose of procuring further proofs to establish Viola as the lost daughter of Don Alverda, intending to return immediately and have you accompany us to the city of Mexico. There, as you also know, I received a letter from home, stating that my father was very ill and not expected to live. Having procured the proofs—which we did without difficulty—we set out for Macon, Georgia. I found my father alive, but in a very feeble state; and as it was altogether probable that he would not recover, we thought it better to remain at home a few weeks."

"And did he recover?" interrupted I.

"No," said Harley, sadly; "he lingered along till winter set in, and then paid the great debt of nature. Meantime, I had introduced Viola to my friends, giving them a brief account of her history. On learning she was not the daughter of St. Auburn, they gave her a cordial reception, and her attractive manners soon made her a favorite. My father blessed the union, and received her

as his daughter; and she so won upon his affections, that toward the last he could not bear to have her out of his sight; and declared, with the peevishness of sickness, that no one could wait upon him so well as she."

"But her parents?" again interrupted I.

"Ay, ay—I am coming to them—only have a little patience. Well, when I found my stay in Macon was likely to be prolonged to an indefinite point of time, I wrote a letter to Don Juan Gomez Alverda, enclosing one from Viola, wherein we gave the statement made by the dying St. Auburn, together with several other important matters, and requested an answer as to whether he felt disposed, from the proofs which we could produce, to acknowledge Viola as his daughter?"

"In due course of time a letter arrived, from both the Don and his lady, in which they expressed their joy in the most extravagant terms, and declared themselves ready to receive her with open arms without any proof whatever. My father-in-law's letter—for so I may now safely call him—further stated, that having some business at New Orleans, he and his lady should set out immediately for that city, and hoped to meet us there.

"To cut my story short, we did meet there; but you must imagine the joyful emotions produced by that meeting, of which words are inadequate to convey any thing more than a cold idea. Such embracing—such shedding of tears—such transports of joy you never saw; and my only regret was, that you, my dear friend, were not there to witness it."

"Thank you!" said I; and the words came from my heart.

"I was delighted with my new parents. Don Alverda is a fine, noble-looking man, and a true Spanish gentleman, and Donna Clarinda is a most lovely, sweet-tempered,

estimable lady, of whom I can convey no better idea than to say there is a marked resemblance between her and Viola—so much so, that it is almost a wonder the relationship was not discovered sooner.

“The parents of Viola insisting that we should return with them, we prepared accordingly, and set out on our journey, going by the way of Galveston, in the hope of finding and prevailing on you to accompany us. I had not heard from you for a long time, and wondered at your silence; and twice, within as many weeks, I wrote to Galveston, begging you to inform me of your whereabouts. Of course I got no answer; and when I arrived there, I found, by inquiry, that my letters to your address had not been taken from the post-office.

“In your letter to me, dated at the Tremont House—and the only one, in fact, I have ever received from you—you stated that you had met the brother of Clara, was much pleased with him, and that you had accepted an invitation to pay a visit to his father’s residence in Houston. This then was the only clue for tracing you; and feeling deeply anxious to learn what had become of you, I prevailed upon my father-in-law to delay his journey for a few days; and leaving Viola and her parents at the hotel, I took a steamer for Houston.

“I found the family of Colonel Moreland in a state of great excitement. They had just received a mysterious note, in which the writer stated that their daughter, and a young man in her company, together with himself, had been captured by the Indians, from whom he had recently made his escape; that he had reason to think the girl was still alive—a prisoner—though he feared her companion had been put to death; and he concluded by saying, that in exactly four weeks from the date of the note, he would personally appear; and that if a large party, well armed

and mounted, were in readiness to go in search of the girl, he would accompany them as guide.

“As I said, I found the family in great agitation on account of this mysterious note, which bore date without signature, and had been properly addressed through the city post-office, indicating that the writer had placed it there with his own hand. It was the first news, direct or indirect, which they had received of one they had already mourned as lost to them forever; and they were in a state of the most intense excitement, not knowing whether to credit the statement of the writer or not.

“Why, when he was so near, had he not appeared to give his account orally, instead of adopting a mode of communication so likely to be disbelieved and disregarded? But then again, would any one who intended it as a piece of deception, be likely to adopt so flimsy an invention?

“Thus was the matter argued pro and con; but hope, which is ever ready to take root in uncertainty, sprung up in the minds of all; and it was finally resolved that a party should be in readiness to set out with the Unknown, in the event of his making his appearance at the time specified.

“To this measure I lent my counsel, and determined to be one of the party; for though the unknown writer intimated the probability of your having been put to death, yet the whole rested on uncertainty; and something whispered me that you might still be living; and affection and duty both urged me to go in search of a friend who had done so much for me.

“I accordingly returned to Galveston, and communicated the whole affair to Viola and her parents, at the same time stating my intention of going in quest of you. Viola shed many tears, both at the thought of your hard fate, and the idea of parting with me for so long a period;

but, like the noble woman she is, she said that it was certainly my duty to go—that you had saved her life at the peril of your own, and that I owed this effort on your behalf to the unselfish friendship of the past.”

“God bless her!” said I, fervently; “she is indeed a noble woman, and an ornament to her sex.”

Tears filled the eyes of my friend; but hastily brushing them away, as if ashamed of such weakness, he resumed:

“I now found that our parting must indeed be for a considerable period; for my father-in-law said that business of importance would require his immediate return to the city of Mexico; besides which, each day’s delay would probably render the journey more difficult, owing to the unsettled state of the country, which is on the very eve of an open rupture with the United States.”

“Ha!” said I; “then the war fever has not died away?”

“So far from it,” replied Harley, “that each account received is of a more warlike character; and General Taylor, when last heard from, was on the point of removing his army and head-quarters to the Rio Grande, where it is expected the Mexicans will give him battle. In fact, the bloody contest may have begun already, for any thing I know to the contrary. But to return to my story, which I must make as brief as possible; for I perceive that the different parties, who have been in chase of the fugitives, are beginning to gather at the door yonder, and we may soon be interrupted.

“Well, I took leave of Viola and her parents—and a hard parting it was—and returned to Houston. When I got back to Colonel Moreland’s, I was informed that one Warncliff—who, to my surprise, I learned was an accepted suitor of Clara’s—wishing to have the honor of rescuing his affianced bride, had volunteered to raise a

party to go in quest of her, and was now absent for this purpose—the Colonel giving as a reason for his going away from home, that most of the men in that vicinity, who might have been enlisted in such an expedition at any time previous to the present, had gone off to join Taylor as volunteers in the approaching struggle, and that Warncliff had friends away on whom he could depend.

“On the day appointed by the Unknown, Warncliff appeared at an early hour in the morning, at the head of some thirty cut-throat looking fellows, all well mounted and armed to the teeth; and about an hour later, a tall, lank, cadaverous, big-boned personage was seen approaching the mansion. On coming up to where we were standing, he merely said, in an indifferent tone:

“‘Well, I see you are ready—so am I.’

“That personage was the one who is now lying there, and whom you, if I remember rightly, called Langee.

“Well, after some very close questioning on our part, it was decided that we should set off with this mysterious being—though I had my misgivings about his sanity, and I think the others had also. However, as events have turned out, it is certain he was no impostor; though I must say that the following of such a guide for three weeks, in an unknown country, not knowing at what moment we might be betrayed into the hands of an overwhelming body of savages, has been no very pleasant task on my part, whatever it may have been to the others.”

“And have you been three weeks on this journey?” inquired I.

“Nearly so—this is the eighteenth day since our leaving Houston. However, it can scarcely be said that we travelled yesterday; for after a three hours’ ride, our guide led us into a thicket, where we encamped and remained in concealment, while he went forward on foot

to reconnoitre. About midnight last night he returned, and reported that he had penetrated the village of the Wepecoolahs; that the chief and most of his warriors were away on some distant expedition; and that the girl we were seeking was living, and would be found in the lodge of the chief; but that the young man he feared had been put to death.

"After a brief consultation, it was decided that we should leave our horses where they were, and set off on foot. We did so—the distance being about ten miles. It is needless to add more—you know the rest—at least enough of it."

"I do," said I. "Such hellish vindictiveness as has been here displayed, is more worthy of the savages themselves than of men born in a Christian land."

"You must not look to find sympathy for the savage among those who, living on the frontiers, have only to recall some bloody encroachment of their painted neighbors, to steel their hearts against any thing like compassion."

"Well, let them take bloody retribution on the aggressors—on the warriors themselves," said I; "but not deliberately murder defenceless women and children."

"Ay, it is easy for us to say this, who have been brought up in a country so remote from border warfare that we think rather of the wrongs the Indian has suffered than of his aggressions; but only let us live where the tomahawk and scalping-knife are yearly made red with the blood of some of our dearest friends—imagine such friends a wife and children—and we might soon become as callous to pity as any, and only desire to see the red-race exterminated, root and branch. Do not understand me, my dear Harry, as seeking to defend this atrocious slaughter; but rather as showing the causes which lead to an approval

of bloody cruelty. But aside from this, I think the present party would be cruel under any circumstances; and if these are the friends of Warncliff, as the Colonel intimated, it is my private opinion he keeps the very worst company in the world. I have my suspicions, too," added Harley, in a low tone.

"Ha! what?" inquired I, eagerly.

"Hush! here comes the Colonel."

"Mr. Walton," said Colonel Moreland, advancing to me, and speaking in a dry, stiff, formal manner, "I have been holding some conversation with my daughter, and, in consequence, am led to believe that I wrongly accused you of betraying the trust I reposed in you, and therefore do hereby retract my words, and offer you a further apology for my rudeness."

"Which I gladly accept," returned I, "and sincerely rejoice that I no longer stand dishonored in your esteem."

"I would say further," resumed the Colonel, with a freezing air, that instantly chilled all the warmth of feeling on my part, which the prospect of reconciliation had at first produced; "I would say further, Mr. Walton, that your negro Tom (I started at the mention of the name, and felt a twinge of conscience that I should have neglected all this while to inquire after the poor fellow, whom I loved almost as a brother,) remained at my house some two months, during which time I wrote to your father—"

"Ha! then he knows of my misfortune?" interrupted I.

"And in due course of time received an answer," continued the Colonel, as though I had not spoken, "which caused Tom to pack up your things, and, with your baggage, set off for home."

"Then Tom has gone home with my baggage?" said I. "This is unlucky—for now I have neither money nor clothes."

"I have enough for both, Harry—never mind," interposed Harley.

"I was about to add," pursued the Colonel, in the same frigid tone, "that having been much inconvenienced—and, as I may safely say, on my account, since at my request you set off with Clara—any thing that I can do in the way of compensation, command me."

"All that I would ask in return, Colonel Moreland," said I, "is that I may be esteemed a friend of your family."

The Colonel hesitated, hemmed, and replied:

"As a friend of the *family*, Mr. Walton, I see no particular objection; but to be brief, as I am a plain man of few words, I think it best it should be understood that there is to be no *relationship*."

I felt the blood mount to my very temples, and was about to make a reply that I might afterward have regretted, when the voice of Warncliff was heard calling Colonel Moreland, who, glad to escape probably, made a stiff bow and strode away.

"Be calm, my friend," said Harley, taking my hand; "be calm, Harry; he has apologized, that is something; keep quiet, and let events take their course. Fate will do its work, do what you may."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRUTALITY AND SUSPICION.

WARNCLIFF'S party having now returned—at least all that ever would return, for some five or six had been killed in the affray—it was speedily decided that we should leave the village without delay, as there was no knowing what moment the chief and his warriors might get back from their expedition; and should we be followed, while our trail was yet fresh, there was no telling what might be the consequences. All therefore soon became confusion—the men seeking the deserted cabins for plunder, and stripping the dead of such of their apparel as they fancied might prove of any value hereafter.

It was my wish, and Clara's also—whom I sought out in the confusion and found weeping—that poor Dundenah should at least have decent interment; and getting Walter to join Harley and myself, we hastened to the corpse, and were about to remove it, when Warncliff appeared, and in an insolent tone demanded to know what we were about to do with that — Indian.

"It is the desire of Clara and ourselves," replied Walter, reddening, "that this poor girl—who, whatever her faults, proved a true friend to the captives—should have decent burial."

"And do you not account the assassination of our guide, and *this*," he cried, fiercely, holding up his arm, which was now bandaged, "an offset to all the good she ever did?"

"But she paid for all that with her life," put in Harley.

"'Tis false!" cried Warncliff, fiercely: "the lives of fifty such wenches would be no equivalent for the death of one white man, to say nothing of her attempt upon my own life."

"In proper time and place," returned Harley, pale with anger, which he strove to keep under control, "your insolence shall be met with proper chastisement."

"This to me?" fairly yelled Warncliff, his features contorted with passion.

"Come, come," interposed Walter, "let there be no quarreling here. You know, Willard, my father has expressly forbidden it."

"Umph!" sneered the other: "*I* command here—not your father."

Again Walter reddened—but merely said:

"Well, well, never mind—let us proceed with the corpse."

"No," said Warncliff, "it goes not hence!"

"But it is Clara's wish."

"It should not leave the building even if it were your father's wish."

"Eh! what is the dispute?" said the Colonel, who entered the door behind Warncliff just in time to hear the last remark.

Walter explained.

"Why, Willard," said the Colonel, "there is nothing unreasonable in this wish of Clara's; for whatever harm the girl might have intended to do you, she was certainly the preserver of the life and honor of my daughter, and as such I also could wish to see proper respect paid to her remains."

"Well," answered Warncliff, sulkily, "I have said she should not have more respect paid to her dead carcass than is paid to the rest of her accursed tribe; and I'll

make my words good; and unless you, Colonel Moreland, wish to get yourself embroiled in an unnecessary quarrel, you will not interfere."

"He that would treat with disrespect the dead, even though the body be that of a bitter foe, is a coward and no gentleman!" cried Clara, indignantly, who had silently joined the group during the discussion.

Warncliff turned fiercely toward her; and there was a something so wicked in the expression of his features, that I involuntarily shuddered, and Clara shrunk back as if alarmed. Nothing further passed between them, however—for the Colonel interposed, addressing his daughter sternly.

"Silence! girl," he said, "and retire!" and as Clara, obedient, moved away, he turned to Warncliff. "And as for you, sir," he continued, "being the commander of this party, you will please to have your own way for the present; but I am one not likely to forget in what manner I have been treated by one I have heretofore esteemed a gentleman."

"And would you insinuate—" began Warncliff.

"No!" interrupted the Colonel—"I would insinuate nothing—for what I believe, I make a point to speak boldly. But let the matter drop for the present—I am in no humor for a wrangle. Nay," he added, as he saw Warncliff about to reply, "by the memory of your father, who was my friend, I charge you not to answer me now?" and turning on his heel he strode away.

At this moment several of Warncliff's men, having heard high words between their leader and others, began to enter the building, headed by the ruffian Tom. They were certainly a cut-throat looking set; and their garments and persons bore tokens of the recent affray—the former being rent in many places, and both more or less bloody.

"What's the row, Cap'en?" said Tom, looking from one to the other, and addressing Warncliff.

"Why, these *gentlemen*," answered the latter, with a sneer, emphasising the italicised word, "are anxious to pay more respect to the remains of this squaw (pointing to the corpse of poor Dundenah) than to those who have freely shed their blood in their cause. In short, they wish to give her *Christian* burial."

Tom ripped out an oath, exclaiming:

"And you going to let 'em, Cap'en?"

"No, not if my men stand by me."

"Let's see the one that won't," said Tom, savagely. "You're not agoing to do it," he continued, scowling at us. "Pick her up, boys, (to others of his party) and take her further inside; and then we'll fire this — old shanty, and that'll end the muss."

It would have been madness for us to resist a force ten times our own, and we knew it; therefore we prudently relinquished our design, and quitted the building, the Colonel and his daughter immediately following.

"Poor Dundenah!" sighed Clara; "luckily thou art beyond feeling the further brutality of these ruffians—for I can call them by no milder term."

The sun was now above the hills—but it here shone upon a scene of human butchery and desolation, at which the heart not steeled to pity sickened.

"This, I trust, will prove the crowning act of this bloody business," said Harley to me; and he pointed to several of the cabins, from which smoke now began to issue simultaneously, while parties of the incendiaries were seen running to and fro, carrying burning brands, and removing such articles as they thought might be of use to them.

Colonel Moreland now withdrew from the common with

his daughter, and Morton, Walter and I followed. In a few minutes we were joined by Warncliff and his men—the latter, most of them, loaded with articles of plunder, a portion of which were sacks of skins filled with corn.

"Come," said Warncliff, in a surly tone, "we have no more time to spare in sentimental delay;" and he set off down the valley, we all following in an irregular manner.

Soon we came to a bend of the hills, on turning which the village of the Wepecoolahs would be hid from our view. Here we all halted to take a last look of the work of destruction behind us. The village was one bright sheet of fire, and we could distinctly hear the roar of the flames, as they raged with fury above the combustible roofs of the different huts. Conspicuous over all was the Council House, which at this moment was smoking dismally, the turf outside preventing the fire from getting the same headway which it had acquired over its smaller and more combustible neighbors. But as I looked, its earthen covering gradually crumbled away, and then it stood a skeleton building wrapped in flames. Presently the whole fabric sunk down with a crash, and a thousand red cinders shot up into the bright sunlight, above the mortal remains of poor Dundenah and Langee, who had been so mysteriously connected in life and in death.

I involuntarily sighed as I thought of the fate of poor Dundenah; but I had little else to regret; for my treatment among the savages—aside from Omema and the daughter of Kenneloo—had not been such as to enlist my sympathies for them beyond the wish that a wanton and unnecessary sacrifice of life, particularly of women and children, had not been made. As for Kenneloo and his ferocious warriors, I little cared what might be their feelings when they should return from their hostile expedition against the frontiers of Texas and find their vil-

lage a heap of ruins. It seemed, in my view, rather like a just retribution for their own aggressive, inhuman acts, and a verifying of the holy text, that "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind." Nor could I gainsay that in the slaughter of the innocent—if any who had fallen might be so termed—they had justly felt the avenging hand of Him whose finger had written upon tablets of stone, thousands of years before, that "The iniquities of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even to the third and fourth generation"—a doom that even those who profanely deny it the great attribute of justice, cannot deny has sacred fulfillment.

With these reflections I turned away, to behold the home of the Wepecoolahs no more.

A walk of some three hours brought us to the horses of the party, which were found in the thicket where they had remained through the night. We here made a frugal repast on rather coarse fare, but which to me was rendered palatable by reason of hunger. Harley now furnished me with an over-coat, and for a want of a cap I tied a handkerchief over my shaved crown. This, while it rendered me more comfortable, and gave me more of a civilized look, added so much of the ludicrous to my appearance, that all who beheld me were excited to laughter. This did not annoy me, however; but the dirty paint on my face did; and I took an early opportunity of removing the greater portion of it at a neighboring stream.

There was no want of horses; for, as I said before, several of Warncliff's men had been killed in the affray. Two of these, thus deprived of their late riders, were assigned to Clara and myself; and the others were loaded with sacks of corn, and other plunder, which had been brought from the village. Toward noon we all mounted and set out on our long and toilsome journey.

As a monotonous detail of our daily progress, aside from such incidents as do not form concomitants to a similar journey in the wilderness, would be more likely to weary than interest the reader, I shall omit it, and hasten to bring forward scenes and circumstances more worthy of his attention.

Let it suffice, therefore, to say, that for eight or ten days we made slow but fatiguing marches, over upland and prairie, through forests and across streams, without meeting with any adventures worth recording.

During this period I scarcely exchanged a dozen words with Colonel Moreland, who was unusually reserved toward every one; and as he kept Clara almost constantly by his side, night and day, I seldom had an opportunity of speaking with her, except in the presence of her father; which, under the circumstances, I did not care to embrace. As to Warncliff, I held no communication with him whatever; and I saw without regret that he studiously kept himself aloof from all save his ruffianly band, with whom he from time to time conferred. As a general thing, he rode at the head of his troop in sullen silence—or, if he spoke at all, addressed himself to Tom, who appeared to hold the position of second commander or Lieutenant.

I say I saw this studied reserve without regret; for it seemed to widen the breach between him and the Colonel, and left Clara unmolested; and I reasoned from this that the engagement between them would eventually be broken off altogether; for the Colonel was a man not likely to urge his daughter to wed with one to whom he had himself taken a dislike.

One eve, when we had encamped as usual on the borders of a wood and prairie, near a little stream, I noticed that the Colonel looked long and anxiously at the setting sun, and, as it sunk below the horizon, turned away, and sought

out Warncliff, who was engaged in giving some directions about the horses. I chanced to be in such proximity, that I could overhear what passed between them.

"It seems to me, Mr. Warncliff," said the Colonel, rather coldly, "that you have missed your way."

"By no means," answered Warncliff, dryly, glancing significantly at Tom, who was standing near.

"Judging from the time we have been on the journey, and the rate at which we have travelled, we should be now at Fort Houston, or in its immediate vicinity," replied the Colonel; "unless, as I fear, you have taken a more westerly course."

"We have taken a more westerly course," rejoined Warncliff, sententiously.

"May I know for what reason?" inquired the Colonel, a little sharply, evidently more irritated by this reply than he wished to have appear.

"Because it suited my inclination to do so," answered Warncliff, surlily.

"But it does not suit my inclination to do so," rejoined the Colonel, quickly.

"That may be; but who commands this party, you or I?" said the other, in an insolent tone.

"You command your own men, of course."

"Then I trust I may take such direction as I see proper."

"But I am not bound to follow you," replied the Colonel, angrily.

"No," said Warncliff; "you can withdraw from our protection if you like, and get scalped for your wisdom."

"Sir!" began the Colonel, in a fierce tone.

"No more!" interrupted Warncliff, haughtily. "I am in no mood to be dictated to by the father of a girl who openly professes to hate me!" and turning upon his heel,

he strode away to Tom, with whom he entered into conversation.

The Colonel looked after him for a short time, his face red with anger; and then biting his lips, as if to keep down his rage, he walked slowly back to Clara, and I fancied I could hear him mutter to himself:

"Insolent puppy! he shall pay dearly for this!"

What is the meaning of all this? what new rascality is now afoot? I soliloquized; and seeking out Harley, I communicated to him what I had just overheard.

"I have thought for some time that all was not going right," he replied; "and now I am certain of it. I fear, Harry, we have only got out of one difficulty to get into another. This Warncliff is evidently a deep, designing villain, and these rough fellows are completely under his command."

"But what do you apprehend?" inquired I, anxiously, my thoughts instantly reverting to Clara.

"I scarcely know what I apprehend," he replied; "but you and I, at least, have not now to learn that persons of wealth, and even refinement—that is, refined so far as education goes—may be connected with desperadoes of the worst stamp, especially here in Texas."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed I, startled at the suspicion his words excited: "Surely, you do not mean to insinuate that these fellows are of the same class as those with whom we once became involved, and whom we had good reason to believe were under the command of that villainous Count D'Estang?"

"And why not?" said Harley.

"Why not?" echoed I: "why—"

But I paused; for a single moment's reflection convinced me that I had no grounds for saying why not; and the more I reflected, the more I became excited and

alarmed at the idea. I recalled to mind what Clara had told me concerning Warncliff; of his known legitimate resources being inadequate to his lavish expenditure; also how he had given out that he was speculating in lands on the Brazos; and adding to this my general knowledge of his character—my previous suspicions that he was following the dishonorable profession of a gambler—and the fact that these very men, these rough, brutal fellows, whom he termed his friends, had been raised away from home, and seemed to regard him rather as an old than a new commander—and I could find nothing improbable in the idea suggested by Harley.

On the contrary, he was a young man who, when unsuspected, I had believed devoid of principle—vain, arrogant, licentious—and therefore one well fitted by nature to embrace the first temptations offered of increasing his pecuniary resources without honest labor.

Yes, the more I pondered upon the matter, the more ready was I to believe that, so far from there being any thing improbable in his having connected himself with a band of outlaws, it seemed inconsistent with his character that he should not have done so, if a proper opportunity and temptation had at any time been offered him.

But had he gone to the rescue of Clara with the pre-meditated design of throwing off his mask at the first convenient opportunity? I could hardly think so; but rather that he had so gone *prepared* for any thing that might happen; and that his altercation with the Colonel, the feeling of detestation with which he could not but perceive Clara regarded him, combined with other circumstances, had decided him to adopt this course; but whether he would proceed to acts of violence against those he had at one time esteemed his friends, was more than I could

determine—though I had my fears, and was not long left in doubt.

After discussing the matter with Harley, I grew so uneasy, that I expressed my determination of communicating my suspicions to the Colonel forthwith, and taking counsel with him as to what we had better do under the circumstances: but my friend deterred me.

“Let us rather wait and watch,” he said; “for as you are not a favorite of the Colonel’s, it is more than likely that he would receive your communication with coldness and distrust—regard it as an uncalled-for interference on your part—and, peradventure, for there is no calculating the obstinacy of a man like him, might wilfully blind himself to real danger, for no other reason than that it had been hinted at by you, and consequently defeat the very purpose we have in view. No, no—let matters take their own course—but let us be ready for any emergency. If the Colonel sees any thing to alarm him, he may seek our counsel; and in that case he would be likely to heed what we say.”

“But in the meantime we may all have our throats cut,” said I; “and bear in mind, that it is not on the Colonel’s account that I would have this interview, but on Clara’s and our own.”

Harley shook his head.

“It will not do,” he said; “depend upon it, the result would be what I have predicted. And moreover, whatever design Warncliff has in view, cutting our throats forms no part of it, or that would have been done long ago.”

I was far from being satisfied with Harley’s reasoning and advice; and took the first opportunity of laying my suspicions before Walter, who, having been somewhat inti-

mate with Warncliff, I thought would probably know whether they had any good foundation or not.

He seemed struck with the facts and my deductions, as one after another I brought them forward; and replied that it was possible my suspicions were just—but agreed with the advice of Harley, that it were best I should say nothing to his father about it, nor in any manner make Warncliff aware that he was suspected.

"We will keep our own counsel for the present," he said, "and watch Warncliff closely; and if we find that he is playing us false, it will be time enough to act—at least so far as we can act in the matter—that is, put a ball through his head, and trust to our power of intimidating the others. To-morrow," he continued, "I will seize the first favorable opportunity, and talk the matter over with my father."

"But why not to night?" said I, anxiously.

"Because my father, according to your showing, can be in no very amiable mood; and I fear that, in the heat of passion, he might do that which would be most imprudent. To-morrow, Mr. Walton—to-morrow he shall know all."

"To-morrow," said I, despondingly—"who knows what the morrow may bring forth?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLOVEN FOOT VISIBLE.

WHEN I rolled myself in my blanket and laid down by the camp fire that night, I felt restless and uneasy, as if some new calamity were impending. I was fatigued, but could not sleep; and for a long time I lay and watched the ruddy gleam of the fire, as it flashed upon the overshadowing branches of the wood, and upon the dark human forms stretched around me—my thoughts the while busy with the foul suspicions which the brief interview between Warncliff and the Colonel, together with my subsequent conversation with Harley and Walter, had excited in my breast.

Harley was lying next to me, and was already asleep—as apparently were most of the others—and even those on duty as sentinels, stood with their backs against the trees, and appeared to be nodding. I glanced over to where the Colonel, with Clara carefully wrapped up beside him, was lying apart from the others; and I could detect no motion there to show that either was awake. If treachery were intended, I finally reasoned myself to the conclusion that nothing would be attempted that night; and feeling greatly relieved, my nerves gradually grew calm and I grew drowsy.

At last the trees seemed to be nodding assent to a curious moral lecture from the fire—such was my strange fancy—and with a sing-song sound in my ear I passed into a state of forgetfulness.

How long I slept soundly, I do not know; but at length I began to dream of Clara. I thought we were children

together, wandering hand in hand through a beautiful grove, beside a purling stream of limpid water, whose gentle murmur came over our souls with a soothing effect. Every thing was bright and joyous around us, and we were very happy in the companionship of each other. Suddenly a dark cloud overshadowed us; and looking up, I saw a huge panther springing from one of the trees. Clara uttered a fearful scream, and the next moment was struggling with the beast of prey, which had alighted full upon her, bearing her to the earth. Bewildered and horrified, I was about to rush to her rescue and certain death, when I felt myself seized in the hug of a grizzly bear, and in terror awoke.

But I awoke, alas! to find it not all a dream; for a couple of Warncliff's ruffians were stooping over me, in the very act of binding my arms.

"Villains!" I shouted, struggling in vain to rise—"what means this outrage?"

"Have a care, my Injen brother!" said one, tauntingly: "we don't allow strangers to call us names."

"But what is the meaning of this? why are you binding me? do you intend to murder me?" I cried, hardly knowing whether to believe myself awake, or still under the pressure of a night-mare.

"Keep your mouth shut, and don't bother!" said the other, gruffly.

"Easy, Harry—easy," said the voice of Harley, addressing me. "We are all prisoners, and it is useless to struggle against fate."

I turned my head, and saw him still lying on the ground where he had fallen asleep, and a couple of Warncliff's fellows bending over him.

"And are they binding you too, Morton?"

"Hand and foot, Harry."

At this moment I heard the voice of the Colonel.

"You are a villain, sir!" he fairly shouted: "a base, treacherous, damnable villain!"

"Softly, my dear Colonel," I heard Warncliff say in reply; "softly, my dear sir! I am only acting for your good, and it grieves me to see that my kindness is not appreciated. You were meditating a withdrawal from my protection; and I could not bear the thought that you should fall into the hands of the savages, and your lovely daughter be doomed to a second barbarous captivity."

"Oh! my daughter! my dear Clara!" groaned the Colonel: "you have killed her already."

"Oh, no—not so bad as that," returned Warncliff. "If you think she is dead, I beg to undeceive you; she has only fainted; and a little water sprinkled in her face will set her all right."

"Fool! fool! that I am! and dupe of my own folly!" muttered the Colonel, as if to himself.

"Well," returned Warncliff, ironically, "I cannot gainsay that you speak the truth now; for I have been under the impression, ever since you sent your daughter off with that rascally Virginian, that you are sadly deficient in wisdom."

"Away with you!" cried the other, vehemently: "my eyes loathe the sight of you! You must be an ill-begotten child, for your reputed father was a gentleman. Begone, I say, and do your worst—murder me if you will—and may the heaviest curse of Heaven fall upon you!"

Warncliff muttered a reply, in a tone so low I could not catch what he said. Soon after this I heard Clara utter a piercing cry of—

"Father! dear, dear father! where are you?"

"Here, my daughter—here—bound like a felon."

"Unhand me, villain!" I now heard her say; "and let me go to my father. Unhand me! Walter—Henry—where are you?—help! help! help!"

These words from Clara—this appeal to me from her I so dearly loved—nearly drove me frantic; and, like a madman, I tried the strength of my cords. But all in vain I struggled; for my limbs were so bound by this time, that I could not move them; and either for greater security, or to prevent my seeing any thing that was taking place, my captors, as they rose from my body, turned me over upon my face; and, passing a long stick between my arms and back, compelled me to remain in that position.

But though I could render Clara no assistance, her appeal for help was not altogether made in vain; for the next moment I heard the sharp crack of a rifle, followed by a loud yell of agony, a shriek from Clara, a general howl of rage and consternation, the quick reports of fire-arms, and, above all, the voice of Warncliff, shouting:

"Take him, men! take him! dead or alive!"

"In the name of Heaven, Morton, do tell me what has happened?"

"I can only conjecture," was the reply, "that, by some means, Walter having escaped seizure in the first place, has answered the appeal of his sister by shooting one of the ruffians, and has again fled, pursued by at least one half of the cut-throat band."

This, as I afterward learned, was a true surmise. Walter, after his conversation with me, had lain down to rest, pondering upon what I had said. At first he had not been disposed to treat the matter as any thing serious; but falling asleep, and dreaming a fearful dream, he awoke in terror, and became so impressed with a sense of approaching evil, that he determined to steal into the wood and keep on the watch the remainder of the night. This, from his position near some bushes, he had easily effected, without being seen or missed; and as the reader knows, he had ere long good reason to congratulate

himself on his prudential movement. About midnight—or perhaps an hour or two later—the treacherous design of Warncliff was executed; but it was not known to him that Walter had escaped, until apprised of it by a bail, which, just grazing his cheek, cut the jugular vein of Tom, his lieutenant. Walter had been watching an opportunity to take the life of Warncliff; and, hidden in a thicket, where he could note every thing going on, had reserved his fire for this purpose.

On the seizure of her father—which, by a preconcerted signal, occurred at the same moment as my own—Clara had uttered a piercing shriek and fainted; and Tom, by Warncliff's directions, had taken charge of her. On her return to consciousness, she immediately called for her father; and would have rushed to him, but was prevented by Tom. She then called on her brother and me for help; and Warncliff coming up to her at this moment, Walter fired, intending to kill both him and his ruffianly lieutenant with the same discharge. But fate had ordered otherwise, and only Tom fell a victim.

It is impossible to describe the scene of confusion which immediately followed Walter's fatal shot. Those of the bandits—for so I must now term them—who chanced to have their rifles in their hands, instantly discharged them into the thicket where Walter had been concealed; and then bounded away to take him, dead or alive. A few remained to guard us; and among the rest Warncliff, who stormed and swore in the most vehement manner. I could occasionally hear what he said, but could see nothing that was taking place.

"Look to the girl, that she does no mischief!" I could hear him say to some of his men. Then he addressed the Colonel: "Hark ye, Colonel Moreland! if your son is taken alive, the nearest tree shall bear fruit from your marriage bed."

"What has he done," was the inquiry, "that you can so easily sacrifice the friendship of the past to such fiend-like monstrosity?"

"Done what I will never forgive, and be —— to him!" cried the other, hoarse with rage. "He has killed Tom Strathman, by a ball aimed at my life."

"I only regret that he missed his mark," was the bold reply.

"Have a care, old man! or you shall swing with him."

"I expect nothing better; for I suppose you planned our death before you seized us; and my only wonder is, that you have delayed execution so long."

"No, Colonel Moreland, in justice to myself I will say, I did not intend any harm to you personally, nor to Walter, nor to Clara; but as for that —— Virginian, who has more than once crossed my path, and who once *struck* me—an insult I would not forgive if I were dying—for him the rope and the tree wait; and they shall not long be cheated of their prey, nor the vultures of a feast on his hateful carcass. I once attempted his life with a ball; but I have ever since rejoiced that I missed my mark. I have daily prayed for this hour of revenge, and now my prayer is granted."

"Which proves, I suppose, that the devil is both powerful and liberal," returned the Colonel.

"You are pleased to be facetious," rejoined the other, in an angry tone; "but you will soon have cause to change your humor;" and with this he apparently stalked away to his fair victim; for immediately after I heard him and Clara speaking together, but was unable to distinguish any thing that was said, though the latter appeared to be sobbing.

"Well, Morton, I think it is all over with me," I said, in a low tone.

"Would to Heaven I could give you aid, my dear friend?" he replied, in a voice half-choked with emotion.

"Yes, Harry," he continued, "you and I may both prepare ourselves for the worst; for as well might the lamb hope mercy from the wolf, as we from this traitor and renegade. Alas! poor Viola! and shall we never meet again?"

"It is not your wont to despair, Morton."

"There is an end to all things, Harry, and Fate can only bear us to the end," he replied, gloomily.

"But there is no reason why you should expect the doom he pronounced on me," I rejoined. "You are not his rival—you never struck him—and unless it is his design to murder the whole of us, I think, with fair speech, you may yet regain your liberty."

"I shall not beg my life," said Harley.

"No! but you need not refuse it if offered. Be chary of your speech, and say nothing in my favor; for no good can accrue from it to me, and it will certainly be injurious to yourself."

"Hist!" exclaimed Harley: "he comes this way."

I now heard steps approaching; and soon after some one withdrew the stick from between my arms and body, and turned me over upon my back. I looked up, and by the light of the fire, which flashed full upon his face, beheld the eyes of Warncliff riveted upon me, and gleaming with an expression of malignant triumph.

"So!" he said, drawing in his breath, and almost hissing the words between his shut teeth—"at last you are in my power."

"So it seems," I replied.

"And how do you think I will use it?"

"In the worst manner possible."

"Ay, by ——! you are right," he rejoined, with an oath; "the worst manner possible for you. Was it ever foretold you, by some gifted seer, that your end would be by the halter?"

"Do your worst!" returned I: "I shall not sue to you for mercy."

"No! for you know you well deserve all you will get at my hands."

"So you will probably settle it with your own conscience; but a day of fearful reckoning will come, notwithstanding."

"Umph! you are disposed to moralize. But you should have thought of that before you struck one a blow, who then swore to reckon fearfully with you for the insult. That insult, sir, bear in mind, was given in the presence of a lady whose hand was pledged to me, and whose affections you won from me by the meanest arts. I did not cross your path—you crossed mine. You deliberately drew the consequences upon yourself, and have no right to complain."

"I make no complaints, sir!—do your worst," I answered.

"What right had you," he pursued, with considerable vehemence, "to thrust yourself upon a family where you were not wanted, and basely endeavor to breed disaffection and destroy all social harmony? It was for a selfish purpose—that you, out of the wreck you would thus make, might be able to secure a prize. You may thank your meddling nature for all the trouble that has so far come upon you, and also for the fearful punishment that will certainly follow; for I swear to you, were an angel from Heaven to plead in your behalf, I would not mitigate in the slightest degree the doom I have fixed for you!"

"In the words of Colonel Moreland," I rejoined, "'my only wonder is that you have delayed execution so long.'"

"I have chosen my own time; and it is enough that I have succeeded in my design at the moment most befitting."

"But why trouble me with the matter now? If you have doomed me to death, and your conscience is easy,

why seek to justify your conduct to me by attempting to fasten the blame upon my shoulders? If I have but a few minutes, or a few hours, to live, I pray you leave me to myself—to the solemn thoughts and reflections which so near an approach to death awakens!"

"Death," he rejoined, with a grim smile, "is but a feeble punishment, if unattended with terrors or regrets; and I wish to punish to the full extent of my power. To do this, it is necessary to wring your very soul while it occupies its earthly tenement, that it may pass from mortal scenes with an agony even eternity cannot alleviate!"

"A fiend could not be more devilish," I said.

"Then think me a fiend," he replied, with a grim smile; "it suits my purpose well. But to begin my tortures—not of the body, but of the mind—for they are fools who torture the body, and inflict temporary pain, when they can reach the soul—for that once stirred with anguish, writhes in misery long after the victim has passed beyond the reach of his tormentors. Ha! do I make your cheek blanch already? then I shall certainly triumph in my purpose. Listen! you love, and are beloved; but she you love is in my power; and hateful as I am to you and her, I swear to you she must and shall be mine; and while these arms enfold her in a close embrace, I will whisper in her ear, that he for whom she would have given her life, is a prey to vultures, dangling between Heaven and earth. Ha! you shudder: it is enough: I know you *feel*; and I will leave the rest to your imagination, and you to quiet meditation."

He then turned to Harley, and said:

"As for you, sir! your end may be as awful as that of your friend; but on your fate another must decide;" and with these words he strode away, leaving us to such reflections as his words and our circumstances naturally excited.

CHAPTER XX.

MY SENTENCE AND ITS EXECUTION.

WHAT occurred during the remainder of the night, I could only conjecture; for from my position I could see little or nothing that was taking place; and the conversation between the different parties was carried on in a tone too low for me to overhear what was said. The ruffians who had started in pursuit of Walter returned, and I felt the deepest anxiety to learn if he had escaped or been killed, but was forced to remain ignorant of his fate. I even ventured to question one of the fellows who was passing near me; but growling out a savage oath, he bade me hold my tongue, and gave me no other answer.

For an hour Harley was left within a few feet of me, and then he was removed. During the time he remained, we conversed together in low tones; and I gave him directions concerning some worldly affairs, and in what manner to break the news of my fate to my friends in Virginia, in case he should be so fortunate as to escape from his captors.

I had never, at any period of my life—not even when standing at the stake—felt a more oppressive presentiment that my earthly destiny was drawing to a close, than as I lay there upon the damp, cold earth, bound hand and foot, and left alone to my thoughts. On the removal of Harley, I truly felt that the parting was final, and that I should never more look upon an earthly friend.

It were vain to attempt to describe my feelings in that hour of lonely misery; for words may express thought and sentiment, but they cannot convey to another the

pangs of a soul stretched upon a mental rack. Nor would I have them; for Heaven forbid that even my greatest enemy should ever be doomed to the suffering I then and there experienced! The words of my tormentor seemed burning into my inmost soul; and I felt he had truly said that the pains of the body were nothing in comparison with the tortures of the mind. I tried to calm myself, and let my thoughts take a heavenward flight, that my spirit might depart somewhat purified from the dross of earth; but the images of Warncliff and Clara—a devil and an angel—continually rose up before me; and I fancied I could hear the one hissing into the ear of the other the awful words:

"He for whom you would have given your life, is a prey to vultures, dangling between Heaven and earth!"

"Poor Clara!" I murmured; "what a terrible doom is thine! Far better, a thousand times better, had the savages slain thee, or forever held thee captive!"

Warncliff and his men remained up the rest of the night; and just before the break of day, I heard the trampling of horses, and the preparations making for the resuming of their journey. For the last two hours no one had come nigh me, and I could form no idea when the terrible sentence of my bandit-rival was to be carried into effect.

At last, just as the dull, leaden hue of morn began to steal over the landscape, giving to every object a pale, sickly cast, Warncliff himself made his appearance. Advancing to my side, he paused, and folding his arms on his breast, stood for several moments, regarding me with the same dark, malignant expression of triumph which I have before described.

"You have *felt*," he at length said, speaking the words slowly, and with emphatic distinctness. "Yes, you have *felt*—for the agonies of the soul are visibly impressed on

your features. My words were not unheeded, and have not been forgotten. In the last few hours you have lived an age."

"May God forgive you!" said I, solemnly.

"Pray for yourself!" he replied, quickly and sharply; "for you have most need, and will soonest stand in His presence. Henry Walton," he continued, "your hour has come, and your minutes are already numbered. I do not wish to see you die, and have come to take my leave. Farewell! I wish you a safe and speedy journey to your destination; which is more than you do me, with all your pretended piety. I go to join Clara; but I leave you in the hands of some trusty friends, who will faithfully stand by you to the last. *Au revoir!*" and bowing, with mock deference and politeness, he turned on his heel and strode away.

I was anxious to see Harley once more, and I called to Warncliff for this purpose; but he heeded me not; and the next moment was hid from my view. Presently I heard the order given to mount; and soon after, the sound of horses' hoofs departing at a gallop, and gradually dying away in the distance till all became still.

For a time, notwithstanding Warncliff had told me he should leave me in the hands of some trusty friends, I was led, from the deep stillness which prevailed, to believe myself entirely alone; and I was beginning to speculate upon the probability of his having changed his design, and left me thus to starve, or be devoured by wild beasts—a doom no less horrible than the other—when the sound of voices reached my ear. At first I could hear nothing but a sort of low grumble; but presently I could distinguish what was said, denoting that the parties were either elevating their tones or approaching from a distance.

"Thar's no use a talking, Jack," were the first words I

could clearly make out: "I tell you I'll be —— if I like such business, no how you can fix it."

"Pshaw! baby talk," replied the other, in a coarse, gruff tone. "You must be gitting chicken-hearted; for you've pinked your man afore to-day, and thought no more on't than I did."

"Yes, Jack, I'll allow that," was the rejoinder; "but that was in fair fight, you know."

"Gammon!" growled the other: "Stuff! don't talk to me as knows, ye! Didn't I see you go up behind Dandy Jake—as we used to call him—dirk him in the back-bone, and pitch him into the drink—hey? Now d'ye call that a fair fight—hey?"

"But I *hated* him," was the reply; "for he was al'ays crossing me in some way or other; and when I seen him attempt to come over the affections of Lady Bess, I swore I'd be the death o' him; and I kept my oath."

"Well, our Cap'en hates this here feller for the same reason; he's tried to come it over his gal; so come along, Bill, and let's make an end of him."

"Well, if Warncliff hates him, why don't he do the dirty business himself, and not be setting others about it that's got nothing agin the chap?"

"Oh, botheration! Come along, Bill, or we'll get confoundedly behindhand. See! our friends is almost out o' sight; and we'll have to ride right sharp to catch 'em as it is; and the longer we delay the wuss it'll be."

"Well, if I must, I must—so here goes; but if ever I'm cotched on such business agin, unless it's on my own account, I'll give 'em leave to string up Bill Waterman, Cap'en's orders or no Cap'en's orders, by ——?"

"We'll have it over in a jiffy," growled the other; and as this was said, the speaker and his companion stood along side of me.

I had heard enough to know that one at least disliked

the horrible business he had been set about by his leader; and a faint hope sprung up in my breast, that perhaps I might prevail upon my appointed executioners to let me escape. With this idea in view, I hastened to say:

"Gentlemen, I know your business; but I believe also that you are men not devoid of pity; and I beseech you not to injure one who, whatever his faults, has never done you, at least, any wrong!"

"Come! come! no whining!" growled the one called Jack; "you've got to be strung up; I promised the Cap'en to see it done; and — me, I'll keep my word, though you use a coward's tongue to beg like an angel."

"Remember," said I, solemnly, "the mercy you deny me, you may some time seek in vain yourself!"

"Well, I'll take my chance, any ways; and as for mercy, when I know I've got to die, nobody won't hear me whine like a whipped puppy, I can tell ye."

I now appealed directly to the companion of this ruffian—for I saw that from him I had nothing to hope.

"Why, I'll tell you what 'tis, young chap," answered the one called Bill; "you never did nothing agin me, I know; and if Jack here was agreed, I'd — soon let ye off."

"Now see here, Bill," interposed Jack, with a savage oath; "I've heard enough of this chicken-hearted blarney; and I'll tell you what 'tis, once for all; if you don't shut your mouth, and help string this feller up right sudden, I'll report you to head-quarters; and you know powerful well what'll come on't: you'll ayther die by a knife, or a rope, right sudden."

"It's no use a talking," returned Bill, looking at me; "you see how I am fixed; and though I'm sorry for ye, I've got to do my duty."

"But I will make it for your interest to let me go," I rejoined, addressing both. "Only let me escape, and by

all my hopes here and hereafter, I swear to you, I will pay any ransom you may name, at any place that may be agreed upon!"

"'Twon't do," said Jack; "I wouldn't trust ye: and hark ye! if you open your mouth agin, I'll gag you, by —!"

I saw my hope vanish—I felt that nothing more I could say would avail me in the least—and with a mental prayer, that God would pardon my many sins, I strove to resign myself to my fate.

Jack now unbound my legs, and, with an oath, bade me stand upon my feet. I obeyed, without a murmur; and he then said:

"Now, mister, you can have your choice, to have your eyes bandaged or not."

"Then I will not have them bandaged," I replied, in a firm, even tone of voice, that almost surprised myself.

"Very good—that'll save me some trouble. Let me see! thar ought to be a tree hereabouts that'll do. Yes, yonder's one that's jest the thing. Now, Bill, go and bring up one of the horses, and I'll make the slip-a-noose."

And while the other went for one of the animals that stood hitched to a sapling not far off, he coolly proceeded to tie a hangman's knot in the rope he had taken from my limbs, and adjust it to my neck. This completed, and the horse being brought, I was unceremoniously lifted upon his back, and the beast led under a tree whose lower branches were about fifteen feet above the ground.

Jack then ordered Bill to hold the horse by the bit, while he climbed the tree and made the rope fast to one of the limbs. This occupied the ruffian but a few minutes; and on his descent to the ground, he said:

"Now, comrade, as you don't like this business, I'll let

you off o' any further share in't. Jest you mount your horse yonder, and be ready to travel—as I'll do the moment it's done; for —— me if I want to look upon this feller's face in the death-struggles. We needn't see him die, and then his ghost won't haunt us; and it'll be all the same if we don't; for die he will, in a few minutes, that's sartin—for his arms is tied, and thar's no possible chance for him to git away."

Bill gave me a look, in which pity and a kind of superstitious terror were blended, and then hastened to do as Jack directed; while the latter took the horse by the bit, ready to start him from under me and mount in my place.

My feelings in that moment were awful, awful, beyond description. To die thus, the most ignominious of all deaths, in the very prime of life, afar from the habitations of my kind, with no friend by to sympathize with me, or hear my last words, or to gather my mortal remains and consign them to mother earth! I thought of the words of Warncliff, ringing in the ear of her I loved, and of the vultures feeding upon my flesh, and tearing it from my bones; and the picture became so agonizingly horrible, that I felt the blood run cold to my heart, while large drops of perspiration started from every pore, and it was with difficulty I could restrain myself from shrieking aloud. I tried to think it some frightful dream, from which I should yet awake; but I felt, too awfully felt, that the waking would be in eternity. I tried to pray; but even "God have mercy on my soul!" seemed glued to my lips; while my brain was like a seething cauldron, where burning thoughts leaped out in a wild chaos.

I suppose the contortions of my features, in this moment of mental agony, must have been frightful—for I heard the ruffian say, with an oath:

"By ——! if I'd a knowed that this was the way he was going to look, I'd hev kivered his face, sartin. Well, it's the first hanging business ever I did, and it'll be the last. Good-bye, mister—hope you'll forgive me;" and with these words I felt the rope tighten round my neck, and the beast going from under me.

A moment more, and I was 'swinging by the neck. All merciful Heaven! what a sensation! A thousand sparks of fire seemed starting from my eyes, to be quenched in blood, and the eyes themselves seemed rolling from their sockets. My heart felt like bursting; while apparently a thousand pounds of blood were forced upward to the brain, and the head seemed on the point of being rent in twain. Earth disappeared from my vision—darkness came—and then a red light, in which danced fiery snakes and scorpions. Strange noises rung in my ear—thundering, roaring, and shrieking sounds, awfully commingled.

Suddenly the frightful sights vanished—the wild noises ceased—and methought I beheld a celestial train of bright, glorious spirits advancing toward me with outstretched arms. At this my soul felt unutterable joy, and seemed to be lifting itself from its earthly tenement, and going up to meet them. And this is death, I thought.

At this moment something seemed to touch me; and I fell, as in a dream, down, down—far down—and struck with a shock. And as I struck, sudden night closed around me, and oblivion sealed my senses.

CHAPTER XXI.

RESUSCITATION AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

WHEN I again opened my eyes to light and life, I saw the face of Walter Moreland bending over me, with a look of painful anxiety. My first impression was that we had met in another world; and I said:

"So then, my friend, you were murdered as well as I—but we are both beyond their reach now."

"Oh, blessed be God, that hath heard my prayer and restored you to life!" he cried, tears of joy filling his eyes. "You know me, Henry, do you not?"

"Certainly—you are Walter Moreland, the brother of Clara. Alas! poor Clara! would to Heaven I could deliver her from the fiend who holds her in his power!"

"And so you shall, Henry—so you shall!" cried Walter, with fiery energy. "With God's aid, we will deliver her, and punish that treacherous villain as he deserves."

"But how, Walter? how?" inquired I, eagerly, still under the impression that we were beyond the shores of time. "They you speak of yet live on the earth."

"And so do we, my dear Henry, as you will perceive when your scattered faculties become collected from the terrible shock they have received."

"And am I still mortal, and on the earth?" cried I, looking around me in a half-bewildered state. "Where am I then? and what stream is this?"—for I was reclining on the bank of a little rivulet, whose limpid waters, as they rolled past me, murmured sweetly in my ear.

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"This is the stream by which we encamped last night; and yonder is the tree from which I cut you down," replied Walter.

I looked in the direction indicated by a motion of his hand; and there, sure enough, within a hundred yards of me, I beheld the tree to which I had been suspended, and a portion of the rope still dangling from the limb, and waving to and fro in the light morning breeze. I now began to comprehend my true situation; but the rope and the tree brought back the awful sensations I had experienced in undergoing the agonies of death by strangulation, and I withdrew my gaze with a sickening shudder.

"But how is it that I am here, Walter, with you beside me, whom I supposed dead, or far away?" I inquired, eagerly. "How was I snatched from death at the eleventh hour?"

"At the eleventh hour truly," replied my companion; "and for a time I feared too late. Thus it was;" and Walter began by stating in what manner, and for what reason, he had, about the middle of the night, withdrawn himself into the wood; which, being in substance what I have previously told the reader, I need not here repeat. I will therefore allow his narration to commence at a point of interest.

"I had taken my rifle with me," he proceeded, "and I now determined to punish Warncliff for his treachery. I therefore kept my eye upon him, and brought my weapon to bear—though I withheld my fire, for fear of missing my mark. While he stood tantalizing my father, I was sorely tempted to pull the trigger more than once; but I restrained myself till he approached Clara; when finding him and the ruffian with whom she was struggling in fair bullet range, I sighted, as well as I could by the firelight, and discharged my piece. At the very instant I

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did so, Warncliff moved his head one side, and thus his life was saved; but Tom, his lieutenant, fell, mortally wounded."

"But were you not afraid of shooting Clara?" inquired I; "for she must have been very near, if not in range also."

"Yes," replied Walter, "I was fearful of such a catastrophe; but better death from the hands of a brother, I reasoned, than life with such a villain; and I left the issue to Providence."

"I knew," continued Walter, "that the moment I should fire, I should be pursued; and I had bethought me of a stratagem for eluding the outlaws—which, it is needless to add, proved successful. Some five paces behind me was a large tree, surrounded by bushes; and to spring behind this, and throw myself flat upon the ground, was the work of an instant. I had just done so, when they discharged their rifles, and burst into the thicket, hoping to find me there wounded; but not finding me, they naturally concluded I had fled deeper into the wood; and instantly they dashed away in every direction, yelling like so many Indians. I lay quietly till I heard them at a considerable distance; and then putting the strap of my rifle over my shoulders, I climbed the tree, and found myself in safety."

"From my position, I could now see nearly every thing that was taking place in the camp; and I was much tempted to try another shot at Warncliff; but I recollected that this would betray my hiding-place, and bring upon me certain death; while, by escaping, I might yet be of service to my friends. The last, rather than personal fear, determined me to display no further rashness; and now I feel I cannot too much rejoice at my prudence."

"To be brief, I remained on the tree all night, watching the outlaws, and overhearing much that was said."

On the return of my pursuers from a fruitless search, I could see that Warncliff was half beside himself with rage—though he took care not to vent it too loud, nor let my friends know of my escape. He now ordered his men to bury Tom, who had died meantime; and when this was done, the whole party proceeded to hold a consultation; after which they divided into groups, and spent the remainder of the night in talking over the late exciting events, and in relating wild tales and daring exploits of former times.

"When, after the departure of the bandits in the morning, I found that only two were left behind to execute you, I felt certain that I could save you; and descending from the tree, I concealed myself in the thicket, to watch their motions, and take advantage of the most favorable moment to come to your rescue. My first idea was to shoot one and rush upon the other; but if this could be avoided, and they be suffered to depart under the belief that you were dead, or soon would be, I preferred it should be so, for many reasons; and I thought it very probable that the moment they should see you fairly suspended by the neck, they would mount their horses and dash away; and I believed there would then be time enough for me to cut you down ere life should be extinct."

"The result has been as I anticipated—save that, in my haste to climb the tree, so as to reach the rope with my knife, I slipped and fell, and for a moment lay half stunned; and the delay this occasioned was nigh proving fatal to you. In fact, when I had borne you to this stream, and repeatedly dashed water in your face, without perceiving any signs of life, I began to tremble with horror, lest all were indeed over. But at length, to my great joy, I fancied there was a slight tremor about the heart; and I continued to labor for your restoration with redou-

bled zeal. With your first gasp for breath, I was so overjoyed, that I was forced to cry aloud to give vent to my feelings; but even after this, there seemed to be a desperate struggle between life and death; and for a time I hardly knew which would conquer. But I need not dwell on the painful scene; you are restored to life and to your senses, and God be praised for it!"

"Amen! from my soul!" returned I. "But how much time has elapsed since you cut me down?"

"I should judge about an hour."

"To God, and to you, Walter Moreland, I owe my deliverance from death," said I, taking his hand; "and may my senses fail me when I forget the debt due to either!"

"You owe nothing to me, for performing a common act of humanity," replied Walter, much affected; "but I trust I may count on you to aid me in my endeavors to rescue my father and sister from the hands of their ruffianly captors."

"Were they my bitterest enemies, but friends of yours, my life and fortune should be at your disposal, to aid them to escape; but since they are friends of mine as well as yours, I cannot even make a merit of such an attempt. But what is to be done first? what do you propose?"

"Why, so soon as you are able to bear the fatigues of the journey, I know nothing better than to set out on their trail, like Indians, and so follow on till we trace them to their destination: what is then to be done must be determined by circumstances."

"I am ready now," said I, as the image of the lovely Clara rose in my mind; and I attempted to spring to my feet—but fell back upon the earth, weak and exhausted.

"Ah! my dear friend," exclaimed Walter, "I feared you were reckoning without your strength. But do not exert yourself now: a few hours I trust will restore you; remember: you have been on the very brink of death, and you

naturally need rest and food. Good heavens!" he suddenly cried, with a look of alarm—"your features express pain! Are you suffering? are you ill?"

"I fear I am," I replied, gloomily; "the blood seems to rush into my eyes; there are sharp, shooting pains in my head; and my heart seems turned to lead."

"Keep quiet! keep quiet!" rejoined Walter, anxiously: "you over-exerted yourself just now. Here, take a drink;" and with a small tin cup which he carried with him, he dipped up some water from the creek, and presented it to my lips.

I was thirsty, and I drank; but the first draught, which I took eagerly, I thought would strangle me; for my throat was very much swollen; and now, for the first time, I felt a strange sensation outside, where the rope had encircled it. I succeeded, however, after several trials, in swallowing about a gill, which refreshed me to a degree far beyond my expectations.

"Ah! thank God! you are better—I can see it," cried Walter, joyfully, who had been watching my features with the deepest anxiety.

"I am, my dear friend—I am," returned I, seizing his hand.

"There! there! no exertion now!" he continued. "Remain perfectly quiet till your strength is restored; and do not attempt to get up till I return."

"And whither are you going?"

"In quest of what we both need, food. Thank Heaven! I have a good rifle, and plenty of ammunition—so we need not starve."

"Do not be long away, Walter!"

"A few minutes—only a few minutes, Henry," he replied, and disappeared in the wood.

It was a beautiful spring morning—all nature was decked in her loveliest green—and as I lay upon the velvet

bank of the little stream, where the cloudless sun, just risen above the mountain tops, poured down upon me a warm, golden flood of light—and listened to the songs of a thousand birds, which cleaved the blue ether above my head, or fluttered among the branches of the neighboring wood—I suddenly felt my soul bound with a joy as inexplicable as inexpressible. I had had presentiments of evil, followed by troubles dire: was this an omen of good, to be succeeded by ultimate happiness? I hoped so—I may say believed so—at least I fervently prayed it might be so.

Wonderful creature is man! wonderfully organized! wonderfully endowed! Whence come these moments of depression and exultation? Are we sometimes given the prophet's inspiration, without the prophet's power of prophesying? Are our spirits permitted to look into the future, and convey the *impression* of good or evil to our senses? Who shall answer? All is mystery. We have been, we are, and shall be; but beyond this, how much do we really know of ourselves?

I soon heard the report of Walter's rifle; and a few minutes after he appeared, holding up a rabbit which he had shot. This he dressed, and broiled on the embers of the last night's fire. I ate a portion of it with some difficulty, owing to my throat being so swollen; but what I did eat seemed to strengthen me, and I felt much better afterward.

In the course of two or three hours, I thought myself able to begin our journey; and we set out accordingly; but I was often obliged to stop and rest; so that we did not make much progress that day. Our course lay for the most part over a rolling prairie; and we had no difficulty in following the wide, heavy trail of so many horses. Game was abundant; and toward night Walter shot a deer, from which we made our evening and morning meals. We kindled a fire, which was necessary to keep off the

wild beasts; and besides, the nights were so cool, that this means of protection detracted nothing from our personal comfort.

Notwithstanding Walter had been up much of the previous night, he insisted on standing guard, and on my getting as much rest as I could; but waking toward morning, and feeling almost myself again, I insisted on relieving him; and throwing himself down by the fire, he was soon fast asleep, much to my satisfaction.

By sunrise on the following morning we had resumed our toilsome journey; and at sunset we selected our camp some twenty-five or thirty miles from the previous one—having, in the course of the day, swum two streams of considerable note.

On the third morning, feeling myself fully recovered, we began our march with renewed zeal, and so continued it through the day. About an hour after setting out, to our great delight, we came upon the first camp of our foes; and so eagerly did we struggle forward after this, that our exertions were crowned with the triumph of arriving at their second camp just as the sun was going down. This camp was on the east bank of the Brazos, some three or four hundred miles above its mouth; and on reaching it, we knew that our enemies were only a day's march in advance of us. This distance we now determined to maintain, by encamping each night where they had encamped the night previous.

So far the trail of the bandits had led due south-west, over an uninhabited tract of country; and we began to have apprehensions from this, that Warncliff was bending his steps for the frontier of Mexico—perhaps to join the enemies of Texas, and so escape the punishment that might overtake him, sooner or later, if he remained within the jurisdiction of the United States. This was no agreeable surmise, and depressed our spirits not a little; but we

determined to follow on, let him lead where he would, and trust the rest to Providence.

The next day we crossed the Brazos; and finding the wide trail of the bandits on the other side, pursued it eagerly; and before sunset had the satisfaction of again coming upon their last night's camp.

Perhaps it may have struck the reader as something a little marvellous, that we, on foot, should be able to advance as far in a day as our mounted foes; but I trust I need only state the fact, that they did not press forward at a very rapid rate for horsemen, and that we began each day's journey at the first streak of daylight, and toiled on as if our lives were at stake.

The third day from crossing the Brazos, we struck a range of mountains known as the Colorado Hills; and the trail here leading into a very wild, gloomy ravine, between high rocks, (which we judged to be the bed of a mountain torrent, or the channel of some former stream, which had either found another outlet, or whose sources had become dry,) we entered it with great caution, thinking it not improbable we were now close upon one of the strongholds of the freebooters.

About half a mile from where we entered the ravine, we came to a spot where the rocks receded on the right and left, with a precipice in front, over which the rushing stream had once probably formed a beautiful cascade. Here we found evidences of the party, of whom we were in quest, having recently encamped; and what was of still more consequence, we every where saw indications of the spot having been made a place of resort—peradventure a general rendezvous for a large band of freebooters, of whom Warn-cliff's men might be only a small detachment.

The rocks, I have said, here receded on either side; but perhaps I may convey to the reader a better idea of the general appearance of this singular retreat, by saying

that it had a circular form, resembling a dipper in shape, of which the outlet might be termed the handle. On the summit of the rocks, which here rose some fifty feet nearly perpendicular above our heads, was a thick growth of bushes, overtopped by trees of pine, oak, and hemlock, whose branches, extending far over the verge of the cliffs, almost met, and rendered the place where we stood of a twilight gloominess. From the outlet of this basin, on either side, and running back to what I may call the cascade precipice, was a kind of log and brush fence, forming two distinct enclosures, within which the horses were kept secure, both from straying and from wild beasts.

No horses were here now, nor could we see a living soul. This emboldened us to make further explorations; but we proceeded with the greatest caution; and afraid that even a whisper might betray us, we communicated with each other only by signs.

At length we discovered some rude steps, partly natural and partly artificial, which led up the side of a steep rock; and these, after some serious deliberation, we ventured to ascend. It required no little care to maintain a foothold—nor could we do so without using our hands. Some twenty-five or thirty feet above the ground, we reached a kind of platform, which extended around the angle of a huge rock, which shelved out over our heads, and we could discover no means for a higher ascent. On turning the angle, we perceived a chasm in the rock, as if it had been rent in twain by some mighty convulsion. This chasm extended back some twenty feet to another rock, which rose perpendicularly to a great height, and was just wide enough to permit one person to enter it at a time. The fissure, however, did not descend to the bottom of the basin, from which we had ascended, but only about four feet below the platform rock on which we stood. To ena-

ble one to pass down into it easily, some stones, probably thrown in from above, were arranged in the form of steps; and this led us to infer that the chasm communicated with a still more secret retreat. At all events, since we had ventured thus far, we determined to know for a certainty whether our surmise were correct or not.

Accordingly we descended into the opening, very cautiously, and moved forward in the same manner. High above us, on either side, rose the granite rocks, solid and stupendous; nor could we discover any other opening till near the end of the passage, when we came suddenly upon the mouth of a cavern in the rock to the right. It yawned upon us with midnight blackness, and so impressed me with something terrible, that I felt my hair rise and the blood run cold in my veins.

Was it inhabited? That it had been, and very recently, I did not doubt—but was it inhabited now? We listened, but could hear no sound,—all was dark, and chill, and silent, as the chamber of death.

“Shall we explore it?” I ventured to whisper to Walter, who like myself stood gazing upon it in awe.

“For what purpose?” was his whispered reply. “No, no, Walton—we have ventured far enough already—too far, perhaps, for our safety. Let us return; I shall not breathe freely till my foot is once more in the open wood.”

At this moment a strange, wild, unaccountable thrill pervaded my frame, and I felt impelled onward, as by the invisible hand of destiny. Whoever has approached the brink of an awful precipice, and, while gazing shudderingly down, has felt an almost irresistible something urging him to take the fatal leap, and thus rashly enter upon the dread Unknown, will understand something of the sensation I now experienced, but cannot describe.

“I must go forward,” I whispered to Walter.

“No! no!” he said, hurriedly—“let us turn back.

This is undoubtedly the rendezvous of a banditti, of whose formidable existence I never before dreamed, and more especially that Warncliff is one of them; but we shall gain nothing by entering their foul den; and should we be discovered, farewell to life! and woe to our friends, whose rescue we seek!”

“I must go forward,” I replied, firmly; “and will, though I go alone.”

“Nay, then, if you are set upon the venture,” he rejoined, “I will be your companion, though death be the penalty.”

I grasped his hand, pressed it hard, and without uttering another syllable, immediately began to feel my way into the awful darkness. The passage I now entered was smooth and level under foot; and keeping hold upon the rocks on one side, I groped my way forward some two hundred feet, as near as I could judge; then bidding Walter, who was close behind me, stand still, and look with all his eyes, I discharged a pistol.

For an instant the flash lit up the gloom around us; and we had barely time to perceive that we stood in a large cavern, when all was again dark; but not still; for the report echoed and re-echoed, and went rolling away, away, away, till it seemed to fairly die out in the distance. By this we knew that the cave was of great dimensions, and extended far, far into the bowels of the earth.

“We must have a light,” said I; “and I doubt not the materials are here for keeping it burning, if we can only see to find them.”

With this I poured some powder into the pan of the pistol—which was one I had received from Walter—and by flashing the powder, ignited some raw cotton which we carried for wadding. This flame I continued to feed, while Walter made a hurried search for some more durable combustible. Fortune favored us; and presently he came

running to me with a half-burnt torch, which he had found on the ground. Having lighted this, we renewed our exploration in a more satisfactory manner.

By the gloomy light of the torch, we could see the rocky ceiling of the cave far above our heads, and the rocky wall nearest us; but in every other direction a pall of rayless darkness shut in the vision—denoting the cavern, as the echoes of our pistol had in fact proved it to be, of vast extent and magnitude. Moving away from the wall toward the centre of this subterranean cavity, we soon, greatly to our surprise, stumbled upon a forge, around which lay tools of various kinds, and, scattered carelessly about, a few pieces of bogus coin of the Mexican stamp.

"Counterfeiters, as well as robbers and murderers!" exclaimed I: "this is the second fountain-head of spurious issue I have discovered in Texas."

"Hist! hark!" said Walter, grasping my arm and speaking in a whisper. "I heard a noise: I fear we are discovered."

I listened with suppressed breath and a beating heart. Presently I heard a stifled groan. My blood ran cold.

"There it is again!" said Walter. "Quick! out with the light!"

"Hush! listen!" returned I.

Again I heard the moan. My hair stood on end.

"Perhaps it is some human being in distress!" I whispered.

Again I heard the moan, and felt my conjecture strengthened.

"This way," said I—"follow me;" and I set forward in the direction whence the sound proceeded.

After advancing about fifty feet, we came to a projecting wall, which partially divided the cavern. Here we paused and breathlessly listened. Presently we heard the sound again—low and stifled—but evidently near us. I hastened

to examine the rocks; and soon discovered what appeared to be a small cavity, closed up by movable stones.

"Perhaps some human being is here buried alive!" exclaimed I, with a shudder; and, as if in answer to my suggestion, we distinctly heard the moan come up from the stones.

"Good heavens! it is so!" cried Walter.

To tear away these stones was the work of a moment. A small cavity was thus disclosed, within which, half-doubled together, lay a human being.

Instantly I held the torch to his face.

Almighty Providence! The ruddy light flashed upon the pale features of Morton Harley, gagged and bound.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OLD FOE IN THE FIELD.

I WAS so astonished, so taken by surprise, and withal experienced such an overwhelming rush of joy, that for some moments I stood speechless and motionless, gazing upon my friend, and almost doubting the reality of what I saw. Then handing the torch to Walter, I gently drew Harley from his sepulchre, cut the cords that bound him, and removed the gag from his mouth. He looked up in my face while I was doing this, and never, never shall I forget the expression of unspeakable joy and gratitude which lighted his pale features. He essayed to speak; but the transition from death to life, from life to liberty, had been too sudden, too unexpected, for his now weak

nerves to sustain the almost heart-bursting emotions, and he fainted.

Both Walter and I were now alarmed lest this "counterfeit presentment" should prove to be death itself; and we eagerly set to work, chafing his limbs, blowing our breath into his lungs, and rolling him from side to side, for we knew not what better to do.

At length Walter exclaimed:

"He lives! he lives!" and almost at the same instant Harley drew a long, gasping breath, and opened his eyes.

As before, he fixed them upon me; and then feebly raised his hands, as if for an embrace. I bent quickly down, and he clasped them around my neck; and both of us burst into tears—the only vent we could find for our over-charged feelings. Harley was the first to speak; but his voice was feeble, and trembled with the deepest emotion.

"Harry," he said, "this is not the work of chance—God has done it."

"Yes, my friend," I replied, with a fresh burst of feeling, "God has done it;" and silently, from our hearts, then and there, locked in each other's arms, ascended fervent thanksgiving to the Throne of Grace.

It was some time ere we could subdue our emotions so as to hold any conversation; but as we began to grow more calm, I said:

"My dear friend, pray tell me how it is I find you here? for though Warncliff doomed me to an awful death, I did not dream he would carry his ferocity so far as to bury you alive, though you were my friend."

"This was not the work of Warncliff, Harry."

"Ha! whose then?" demanded I, quickly.

"The work of one who has good reason to hate us both."

"Well! well! say on!"

"Count D'Estang."

"Good heavens!" cried I, in astonishment; "you do not mean to say that you have been in the power of that man, Morton?"

"It is too true: he is the Captain-General of a banditti, which numbers I know not how many, and of which Warncliff is merely a subordinate officer."

"You astonish me, Morton!" cried I; "not in saying that D'Estang is a bandit chief—for that we knew before; but with the fact that his head-quarters are now here—that you should so singularly have been thrown into his power—and that Warncliff belongs to the same band of desperadoes which assailed us once before. But go on—tell your story. Yet stay! perhaps we are not safe here!"

"I think we are for the present, Harry—though it will not be prudent for us to delay our departure too long."

"But where are the freebooters now?" inquired Walter.

"From some conversation I overheard between D'Estang and Warncliff, I think they have set off on an expedition to join the Mexicans," replied Harley.

"Ah! we feared so," said I, with a sigh, as my thoughts reverted to poor Clara.

"And yet I think we have no reason to regret their hasty departure, be it for what destination it may," rejoined Harley; "for even in this I see the mysterious working of Providence for our good."

"How so?"

"Why, had they remained here, in all probability you would have fallen into their clutches; and I, to say the least, might have expired under the horrible doom from which you have rescued me."

"It is even so," said I, thoughtfully. "God works for the best; and instead of repining, we should rather be thankful that matters are no worse than they are; though not to complain—not to wish things otherwise, be our circumstances what they may, good or bad—would be to

prove ourselves exceptions to the human race generally. But pray go on with your story, Morton!"

"Rather let me hear yours first," he replied; "and how I find you and Walter so mysteriously standing together here, when you at least I believed beyond the pain of mortality."

"There is little of mystery in my case, though much of Providence," I answered; and I proceeded to narrate the striking events with which I had been connected since our separation; how I had been executed, cut down by Walter, and restored to life; how we had followed the trail of our foes, day after day; and finally, how we had been led to find this secret cavern, together with the unaccountable impulse which had impelled me, even against reason, to enter it, and so save the life of my dearest friend.

"Wonderful! wonderful!—Fate! Fate!—Providence! Providence!—God! God!" were the several ejaculations of Harley, as I concluded my narration. "Oh, man! man!" he apostrophised: "One of God's most wonderful machines! when will knowledge, emanating from the Supreme Fount, enable thee to understand thyself? Do you remember, Harry," he continued, "the strange presentiments we both had of the near approach of Death? Ah! we truly heard the rattling of his bony tread; we have since seen him face to face; and yet we stand on mortal ground, in mortal form, to tell it. Wonderful! most wonderful!" and he relapsed into a fit of abstraction, something similar to those exhibited in our early acquaintance, as described in "Viola."

I addressed him several times without getting an answer, and in fact without his comprehending a word I said; and it was not till I had shaken him somewhat severely, that he seemed recalled to himself. At length he looked up and around, with a start of surprise, and said, hurriedly:

"Where am I? where am I?" And then, without

giving me time to reply, as hurriedly proceeded: "Ah! I see—I understand—my mind has been wandering again—the old disease. I thought myself rid of it. God send I may never lose my reason!—that a mental night of utter darkness may never settle upon my senses!" and as he spoke, a visible shudder passed over his frame.

"Do not be alarmed, Harry!" he continued, noticing the expression of anxiety which had fixed itself upon my features. "Do not be alarmed! I feel better now. My head did feel strangely—but the awful sensation is passing away. Ah! let me see! I was telling you something of myself, was I not?"

"You were about to tell us of what has happened, to your knowledge, since we were parted by our foes?"

"True! true! I was about to tell you; you are right. Well, I will tell you now; and then we must hasten our departure; for I do not think it prudent nor safe to remain here longer than is necessary. The blood begins to circulate in my late corded limbs; and in a short time I trust to be able to leave this cavern of death forever."

"It is not necessary, I suppose, to describe our journey hither," pursued Harley; "and therefore I will commence by saying, that we arrived here in the afternoon of yesterday—the Colonel and I both bound, as when we separated from you."

"But Clara!" exclaimed I: "first tell me of Clara! was she not with you?"

"Yes, she travelled with us, closely guarded; but neither her father nor myself were allowed to speak to her, nor she to us."

"But she was not bound, Morton? do not tell me that Warncliff carried his ruffianism that far?"

"She was not bound in the day-time," replied Harley; "but I think some restraint was put upon her limbs at night."

"And how was she treated?"

"I saw no violence offered to her on the journey; nor were the Colonel and I maltreated, otherwise than in being kept bound and close prisoners."

"Well, proceed!"

"When we arrived here, we were met by another strong party of brigands; who, from the manner in which they greeted Warncliff and his men, led me to infer that we were expected. We were conducted to the foot of the rocks below here, and were then raised to the platform above by means of ropes. We were thence escorted into the cavern; where, to my surprise and dismay, I found myself confronted with D'Estang. He bowed with mock politeness, and smiled; but such a smile! I shudder now at the remembrance of it: for concentrated hate and devilish malignity, Satan himself might have envied it.

"So, Mr. Harley," he said, "we meet again: I am glad to see you."

"I do not doubt it," was my reply; nor did I: he evidently was glad to see me: but, much to my regret, I was not in a condition to return the compliment.

"Yes," he pursued, "when we last saw each other, I think you had a little the advantage of me—now the tables are turned."

"If you use your advantage as moderately as I did mine, I will not complain," said I.

"Let me see!" he replied; "you were very moderate, I think. You and your companion entered my premises like a couple of thieves; and besides making me a prisoner in my own dwelling, locking me up in a dungeon, you bore away my intended bride, and her reputed father, on my own horses. Very moderate you were, indeed!"

"Our own safety compelled us to do so," I replied; "but so soon as we had escaped, we left your horses where

you could get them, and sent to have you released from confinement."

"I believe you did; and I suppose you think I ought to thank you on my knees for your generosity. But if I remember rightly, you bore off the girl Viola?"

"And made her my wife," said I.

"Ah! yes—made her your wife—for which you doubtless think I should be very grateful also. Now if the girl were here, so that I could return your generosity in kind, I think I could easily prevail upon myself to do it; but as she is absent, I shall be under the necessity of paying my debt of gratitude to you in some other way—not forgetting the interest, which having been some months accumulating, must of course be added to the principal. Let me see! you locked me in a dungeon, and carried away my intended bride, making her your own, and getting a fortune for your trouble. I cannot do the same by you, for a sufficient reason; but so far as I can do, I will do. You locked me up in a dungeon, and afterward gave orders to have me liberated. Now I will place you in a dungeon, and give no such directions for your release. And as I think there is still a balance in your favor, I will endeavor to make up the deficiency by allowing you to remain there for life.

"I shuddered at the thought—I could not help it.

"There—no thanks!" he pursued, mockingly, with another fiend-like smile. "I must be permitted to equal you in generosity—it is my nature. I do not like to owe debts of this kind, especially when it is in my power to pay them. And, by-the-by," he continued, "I will add to my kindness in this way. Lest in trying to get out you should bruise yourself against the unfeeling stones, I will confine your limbs by cords; and for fear you may injure your lungs and voice, by trying them too much, I will have a gag put in your mouth; and that the presence of others may

not be an aggravation to you, thus deprived of the power of speech, all shall be removed; and in perfect solitude and silence, you shall wait the coming of death to take you heavenward. You see, therefore, I am disposed to be careful of you, and you ought to be grateful.'

"As he concluded, the bandits, who had gathered around to listen to my sentence, set up a shout of horrid laughter that made my blood run cold. Despair now seized upon my heart, and I felt as if I should sink to the earth. I thought of Viola, and my agony was complete; and, in spite of myself, I believe I uttered a groan.

"D'Estang calmly enjoyed his triumph for a few moments; and then turning to Colonel Moreland, addressed him in a sterner tone than he had used toward me—though, being devoid of irony, it sounded not half so fiendish.

"You, sir!" he said, 'deserve something at my hands; but I shall waive my right to punish you, and leave you wholly in the hands of Willard Warncliff, your future son-in-law.'

"He shall never bear that relation to me, by my consent, the villain!" exclaimed the Colonel, indignantly.

"Warncliff, who was standing near, on hearing these words, sprung fiercely toward the Colonel, and raised his hand with the intention of striking him—but was arrested by the voice of his chief.

"Hold!" cried D'Estang: 'when I sit in judgment, I allow no subordinate to interfere. Retire, sir, beyond hearing!' And as Warncliff, obedient to his command, withdrew from the group, with a crest-fallen countenance, the other proceeded: 'As to your consent, Colonel Moreland, I suppose it will make little difference with the parties concerned, whether it is obtained or not; but it may be that you will be glad to give it, and a fortune with it: you understand me?'

"I think I do understand you, so far as an honest,

upright man may understand a villainous thief, robber and assassin!

"At these words D'Estang turned pale with anger, and his eyes fairly glowed like coals of fire. Instantly drawing a pistol, he presented it to the Colonel's head, and I expected to see his brains scattered where he stood. But he changed his design, and returned the pistol to its place, saying, as he did so:

"No! I have promised Warncliff that I would not harm you—that he alone shall decide your fate—and I will keep my word; but policy, if not a fear of the consequences, should dictate to you less aggravating replies. But you have had some cause for intemperance in language; and I can overlook that in one of your years, which I could not in one younger than myself. Let me see! I believe I did once lay you under contribution to the extent of a span of fine horses; which, now that we are on the subject, I may as well inform you were procured for me through the aid of your future son-in-law.'

"Ha!" cried the Colonel; 'then I did not suspect you wrongly? and Willard Warncliff—the son of my friend—a youth whom I loved and took as it were to my bosom—was even then a thief? was even then robbing his benefactor? Well! well! I never suspected him before, though I did you; but I am now prepared to believe either of you capable of any meanness, of any crime, from picking a pocket up to highway murder.'

"And we are now prepared to let you believe what you like,' returned D'Estang, coolly; 'and, for the present, to say what you please. But let me tell you, by the way, that had you suspected less in one place, and more in another at one time—and had your daughter, when affianced to Warncliff, been less romantically foolish, kept to her word, and not fallen in love with a stranger, and

even ran away with him, through one of your short sighted blunders—you would not be in your present predicament, and be obliged to hear these disagreeable truths. But no! a designing stranger was welcomed into your family, and allowed to take high place in your regard; and being an upstart braggart, he must, as a natural consequence, begin his acquaintance by boasting of his wonderful exploits; and among the rest, his triumph over me; and then for the first time it occurred to you that you might as well have a hand in the dish—more especially as you thought there might be something gained, without any loss or risk. He told you I was a counterfeiter; and believing his story, you in return told him that you suspected me of being a thief; and so between you it was agreed that you should write to the Sheriff of Brazoria County and have me arrested.

“Well, you did write; but your letter was intercepted, and your plan foiled. Luckily there was a faithful spy in your confidence; and through him I was informed of your kind intentions in time to thwart them. Lest you might succeed eventually, I thought it better to change my quarters. Not that I feared the Sheriff and all the men he might raise, mark you!—for I had, and still have, a hundred dare-devils at my command; but some of these were away at the time; and I thought it advisable to remove out of the county, and avoid any open rupture with the officers of the law—by which, though I might lose nothing, I certainly could gain nothing.

“I therefore sold my splendid mansion and grounds at a pecuniary sacrifice; and here you find me—as safely, though less elegantly quartered. As I have thus lost much by you—after deducting the price of the horses—and as I understand you are wealthy, I have no doubt, Colonel Moreland, if you ever return to your friends, you will first be under the necessity of making my loss good, besides doing something handsome for your worthy son-in-

law. But as all these arrangements must be between you and Warncliff; and as I have now given you an idea of what is expected, and for what reason, it is unnecessary to prolong this interview. You may therefore retire, and reflect on what you have just heard.

“The Colonel now moved away,” continued Harley, “without making any reply—doubtless thinking it politic not to bandy words in his excited state of mind.”

“And where was Clara all this time?” I inquired.

“She had previously been conducted to a distant part of the cave, where she could not overhear the conversation. I did not see her afterward. Well, on the withdrawal of the Colonel,” pursued my friend, “D’Estang turned again to me, and said:

“‘You see, young man, that I have pretty extensive arrangements; and though you were foolish enough at one time to flatter yourself that you could easily have handed me over to the law, yet had you tried it, and remained to see it accomplished, you and your friend would have awaked some fine morning and found your delicate throats cut from ear to ear. And better for you both, perhaps, had it been so; for he would thus have been spared the halter, and you a less pleasing death than his. The fact is, your time had not then come; for you almost miraculously escaped me on your return to Galveston; but the case is different now; your time *has* come, and your friend is already dead. Thus do I always, sooner or later, triumph over my foes, and all meddling knaves.’

“With this he turned away, and spoke apart with a couple of his followers; who then advanced to me, and led me to the spot where we now are. Here they proceeded to throw me on my back, gag me, bind my legs, and tighten the cords around my arms. This done, they thrust me into the hole where you found me, and closed up the entrance with stones.

"I will not pretend to describe my feelings, when I thus found myself gagged, and bound, and buried alive, and left there to starve.—Something you may imagine, and that something is enough—for horrors should not be dwelt upon.

"After I had been shut in there, I heard the sounds of boisterous mirth, which continued for several hours; and while this was going on, D'Estang and Warncliff held a consultation near me—probably having selected this part of the cave as being close at hand, and still beyond interruption. I could only now and then catch a word, or a short sentence, of their conversation; but what I did hear, led me to believe they were discussing the plan of an expedition to the frontier of Mexico; there to open a kind of Guerilla warfare—ostensibly against the Americans, to give an air of lawfulness to their proceedings—but with the real design of plundering any and every body that might fall into their hands."

"This would at least be in keeping with the rest of their proceedings," said I.

"Well this, as I said, I think is their intention; and therefore I do not feel very apprehensive of a sudden return hither. But still we had better not venture delay on that account—for there is no knowing what may happen.

"But to conclude my story.

"At last all became quiet, and so remained for two or three hours, when I heard sounds of preparation for departure. These lasted perhaps an hour; and then all gradually died away, and a deep, unbroken stillness prevailed.

"Oh! the awful, soul-sickening desolation which followed! Human language could not describe it; and Heaven forefend that you ever feel it as I felt it! Death stared me in the face—and such a death! Death by starvation, alone, in the solitude of eternal silence—alone, in the darkness of eternal night!—buried alive beyond human aid!—

buried alive beyond the voices of nature! I would have given worlds, had they been mine, to hear once more the sound of a human voice—the roar of waters—the sighing of the breeze—or even the chirp of a cricket,—any thing to break that awful, death-like, desolating silence! Oh! my God! my God! may I never forget to thank Thee, daily, on my knees, for this deliverance!

"I scarcely need tell you that the first sounds I heard, after the departure of the brigands, were your voice and the discharge of your pistol. The words I did not hear—the voice I did not recognize; but it was at least human; it proceeded from mortal lips; some living being of my kind was near me; and oh! you know not, my friends—you never can know—what I felt in that moment! I had no right to hope for release; and yet, somehow, I felt that God had not deserted me; and a thrill of inexpressible joy went through my frame. I could not speak—but I could moan—and by this means you were drawn to me. When I found that I was about to obtain my liberty, I thought I should go mad with joy; and when, by the light of the torch, Harry, I beheld your face, whom I believed dead, methought I had gone mad, truly, and that this was one of the visions of a disordered brain."

During Harley's recital of his singular adventures, Walter sat and watched him in silence; but though he opened not his lips, the workings of his countenance plainly showed the emotions excited by the thrilling narration; and more than once, while Harley was speaking of his father, Warncliff, and D'Estang, he clutched his rifle with an iron grip, and half-started to his feet, as if he fancied his foes were even now standing within the reach of his vengeance. He grew calmer toward the last; and when my friend ceased speaking, he said, as if in answer to a mental question:

"Yes, they have undoubtedly set off for the frontier of Mexico, and we must follow them. One thing is evident from the words of D'Estang, and this takes a weight from my mind—they do not intend immediate personal violence to my father nor Clara; and if my father will only let policy govern his speech, we shall yet triumph in their rescue. How narrowly have we all escaped death! how wonderfully have we been brought together! how singularly all their designs against us personally have been frustrated! and surely the same wise Providence that hath worked so miraculously in our behalf, will not desert us now."

"No!" cried I, feeling my heart bound under the exhilarating emotion of newly awakened hope: "No! Heaven is with us, and we must and shall succeed. But come! this is no longer a place for us: let us begone."

"I am unarmed," said Harley: "perhaps there may be weapons here."

"A good idea—let us search," replied Walter.

We did search, and were presently rewarded by discovering a large chest; which, on being opened, displayed a small armory, consisting of pistols, cutlasses, knives, poniards, some three or four short rifles, a dozen canisters of powder, as many pounds of balls, and at least fifty weight of bogus coin. The joy of a miser, on finding a bag of gold, could not exceed what we experienced on making this discovery; and we hastened to arm ourselves to our complete satisfaction—Harley observing:

"As their villanous designs on us have so far been defeated through the very monstrosities they planned against us, so may we, with God's aid, yet live to punish the vile authors with their own weapons."

We did not explore the cavern; for now we felt there was more important work before us; and seeking the light of day, we extinguished our torch, descended the rocks and the ravine in safety, and then set off on the trail of

our foes; our hearts filled with prayers of thanksgiving for our unexpected union, and our wonderful deliverance from the awful evils which had threatened us with death in its most terrible form.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RANCHO.

It is needless for me to detail our progress day by day in pursuit of the freebooters. We kept to our original design of encamping each night where they had encamped the night previous; and we had withal to be very cautious, lest we might be discovered by scouts of the main body, or surprised by roving bands of Camanches, over the eastern portion of whose territory our route lay for several days together. The trail of the bandits crossed the Colorado Hills and the Colorado River, above Austin, the capital of Texas, and thence took a southerly course, avoiding all settlements, and much of the way, as before remarked, passing over the wilderness known as the Camanche-Range.

Scarcely a day passed that we were not obliged to ford or swim some stream; and often we met with delays that taxed our utmost exertions to repair. As we drew near the frontier of Mexico, these delays became more frequent, owing to the country being infested with small parties of Indians and Guerillas, who roved about in quest of stragglers, or small parties, whom they might attack and plunder with impunity, being too cowardly to risk an affray with any body of men of any thing like equal numbers.

Consequently, while our foes could proceed without any

risk, we were often obliged to conceal ourselves in thickets, or climb trees, and there wait with what patience we could till we could see our route clear of these petty plunderers. Most of our nights now we also passed in the branches of trees; for we no longer considered it safe to lie by a fire, even with one of us on the watch, as we had previously done.

At last, after a toilsome and perilous march of many days, during which we lived mostly on fresh meat, with occasionally some fruit and berries, sleeping on the ground in the open air, or in the tops of trees, we arrived one eve, just as the sun was sinking gloriously in the West, in sight of a Mexican rancho.

As the trail we had followed led directly thither, and as we perceived a couple of sentinels slowly walking up and down the flat roof of the main building, within the walls, we naturally came to the conclusion that our friends and enemies were quartered inside. Our position, when we made this discovery, was on rising ground, in the edge of a wood; and the rancho was nearly half a mile distant, in the centre of a cultivated clearing; consequently, though we could see what was taking place there, we ran little or no risk of being seen ourselves.

"The villains are yonder, without doubt," said Harley, drawing a long breath, and keeping his eye steadily fixed upon the rancho.

"At last, then, we have tracked them to a burrow," sighed I, thinking of Clara.

"It is time," rejoined Walter; "for another such a tramp would leave us naked."

In truth we were in a sad plight—our clothes dirty and ragged, having been nearly torn from us by the thorns of the chapparal through which we had passed—our beards long—our feet bare, swollen and sore—and our hands.

arms, face, neck, body and legs, scarcely without a scratch for the size of our palms.

"And what is to be done now?" was the next question asked; which led to a consultation, and finally to the decision, that we should remain where we were till after nightfall, and then set forward and carefully reconnoitre the rancho, and endeavor to ascertain for a certainty whether it contained the persons we were seeking or not.

Accordingly, we seated ourselves on the borders of the wood and clearing, and proceeded to make our evening meal on some meat which we had roasted the day previous, and since carried with us, to avoid the necessity of kindling a fire in any place where the safety of such a proceeding should be considered doubtful.

The sun went down in a bright bed of golden yellow, and the whole scene before us gradually faded away, and became lost in darkness. For an hour longer we sat conversing in low tones, the subject of course being that which lay nearest our hearts.

"And should this prove to be D'Estang's band of ruffians, what are we to do?" inquired Walter, anxiously.

"Let us ascertain that first," answered Harley, "and then meet here to consult on future operations. Providence has wonderfully aided us so far—let us not prove unworthy by failing to trust something to Providence now."

"I would I knew in what part of the country we are?" said I.

"That we may not know till some one tells us," rejoined Harley. "Come! I think we can venture forward now in safety. If by any chance we become separated, remember this spot must be our rendezvous. Hark!"

As the last word was uttered, a strain of lively music came floating up to us on the still air from the rancho.

"That sounds of merry-making," said I.

"A fandango," returned Walter.

"Fate favors us," observed Harley: "and so, while the dance is going on, let so forward and reconnoitre."

We set off accordingly; and in the course of a quarter of an hour approached the rancho with great caution. The music was still in full blast, the air quick and inspiring, and we could hear the feet of the dancers keeping excellent time; while the constant hum of voices, and every now and then a soft, melodious laugh, which also greeted our ears, told us that many were here collected of both sexes.

But though we could distinctly hear, we could not see a living soul; for the rancho was surrounded by an adobe wall, some twelve or fifteen feet high. We crept up to the wall in the most stealthy manner, and cautiously made its entire circuit, without finding a cranny through which we could get a single glimpse of the dancers. We could hear the voices of many speaking together, which prevented our distinguishing any thing that was said; though we could make out that there were two distinct parties—one of whom spoke English and the other Spanish—and that each, in trying to pay the other a compliment, by addressing him in language not his own, unitedly produced a jargon worthy of Babel.

Having listened as long as we thought necessary or prudent, we silently withdrew to a safe distance, in order to hold a consultation, and decide on what should be our next proceedings.

"Well," said Harley, in a low tone, "I have no doubt that D'Estang and his men, or at least a portion of them, are in yonder rancho; and that they are there united for the present, if not permanently, with another band of cut-throats of Mexican origin."

"This being granted," said Walter, "what can we do to effect the liberation of my father and sister?"

"Nothing, of ourselves, alone, while they remain in such force," replied Harley.

"Which seems equivalent to saying that we have journeyed hither in vain," said I, dejectedly.

"Well, that may or may not be; but I think the latter," rejoined my friend.

"Have you any thing to propose?" asked Walter, anxiously.

"Yes, I have two propositions to lay before you."

"Go on."

"The first is, that we take up our quarters in the neighboring wood, and there remain on the watch. It is possible that this rancho may for the present be used as a rendezvous, and that the captives will be left here under a small guard, while the main body sallies forth on a short expedition for plunder. At all events, such a large body of armed men will not long remain idle; and whether they leave their prisoners or take them with them, by remaining where we can watch their movements, we shall be likely to come at the truth one way or the other. Now if the prisoners are left behind under a small guard, it is possible, by watching, we may find a favorable opportunity to rush upon them, and by taking them by surprise, overpower them; and if the prisoners are not left behind, then we shall be ready to follow the whole party as we have done heretofore, and determine our future actions by future circumstances. This is my first proposition."

"And a more hopeful one than I had thought could be made," replied Walter.

"Now for the second proposition," said I.

"The second is," pursued Harley, "that we at once set off and seek for a force equal to their own, and with this force come upon them suddenly and give them battle."

"But where can we find such a force to aid us?" inquired I, in surprise and some dismay, lest the reply

should prove that the mind of my friend was again wandering.

"Why," answered Harley, "I think such force might be found in Taylor's army."

"Taylor's army?" echoed both Walter and myself in the same breath. "And where, my dear Morton," continued I, fears for my friend's sanity rather increased than diminished by this reply—"where do you suppose Taylor's army to be at this moment, that you refer to it with such an air of confidence?"

"Much less distant than you think, judging by the tone of surprise in which you ask the question."

"Certainly much less distant than I think, Morton, if any where within a reasonable journey," said I.

"Well, within a reasonable journey I am ready to wager it is," he rejoined, in the same confident tone.

"And what reasons have you for so thinking?" inquired Walter.

"Many, sir," replied Harley, "which I was not prepared to give a half hour since, when Harry here was wishing he knew in what part of the country we are. I have since been pondering upon the matter, and have at length arrived at a conclusion which I might have come at sooner, had I sooner taken the subject into serious consideration. To begin then with my reasons:

"In the first place, about a year ago, I had occasion to study a map of Texas; which I did so thoroughly and retentively, as to fix in my mind the locality of the principal towns and rivers, and also the distance from one to the other. Now remembering the course we took from Houston, the number of days we were on the journey, together with the probable distance of each day's travel, and I am thus enabled to form a pretty correct idea of the part of the country in which the Indian village was situated; and by making the same calculation of our journey since

quitting it, I think I can guess pretty accurately of our present whereabouts."

"And pray then where are we?" inquired I, eagerly; for though I have since traced our route on the map, I had at this time no definite idea of the part of the country we were in; and the information I have occasionally given the reader, of different localities, in the course of our journeyings, was found out afterward.

"Well, then, to the best of my belief," replied Harley, "we are in the province of San Patricio, and not many leagues from where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf of Mexico; and consequently, if Taylor has pushed his army forward to Point Isabel, as by the last rumor that reached me he was about to do, and has not since changed his quarters, we are not many leagues distant from him."

"By heavens!" exclaimed Walter, in a very excited tone, though he prudently spoke low; "if your conjectures prove correct, Mr. Harley, these villains will do well to escape the punishment they deserve; for I will at once to Taylor's camp; and if I can fall in with Walker and his Texas Rangers, it will only be necessary to mention to him the name and captivity of my father, to enlist him at once in our behalf."

"I am glad to hear you speak so confidently of obtaining assistance," rejoined Harley; "and to prove my surmises correct, I will advance these arguments. First, on our way hither, we have recently seen, much to our annoyance and alarm, several small parties prowling about, evidently in quest of plunder. These, doubtless, are the human wolves or vultures, which hang upon the outskirts of the army, ready, whenever a battle is fought, to come in for the best share of the plunder, but too cowardly to take it from an equal or unconquered foe."

"Nothing more likely," said Walter.

"Secondly," pursued Harley, "you will recollect that I told you, from the conversation overheard between D'Estang and Warncliff, that I judged their intended destination to be the frontier of Mexico: now would they be likely to stop short of their destination—at least any considerable distance—and idle away their time in revelry?"

"Ha! that is true," exclaimed Walter.

"Thirdly," continued my friend, "we know that there are many females in yonder rancho, and that it is not reasonable to suppose they belong there; and if they do not belong there, whence come they, unless from some near town? for neighbors here are scarce; and if from some near town, that town must be on the Rio Grande, for there can be no other in this vicinity."

"I am convinced," rejoined Walter, "that your conjectures are well founded. Now then to act accordingly. In the first place, you being right in your surmises, there must be a road, or at least a mule-path, leading from this rancho to the town in question; and therefore let it be our first care to find this and follow it, till we chance upon some one from whom we can gather correct information, both as to the name of the town, and the exact position of, and distance to, the American army."

"I see nothing to object to this," replied Harley.

"With all due respect for your surmises and plans," said I, "I think there is one important conjecture that should be made a certainty before we act as if it were so—for this is truly the keystone to the whole arch of your calculations."

"Ha! well, what is it, Harry?" said Harley.

"Why, you have taken it for granted that the banditti we seek, and their captives, are within yonder rancho. Now if this should prove to be another party—"

"Ha! by my life!" interrupted Harley—"I see! we

have taken too much for granted. We must be certain this is D'Estang's band, Walter, ere we make an effort against them—otherwise we may let the real villains and our friends escape us."

"True! true!" answered Walter; "but how are we to ascertain this fact in time to be of any benefit to us?"

"I have a plan," said I. "In passing around the walls of the rancho, I observed a stick of timber leaning against one, by which I think I could mount to the top and get a view of what is taking place inside."

"But this would put your life in peril," said Harley, anxiously.

"It has been in peril a long time, my friend," I replied; "and we cannot hope to defeat our foes and regain our friends without new risks."

After some further discussion, it was settled that I should immediately proceed to put my plan in execution—I promising on my part to be very prudent and cautious, and exacting from my friends their solemn pledge in return, that in case I should by any accident again fall into the hands of my enemies, they would not attempt a rescue without sufficient force; but instantly depart and seek succor, without approaching any nearer to the rancho, that it might not be discovered I had accomplices, which would certainly put the villains on their guard against surprise, and perhaps be the worse for me in other respects.

I now shook hands with Morton and Walter, and parted from them as for the last time; for there was no telling what might happen; and I was not without forebodings that I should get into fresh difficulty. I set off, however, with a tolerably stout heart; and in a few minutes had reached the rancho, and climbed to the top of the wall, without meeting with any accident.

Here I found, what I had not anticipated, namely, that

from this wall I could get no view of the parties within—for the main building of the rancho here formed an inner wall, about six feet distant from the other, and the dance was apparently taking place on the other side of this, in an uncovered area. And besides, I could not pass from the wall I was on to another, because the corners were flanked with circular bastions. I could see the gleam of the lights, though not the lights themselves, and hear the music, the tread of feet, and a loud buzz of conversation; and having ventured thus far, I determined, imprudently enough, to venture still further.

With this intent, I soon discovered that one corner of the building projected within three feet of me; and standing up, and leaning over, I managed to reach this with my hands; and after a severe effort, during which I came near being precipitated to the ground below, I succeeded in clambering upon it. Moving carefully over the flat roof to the opposite side, I now had a fair view of what I had sought.

The area, formed by the surrounding buildings, was large; and in this, standing in a circle, were perhaps a hundred persons of both sexes, watching the motions of some ten or twelve others who were dancing in the centre. Torches and lamps were plenty; and in the bright light thus made, I recognized several of the villainous faces of Warncliff's detachment—but could nowhere see him or D'Estang. The females, of whom there appeared to be about twenty in all, were mostly young, were dressed in white, and many of them were extremely good-looking. Their dark skins, black eyes, and raven tresses proclaimed them of Mexican or Spanish origin; and the beautiful forms of those in the dance, certainly moved with a grace and ease that would not have disgraced a fashionable ball-room of my own country.

While I was yet looking, the music ceased, and the set

broke up; and while another was forming, I prudently thought of withdrawing; but just at this instant I became spell-bound by the sound of Warncliff's voice.

"Come along!" he said, gruffly; "you must dance with me, and there is no use of whining about it! I am master here, and will be obeyed."

There was a low, tremulous reply—the words I did not hear—but the tones seemed to thrill through every nerve and fibre of my body. I could not mistake that voice among a thousand—it came from the lips of Clara Moreland. The speakers seemed to be under me—but yet I could not see them. In my excited state of mind, I impatiently, imprudently, raised myself and leaned forward. But alas! in doing so, I lost my balance; and finding I must go down, I made a spring, and landed in the very midst of the freebooters and their associates.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FROM IMPENDING DEATH TO A DUNGEON.

HAD an angel suddenly descended from Heaven into the midst of that circle, I doubt that those who recognized me would have been more astonished.

"A ghost! a ghost!" they shouted, with blanched faces, while the females drew back with shrieks of alarm.

A scene of general confusion ensued—every one seeming surprised, if not terrified—during which I could distinguish the cries of:

"The rancho is attacked!"

"Seize the scoundrel!"

"Shoot him down!"

"No! no! don't fire!—it's a ghost!—it's the man that was hung!"

I had alighted on my feet; and though considerably jarred, was not injured; and with perfect presence of mind I drew my pistols, and looked eagerly around, in the hope that I might, by taking advantage of the alarm and confusion, in some miraculous manner effect my escape. Through what appeared to be the main dwelling, lay my way to one of the gates; and thinking it possible it might not be barred, I darted forward in that direction, shouting to those before me to stand aside or take the consequences. Instinctively they gave way; and I had already broken through the circle, and entered the dwelling, when I heard a rush behind me, and the cries of:

"Take him! take him!—don't let him escape!—he's alive enough—he's no ghost," &c. &c.

Too soon for me the different parties had recovered from the inaction of a first surprise; and the consequence was, that I was seized by some two or three stalwart fellows, who instantly bore me to the ground and disarmed me.

"Don't kill him! Bring him out alive! We want to see him!" cried the excited crowd, who could not press into the house; and immediately I was lifted and borne out into the area, where I had so unceremoniously made my first appearance.

Here I was cast upon the ground; and for a few minutes was in danger of being crushed under the feet of the surging mass, each of whom was struggling with his neighbor to get a sight of me.

"Fall back! fall back, men!" now cried a loud voice, which I instantly recognized as Warncliff's; and immediately a circle was cleared around me, and my hated rival advanced to my side.

My face was turned from him; and he evidently had

not heard my name mentioned, nor had the remotest idea that the being he had consigned to an awful death was living and in his presence; for he addressed me sternly.

"Who are you, fellow," he said, "that have rained down here to cause this disturbance?"

I quickly gathered myself upon my feet, and silently confronted him. The moment his eye fell upon mine, he staggered back, with a yell of horror—the blood forsook his face—even his lips grew white—and I believe he would have fallen, had not one of his men behind given him support. It was some moments before he sufficiently recovered himself to again address me; and even then he rather gasped than said:

"Henry Walton! are you alive or dead?"

"Villain! coward!" cried I: "does your guilty conscience rather make you fear the dead than the living?"

The sound of my voice seemed to reassure him; and as the blood rushed back into his face, he exclaimed, angrily, perhaps to cover the shame and confusion he felt for his recent display of terror:

"So, then, you are alive; and I have been tricked, deceived. Where are the traitors? By heavens! I have a mind to make hanging examples of them!"

"You have no reason to find fault with your tools," said I; "for they are after your own heart in villainy, and did their hellish work as well as you could have done it yourself."

"'Tis false! else how are you here alive?"

"There is a Power above yours," rejoined I, solemnly, pointing upward. Warncliff, and those who surrounded him, involuntarily, as it were, looked heavenward, as if expecting to behold the Power of which I spoke. "You cannot see it *now*," continued I; "but it is there, nevertheless; and ere long you will feel it in terrors more dreadful than those you but now experienced."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Warncliff, impatiently; "are you mad? or a fool? or have you turned priest, and come here to preach? But no matter; if my orders had been executed, you could not be here now; and therefore I say, I have been deceived by a couple of treacherous scoundrels."

"If you mean me by that thar remark, I say you lie!" cried a voice behind me; and the next moment Warncliff was confronted with the very ruffian who had placed the rope around my neck and led the horse from under me.

"This to me, fellow?" shouted Warncliff, half choking with rage, and thrusting his hand into his bosom as if in search of a weapon.

"Take care!" thundered the other, instantly presenting a pistol to the head of Warncliff; "if you dare to lay your hand on steel, I'll blow your brains out!"

"Mutiny! mutiny!" cried several voices.

"No mutiny about it," roared the big ruffian; "and if there was, I don't care a —! He's called me a treacherous scoundrel; and he's got to eat his words, or die, by —!"

"Well, well, perhaps I was hasty," returned Warncliff, in an altered tone, who felt that he was in the ruffian's power, and judged it politic to speak him fair. "I was angry at the thought that this man, whom I hate, had escaped the death to which I doomed him; and in the heat of the moment, I made use of words whose meaning I did not consider, nor on whom they would reflect. Now tell me, Jack—if you saw him executed, as you reported—how is it I see him here, alive?"

"Don't know, unless Old Nick cut him down," replied the other, gruffly. "If I seen him executed, indeed! I tell you, sir, these here hands put the rope round his neck, and these here eyes seen him hung, swinging in the air, as purty a piece of human flesh as ever a turkey-buzzard could wish to light on."

A roar of laughter followed this coarse speech, in which Warncliff affected to join.

"There, Jack," he said, "I believe you did your duty faithfully; and Old Nick, as you say, must have had a hand in his escape, surely. And now, sirrah! (turning to me) tell me how it is I find you here, which is scarcely less marvellous than that you should have avoided the death to which I doomed you? How came you here? how have you traced us for hundreds of miles? and what strange fancy could have induced you to voluntarily put yourself in my power again? Is it possible you have such a liking for hanging, that you wish to try it again?"

"And who says I am in your power?" replied I, affecting a coolness and confidence I did not feel. "Are you *sure* I am in your power again?"

"Ha! what mean these words?" he cried, in a tone which betrayed some anxiety, if not alarm. "Are you not alone? are you supported by others?"

"And have you so underrated me, as to think me foolish enough to come here alone, and quietly surrender myself to you?" I continued, perceiving that I had happily roused an apprehension in his mind, which if I could increase, by throwing out vague, mysterious hints, in the same tone of confidence, might be of incalculable benefit to myself.

"By heavens!" he cried: "perhaps we are surrounded by an armed body! This comes of not keeping the sentinels to their duty. It is all my fault, I must acknowledge; and if any harm befall us, in consequence, I shall dread to meet the eye of our Captain when he returns."

Here was an unguarded admission that his Captain, Count D'Estang, was away; and I instantly seized upon the fact, and turned it to my advantage.

"You need not dread your Captain's return while I am held a prisoner," said I.

"What! is our Captain taken?" cried fifty voices; and

I could see that the bare idea excited no little consternation.

"Then shoot the scoundrel that ventures here to tell us so!" exclaimed others.

"Hold!" said I. "Suppose the life of your chief depends on the manner in which I am treated?"

"It's all a ——— lie!" put in Jack, who, keeping his place by my side, had been closely watching my countenance for some time. "You're a skeery set, the whole of ye," he continued; "or you'd see right through a yarn as loosely spun as this here chap's. Haint we been travelling right fast ever since he was hung? and how could he travel as fast afoot, track us here, and have a body of men at his heels? And besides, whar could he find the men you fear? And if he wanted to hold parley with us, d'ye think he'd come tumbling over the roof, instead of knocking at the gate? Go away—you're green—you ain't seasoned worth a ———!"

"Right, Jack, by ———!" cried Warncliff, clapping him on the shoulder; "you have more sense than all of us put together. He has been lying—I see it clear enough; for if he came intentionally among us, why did he try to make his escape in the first instance? I understand it all now—thanks to you, Jack. He escaped from the rope by one means or another, and has been dogging our steps ever since; and having traced us here, he has watched his opportunity, climbed the walls, and mounted the roof, with a view of ascertaining our numbers, intending to get off unseen and go in quest of a force to lead against us. He is a spy upon us, and it will not do to let him escape. I leave it to you, however, my gallant men, to say what shall be done with him."

"Hang him again, or shoot him," cried fifty voices; "that's the way to fix spies."

"Do either at your peril!" said I, firmly and coolly,

though I felt my heart sinking within me at the same time. "I tell you I am not alone," I continued, "as you may soon find to your cost. You seem to forget that Walter Moreland escaped from your treacherous designs as well as myself."

"And he cut you down? Ha! I see it all now," returned Warncliff, quickly.

"And if he did," said I, "is he your prisoner now? Ha! you see also there is one determined foe who is not in your clutches; and you will do well to believe he is not the only one: I tell you there are many more."

The assurance I so well assumed, seemed to stagger the freebooters, one and all. They knew not what they really had to fear, and consequently feared every thing. Had D'Estang been with them, the case would have been different; but he was away, and possibly might be a prisoner, as I had hinted; and in this uncertainty they were afraid to proceed to extremes with me, lest a similar punishment should be visited upon him.

"To the walls, men, some of you, with torches, and carefully reconnoitre the ground below; while the rest of you prepare to make a sortie with me!" said Warncliff. "We will soon know if we have any thing to fear; and if we have, *what* we have to fear."

"You may save yourselves the trouble of mounting the walls," said I; "for I assure you there is no foe beneath them. As to making a sortie, you can do as you like; but my advice to you is, not to go too far from your stronghold."

"Thank you!" returned Warncliff; "we will believe just so much of your story, and take just so much of your advice, as we think proper."

He then held a short consultation, in a low tone, with some half a dozen of his cut-throat gang; after which, he advanced to me and said:

"Hark you, sir! I do not know whether you have lied to us or not; but we shall probably learn the truth, one way or other, in the course of the night; and if you have lied, you shall not outlive the rising of to-morrow's sun. Away with him to the dungeon! and if he escape my vengeance this time, by my father's soul! I swear to visit the severest penalty upon the heads of you who have him in charge!"

"I'll answer for him with my head this time," replied Jack; who, with another ruffian, immediately laid rough hands upon me, and led me away.

They conducted me into an old building, which appeared to be used as a granary; but ere I entered it, I saw the females grouped together in another building, in company with some twelve or fifteen hang-dog looking fellows, whose style of dress and swarthy complexions denoted them to be Mexicans. All were staring at me with vulgar curiosity, and no doubt wondering among themselves what could be the meaning of all they saw—for they evidently did not understand sufficient English to render the matter clear to them.

I scanned the group eagerly, and ran my eye rapidly around the buildings, in the expectation of seeing Clara. But I was disappointed; for she, little dreaming who was so near her, had probably withdrawn herself to an inner apartment; or else did not feel interest enough in what was going on to even bestow a look upon it; or, peradventure, and this idea was not a pleasant one, she might be a close prisoner, whom Warncliff, ere he took part in the scene described, might have hurried back to her place of confinement. But where was her father, Colonel Moreland, all this time? Was he here, a close prisoner also? or had a worse fate befallen him? I was strongly tempted to ask my ruffian-guard some questions concerning my

friends; but believing I should only receive abuse in return, I kept my lips closed.

On entering the granary, my conductors lifted a trap door, and gruffly bade me descend. I did so, by means of a ladder, and found myself in a damp vault, where I could see nothing—for the light from the torches of my guard did not penetrate the pitchy blackness which now enveloped me. As soon as I was fairly down, the ladder was drawn up and the trap closed; and thus was I left in inky darkness, to solitary reflection.

And it will readily be believed that my reflections were not of the most pleasant character. Here was I again, in the hands of my enemy—an enemy without pity, who thirsted for my blood—and unless something almost miraculous should take place in my favor in the course of the night, I did not doubt that the rising of another sun would be the signal for my death. And what better place to put this fiendish design in execution, than the one now assigned me? I could not avoid a cold shudder, as the horrible idea rose in my mind that I might never leave it alive. My fate would at least be known to my friends, sooner or later; for Morton and Walter had both escaped, and doubtless were even now gone in quest of assistance; but it was not probable that assistance would arrive in the course of the night, even if procured at all; and therefore I could find little consolation in the idea that my remains might be discovered and given Christian burial. I thought of poor Clara; and I censured myself for my imprudence and carelessness; when, by a different course of action, I might have withdrawn, with all the information I had sought, without having discovered myself to my enemies, and thus put them on their guard and myself in their power. Sweet Clara! could I but free her with my life, I felt I would not hesitate a moment at the sacrifice;

but to lose my life as I was now situated, and thus give my inhuman rival a double triumph, was an idea so terrible that it almost drove me mad.

Being left in my prison-unshackled, I thought I might as well endeavor to ascertain its dimensions; and accordingly I began to grope about, moving very slowly and cautiously. The ground under me was cold and damp; and when I at length reached one of the walls, I found it covered with a thick coating of slime, that made me involuntarily recoil from the touch. The air, too, had a foul, sickly smell, such as one is likely to encounter on entering a damp charnel house; and I soon found that these disagreeable vapors so clogged my lungs, if I may be permitted the expression, that my respiration was effected with some difficulty; and I felt a heavy pressure upon my chest, similar to what one often experiences on retiring to bed immediately after partaking of a hearty supper.

Having reached the wall—for my descent into this loathsome place had been about central way—I began to make the circuit of my dungeon, keeping the slimy boundaries within reaching distance as a guide to my steps. I had proceeded in this manner some fifteen or twenty feet, and was slowly groping along beside the second wall, when I suddenly stumbled against a small heap of bones, which instantly emitted a startling phosphorescent light, and at the same moment a dull, heavy groan sounded in my ear.

I never was much given to a belief in supernatural appearances and manifestations; but situated as I was, laboring under intense nervous excitement, the reader will hardly doubt my word when I say that I involuntarily uttered a cry of horror, and reeled against the wall; while my blood seemed to curdle in my veins,

“And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.”

Nor was my horror abated, when, venturing to scan the decaying bones by their own ghastly light, I perceived among them three human skulls, whose naked teeth grinned upon me hideously, and whose hollow sockets seemed to have eyes of fire. I closed my own eyes, to shut out the frightful scene, and made haste to withdraw from a contact with these remnants of mortality.

But though I turned my back upon them, and kept my eyes darkened, I seemed to see them as distinctly as before; till at last, made desperate by the horror I could not avoid, I resolutely faced them, half expecting to see them assume some other horrible form. Spell-bound, I gazed upon the revolting spectacle; while the awful idea took possession of my half-maddened brain, that foul murder had been done here—that foul murder might still be done here—that I might be the next victim—and that ere long my own bones might lie with these, peradventure to give out the same warning deathlight to another victim coming after me.

Gradually I grew composed, so far as dread of supernatural appearances had troubled me; and in order to banish all fear by daring the worst, I walked up to the bones, and seated myself upon them. I had not been in this position many minutes, when I heard the groan repeated which had so startled me at first. My mind being now in a state better fitted for reasoning, I began to look around me for a natural, rather than a supernatural, cause; and to find the cause, I traversed my dungeon, and searched every portion of it by the dim, phosphorescent light. I now became satisfied that no human being save myself was here confined; but it did not follow to my mind that no human being was confined in a dungeon contiguous to mine; and believing such to be the case, I said, in a loud tone:

"If you who groan have power of speech, pray answer me! Who are you? and where are you?"

"And who are you that asks?" replied a voice through one of the walls.

"A victim of villainy," I answered; "imprisoned in a dungeon that I may never leave."

"And I another," said the voice.

"Your name?"

"Moreland."

"Heavens!" exclaimed I: "Colonel Moreland?"

"The same—do you know me? who are you?" said the voice in the same breath, and in a tone that denoted surprise.

"I am Henry Walton," I answered.

"It cannot be; you are deceiving me; he perished by the halter."

"He was executed, but did not perish," I pursued, eagerly. "He was rescued by your son, to whom he owes his life."

"Walter! my son! is he alive? and where is he then?" cried the Colonel, in a quick, agitated tone.

I hastened to the spot from which the sound of the other's voice seemed to issue; and putting my lips near the wall, in a lower tone, lest we might be overheard, hurriedly communicated the leading events connected with myself since our separation—mentioning the escape of Harley, how we had followed the banditti, and what had led to my incarceration in my present gloomy abode.

"Thank God!" I heard him exclaim: "Walter is alive, and free, and vengeance does not sleep. I can bear up now, Mr. Walton," he continued—"for you have given me hope."

"And why are you, like myself, immured in a dungeon?" I inquired.

"Because I would not comply with the wishes of that human fiend, Warncliff, and urge my daughter to sacrifice herself to save me. He demands, as the price of my liberation, the hand of my daughter in lawful marriage, and an amount in gold that would beggar me; and he frankly gives as a reason for seeking this honorable alliance with Clara, when she is already in his power, that I, being proud of my family and connections, would not attempt to disgrace the husband of my child, to whose marriage I had consented, for the paltry consideration of revenge; and to make this doubly sure, he further demands that I swear, by all I hold sacred, never to molest, nor urge others to molest him; that I will never divulge what I know of him; and that in the event of his becoming involved in difficulty, I will stand forth as his friend. What motive he has in putting in the last-mentioned clause, is more than I can tell; for if detected in any of his heinous crimes, I could not save him if I would; and it certainly argues a *fear* of detection, which his bold, high-handed villainies seem to contradict. He further says, that when the money shall have been paid over to him, at some place hereafter to be settled upon, I may then take my daughter home with me; but that meantime he will hold her as security; and as I deal by my oath, so will he by her."

"But you will not agree to his base proposals?" said I, anxiously.

"No! since I know Walter lives, never, so help me Heaven!" he replied, with energy. "But hush! I hear a noise—perhaps some one is coming to me."

No more words passed between us for perhaps a quarter of an hour, when the Colonel again spoke, in a low tone:

"I think no one is listening; but it may be prudent for us to hold no further conversation for the present."

"A question or two first," I replied. "How long have you been confined in your dungeon?"

"Since yesterday eve."

"Are you at liberty to move about?"

"Yes! Can I do any thing for you?"

"Not here; but should I be murdered, (I shuddered as the word passed my lips,) and you escape, I trust you will acquaint my friends with my fate?"

"Certainly I will—rely upon it—and avenge your death, if that be possible. Alas! young man, I grieve that you are here; for Warncliff hates you; and unless something providentially snatches you from his power, you may give over hope of life."

"I know it—too well I know it," I replied.

"Through his misrepresentations, I was led, a while since, to do you injustice; for which, as we may never meet again, I crave your forgiveness."

"You have it, Colonel Moreland—you have it—and oh!—"

"Well, go on!" he said, as I paused.

"Will you do me a favor, Colonel?" I continued, in a hesitating tone.

"If in my power, as I hope for mercy, yes! Say on!"

In a tone tremulous with emotion, I continued:

"Should I perish here by the hands of the assassin, will you tell your gentle daughter—will you tell Clara—that—that—I thought of her—and prayed for her deliverance in the last awful moment of my existence?"

"I will! I will!" answered the Colonel, quickly. "Ah! Mr. Walton, you love her truly, I see; and should we all escape the toils thrown around us, believe me, I will not forget that you perilled your life to save hers."

"Thanks!" cried I: "thanks! you rob death of half its terrors, and yet make life dearer to me than ever. I have

nothing more to ask. Farewell! and may Heaven's blessings be upon you and yours!"

About an hour after this conversation, I heard sounds of music, to which many feet kept time, indicating that the alarm caused by my appearance among the banditti had passed away, and that the dance was now renewed. An hour later, the revelry began to grow boisterous; and so continued till after midnight; when suddenly the sounds of merriment were changed to cries of alarm.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ATTACK AND RESCUE.

I NOW heard the shrieks of women, the shouts of men, and the report of fire-arms, all united in one uproarious din; and my heart bounded with emotions of hope and fear, such as one in my forlorn situation could alone experience. That the rancho was attacked, was beyond question; and should the assailants, whoever they were, prove victorious, I could reasonably expect life and liberty. It was probable to my mind, that Morton and Walter had fallen in with a scouting party and guided them to the relief of their friends, and were now valiantly fighting for our deliverance. This of course was mere conjecture; but it was a natural one; and oh! how I chafed at the thought, that I could not make one of their number, and strike a blow against my enemies for the freedom of her I loved.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour, the sounds of fierce and sanguinary strife continued; and shrieks, groans, shouts, curses, and the sharp crack of fire-arms, resounded

from every quarter of the stronghold of the freebooters. At length the noise of bloody contention began to die away, and soon after comparative quiet reigned. I now fairly trembled with anxiety to learn which party had triumphed. But I was not doomed to be long kept in suspense; for presently I heard footsteps on the floor above me, and a voice, which with joy inexpressible I recognized, exclaimed:

"Is it here, villain?"

There was a reply; and the next moment the trap-door was raised, and I beheld Morton Harley, with a torch in his hand, bending forward, and endeavoring to peer down into the gulf of darkness which enveloped me.

"Harry!" he cried, in an anxious tone—"are you here, alive?"

"Yes! Morton—yes!" I fairly shrieked, in an excess of joy that almost deprived me of the power of motion; and I reeled forward like a drunken man, under a very disagreeable sensation of suffocation. "The ladder!" I gasped: "the ladder!"

The ladder was instantly lowered; and grasping the lower portion, I leaned heavily against it for a few moments, too overcome with joy to attempt an ascent. Feeling my strength revive, I placed my foot upon the lower round, and the next thing I remember I was locked in the embrace of my friend and weeping like a child. Having thus given vent to emotions that were stifling me, I withdrew my arms from the neck of Harley, and, looking eagerly into his face, exclaimed:

"Clara! Clara! tell me she is safe!"

"Heavens!" he replied, with a start: "I have not seen her! Where is she?" he demanded, turning quickly round to where he supposed one of Warncliff's men was standing. "Ha! the fellow has fled," he continued. "But no matter: I promised him quarter and liberty if he

would conduct me to you, and he has taken all further responsibility from me by rashly venturing to try escape without my aid. But Clara! we must find her if she is to be found."

"Yes! yes!" I rejoined, eagerly: "let us make active search;" and as I spoke, we both rushed out into the area or inner court.

Here I saw a number of men in a kind of undress uniform, with arms in their hands, variously occupied, and the ground strewn with dead bodies, bloody and ghastly spectacles, over several of which we had to step to cross to the building from within which I had heard Clara's voice while on the roof. As we were about to enter, Walter came rushing out of an adjoining building, and seeing me, instantly grasped my hand, and said, hurriedly:

"Ah! Walton, thank Heaven you are safe! But my father—my sister—know you ought of them?"

"Your father is in a vault of yonder building, (and I pointed to one which adjoined the granary) and Clara we are searching for—God send we may find her safe!"

At this moment we were all startled by the cry of fire; and looking around, perceived a thick volume of smoke issuing from a range of low buildings, on the opposite side of the granary and adjoining the corral, in which a number of horses, belonging to the freebooters, were now kicking and plunging at a furious rate. Several of the men, who had been engaged in plundering the houses, came running out at the cry of fire; and seeing at once the state of affairs, instantly set to work to liberate and secure the animals. The females, too, whom I had previously seen—who, during the melee, had been huddled together in one small room, half frightened out of their senses—now came pouring into the court, filling the air with shrieks of terror. A single glance showed me that

Clara was not among them; and bidding Walter fly to save his father, while I made search for his sister, I darted into the main dwelling. At the very threshold I stumbled over the dead body of a Mexican; and by the light of the torch, which Harley bore in after me, I saw several others strewn about, weltering in their blood, all apparently dead, and some of them horribly mutilated.

"The Rangers gave no quarter," observed Harley.

"Are our friends the Texas Rangers, of whom Walter spoke?" inquired I.

"Yes! and commanded by that dare-devil Walker, whose very appellation is a word of terror to his enemies."

I was too anxious concerning Clara to put further questions at that moment, and I instantly shouted her name.

"Who calls?" answered a faint voice above me.

"Ha! she lives!" cried I, in ecstasy; and looking up, I perceived a trap door in the ceiling, but no means of reaching it.

The truth flashed upon me at once. This had been her place of confinement; and by removing the ladder, Warn-cliff had both secured her against escape and intrusion. For this ladder I now looked eagerly, but could not find it.

"Here! take the torch," cried Harley, "and these weapons, and remain here till I fetch the ladder from your dungeon."

He was absent but a brief time; during which I learned from Clara that she was so secured by cords as not to be able to make herself visible to me.

On the ladder being placed against the wall, I mounted in haste, torch in hand, and soon its ruddy gleams fell upon the object of my search. She was standing in the middle of the apartment, neatly attired—her savage costume having been exchanged for one of a more civilized appearance—and as I rushed up to her, she sunk into my

arms, with a cry of joy, and fainted. She was still as lovely as ever; but I could perceive the traces which grief, fear and anxiety had made upon her pale features. A strong cord was around her waist, with the other end made fast to a ring in the floor, by which she had been confined to a circuit of so many feet. To cut this was the work of an instant; and lifting her gently, I bore her to the top of the ladder, where Harley met and assisted me to lower her to the ground.

There was now a scene of wild confusion in the open court—men, women and horses all seemingly mixed up together—while from the low structures, whence the smoke had first issued, burst broad, lurid sheets of flame. I saw at a glance that, with the headway the fire now had, it would be impossible to save any of the buildings, and consequently that there could be no place of safety within the walls of the rancho. My first care, therefore, was to bear the unconscious Clara through the great gate, which stood wide open in the rear of the building we were in. Harley accompanied me with the torch; and it was well he did; for my half Indian costume, unshaved, begrimed, weather-tanned face, and squalid appearance generally, led some of the Rangers, who were hurrying out and in, to mistake me for a Mexican; and more than once, but for the timely interposition of my friend, I think they would have done me a serious injury.

Scarcely had I got beyond the walls with my fair burden, when I was startled by the heavy tramp of a body of horse, and the next minute some thirty mounted men drew up in front of the rancho, and the loud blast of a trumpet rung out above the din.

"What means this?" asked I of Harley, in some dismay.

"The Rangers," he replied—"their leader is sounding a recall."

"I do not understand you: I took those to be the Rangers we saw inside."

"So they are, but only a part of the whole body. The attack was made by one division, which scaled the walls, and this is the other division, which remained without to cut off the fugitives. They have just returned from pursuing them."

At this moment a young man, of small stature, came up to us, and abruptly demanded:

"What's this?"

"Ha! Captain, glad to see you safe," answered Harley. "This is my friend, and the fair lady we came to liberate. Mr. Walton, Captain Walker."

From having heard much, at different times, of the redoubtable feats of Walker, whose name was truly a word of terror to his foes, I had naturally formed the idea that he was a large, brawny, heavy-bearded, fierce-looking fellow; and consequently the reader can judge of my surprise, on being introduced to him so unexpectedly, and finding him a small, slenderly made man, with a smooth almost boyish face, short brown hair and blue eyes, and nothing about him either remarkable or striking.

He slightly nodded to me, as Harley mentioned my name; and pointing to Clara, whom I was supporting on one arm, said:

"Is she wounded?"

"No, Captain, only fainted;" and as I spoke, Clara drew a long breath and opened her eyes.

"She recovers," he added. "Here, Hanson, (turning to one of his men) bring hither your horse, and be quick." And as the one addressed disappeared, he continued to us: "Let the lady mount as soon as she is able, for we must away."

"My father and Walter, where are they?" now cried Clara.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed I, horror-struck at the idea: "God send they have not perished in the flames!" and I was about to dart into the rancho in search of them, when both at the instant came rushing through the gate.

"Father! dear, dear father!" cried Clara.

"My child! my daughter!" returned the Colonel; and the next moment they were locked in each other's embrace.

Walter's turn came next; and as he pressed his lips to his sister's, tears of joy dimmed the eyes of both—nor was I unmoved at the scene.

"Ah! Colonel Moreland, glad to see you unhurt," said Walker, offering his hand, for the two had met before.

"Captain Walker," responded the Colonel, seizing the proffered hand and shaking it warmly, "I am not a man of many words—but depend upon it I shall not forget what you have done for me and mine. You have made rough work here, and I hope you have exterminated the accursed band."

"Some have escaped," answered the Captain, quietly; "but I think they will remember us."

"Have you lost any of your brave fellows?"

"Some half-a-dozen, I fear. Well, Sergeant, (to one of his men who now came up) how many are missing?"

"There'll be seven vacant saddles, Captain."

"Are the bodies found?"

"Four of them."

"How many wounded?"

"None unfit for duty."

"We must bury the dead, and then depart."

It was a picturesque, but gloomy scene, as, by the light of the burning rancho, the Rangers made a hasty burial of their fallen comrades. While this was taking place, having resigned Clara to the care of her father, I held a

hurried conversation with Harley, and this is the substance of what I gathered.

On my separating from my friends to spy out the inmates of the rancho, they had listened in anxious suspense till the shouts of the freebooters too clearly proclaimed that I had been taken prisoner. Knowing themselves powerless to do any thing for me, and remembering what I had made them promise, they immediately set off, in the hope that, providentially, they might fall in with succor. They took a southerly direction, and soon reached the bank of a large stream, which they concluded must be the Rio Grande. This they began to descend, keeping the water in sight, and had advanced some five or six miles, alternately through glade and chapparal, when they heard a body of horse approaching from below. Concealing themselves, they waited till the horsemen were abreast of them, when, thinking it more than likely they were Americans, they hailed.

Fortunately the horsemen proved to be the Texas Rangers, who were on a scouting expedition in quest of the notorious Romano Falcon; and on hearing the story of Walter and Morton, Walker decided on making an immediate attack on the rancho, thinking it not improbable that Falcon and his band might be within. They accordingly approached the stronghold quietly, and while one party scaled the walls and made a sudden onset inside, the other remained without to cut off all who might seek escape by flight. Whether Warncliff was among the living or dead, Harley did not know.

While on his way back to the rancho, Harley had learned our geographical locality, with other matters of great interest to us, who had been so long without news of any kind. We were about a mile and a half from the Rio Grande, and about fifteen miles above Matamoras, opposite which place General Taylor was now encamped

with the main body of his little army, engaged in throwing up the redoubt since known as Fort Brown, and each moment expecting an attack from the enemy, who, with treble his numbers, was watching him from the other side of the river. Some skirmishing had already taken place between small detachments of Americans and Mexicans; but as yet there had been no pitched battle between the two armies. The notorious Romano Falcon had drawn the first blood, by fiendishly beating in the skull of the gallant Colonel Cross, who had unfortunately been taken prisoner by some of his cut-throat band. For this murderous deed a price had been set on his head, and vengeance, summary and terrible, sworn against him.

By the time Harley had communicated this much, horses were brought to us, and we were requested to mount. On looking around, I perceived, by the lurid light of the burning rancho, that most of the Rangers were in their saddles. The exceptions were Walker and some of his subordinate officers, who were conversing with the fair Mexican senoritas. These latter stood grouped together near the gate, looking very much distressed and disconsolate—as in fact they had good reason to be—all their friends having fled or been killed, leaving them to the mercy of their country's foes. Presently an order was given, and some twenty of the horses, which had belonged to the bandits, were brought up to the group. On the bare backs of these beasts the girls were mounted; and while the end of a halter was allowed each to steady herself by and keep her position, a Ranger rode by her side and had full control over the animal that carried her.

Every thing now being in readiness for departure, Walker sprung upon the back of his own high-mettled beast, the bugle was sounded, the Rangers fell into position, and we set off at a steady trot, shaping our course for the Rio Grande at the nearest point.

For some distance the light of the burning rancho enabled us to see in every direction; and for a long time after, its lurid gleams were visible on the azure vault above us. We left it alone, to do its work of purification, and cleanse the earth of a spot foul with crime.

On reaching the bank of the river, the Mexican girls dismounted; and bringing from concealment some three or four small boats, they waved the Rangers a grateful adios for their gallantry, and were soon rowing over the water to their homes on the other side. Many of the latter, doubtless, regretted such speedy parting from their fair companions—but the word of their leader was a law which none dared disobey.

Walker now rode up to us, and said:

"Gentlemen, I should be glad to escort you myself to Taylor's camp—but the business I am on will not permit. From yonder females I have learned it was reported at the rancho, that Romano Falcon and his assassin band, leagued with one Count D'Estang and a few followers, are above here, and I am eager to fall in with the cut-throats and do them justice. Therefore I have selected ten trusty fellows, who will take down the captured horses, and I trust give you a safe escort."

The Colonel replied, warmly thanking him for all he had done, and expressing himself satisfied with this arrangement—adding, that but for his daughter, he, for one, would gladly accompany him.

"As for Romano Falcon," he continued, "I know nothing about him; but this so-called Count D'Estang, is a villain of the worst stamp, whom you have touched in a vital part already."

"I do not understand you," said Walker.

"The cut-throats you have just attacked, killed, or put to rout, were under his command."

"Ha! indeed? Then while assisting you, 'I have done

the State some service.' But time presses. Adieu, Colonel and gentlemen."

With this the gallant Captain closed conversation with our party, gave a few rapid orders to his men, and instantly dashed away.

Our escort of ten had some thirty horses to manage, besides those which they rode; but the animals were not refractory, and gave them very little trouble. We continued down the bank of the river, conversing among ourselves, in low tones, each congratulating the other on his Providential escape, and all secretly returning thanks for the wonderful manner in which we had been preserved and brought together.

"Dear Clara," said I, in a very low tone, riding close to her side, "I feel an inexpressible happiness in knowing that I had *something* to do with your rescue from an awful doom."

She seemed to shudder; and then extending a hand, which I eagerly seized, said, tremulously:

"Ah! say no more to me now—my emotions are too deep for utterance. I would be alone in thought, to thank God for the wonderful deliverance of myself and those I love."

For some six or eight miles we continued down the bank of the Rio Grande, without accident or incident, and were in the act of crossing an open plot of ground, surrounded by dense chaparral, when suddenly armed horsemen burst in upon us on every side, to the number of a hundred or more. Instantly the Rangers let go their captured horses; and drawing their revolvers, with which all were armed, made a bold, determined dash upon the closing circle of Mexicans, calling on us to follow. Had there been no lady in our party, we should have done so, and doubtless some of us would have escaped; but as it was, each seemed

to think more of the safety of Clara than his own; and instinctively, as it were, we formed a close circle around her, to protect her from any chance shot.

The Rangers were now having a desperate struggle with their enemies, as we could tell by yells and groans, the quick report of fire-arms, and the clash of steel. During the melee, Harley uttered a sharp cry of pain, and his bridle-arm fell dangling by his side, broken by a chance ball. While we were endeavoring to render him some assistance, a party dashed up to us, the leader shouting in Spanish that we must instantly yield ourselves prisoners or be cut to pieces.

The Colonel understood enough of Spanish to reply that we had made and should make no resistance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

NONE of the Rangers were taken prisoners, and only two made their escape—the others died fighting on the ground. But the Mexicans paid dearly for their victory—having lost one officer and seventeen privates, killed in the skirmish—besides seven others very seriously, if not fatally, wounded.

Stripping from the Rangers every thing of value, the valiant victors proceeded to collect their own dead and wounded, to take with them into Matamoras. They also took from us our arms; and then separating us, detailed four dragoons as a guard to each person—so much did they fear something unexpected and desperate might sud-

denly be accomplished by los Americanos. In this manner we were escorted to one of the upper ferries, and taken across the Rio Grande. Day broke just as we reached the right bank of the river; and as we entered the city, the sun rose bright and beautiful, dispelling even the gloom of the mind, and making every thing look pleasant and cheerful.

Hundreds of citizens and soldiers were abroad—and windows and roofs showed many a pretty pair of black eyes peering at us as we rode past to the Grand Plaza, whither our captors conducted us in triumph. This Plaza is a large open square, surrounded by trees and buildings, from which diverge several wide streets. On one side was an unfinished Cathedral, and opposite it a prison. All the houses fronting on the square were either brick or stone, with very thick walls, and heavy iron grates to the windows.

From one of these, a massive stone structure, waved the Mexican flag, and around the door stood several officers in splendid uniforms. This was the head-quarters of General Arista, who had lately arrived in town as commander-in-chief. The Square, or Plaza, was full of soldiers on parade—their new, beautiful uniforms, and bright, glittering arms, as they marched and countermarched, setting off their persons to great advantage, and giving them quite a formidable military appearance.

Now that we were considered in safe quarters, we were allowed to come together, though still surrounded by a strong guard. The dead were also conveyed into the Cathedral, to have mass said over the bodies, and the wounded taken to the hospital, while our commandant went to make a report to his chief.

"Where will our adventures end? and what will be the end of them?" were the first words of the Colonel, in a desponding tone, as we met in the Plaza. "But I beg

your pardon, Mr. Harley! I had forgotten your wound—it must be very painful.”

“It is somewhat so,” replied Harley.

“If we could only get a surgeon, and have it attended to!” said Clara, anxiously, who seemed to think more of him than herself.

“A surgeon we must have,” said Walter, “if we can possibly procure one. Father, you can speak a little Spanish, pray make inquiry of one of these fellows, as to how we can best manage the matter.”

The Colonel accordingly addressed a few words to one of our guard; who answered in a surly tone, that as to surgeon, he would like to act in that capacity long enough to perform an operation on all our throats, or words to that effect.

As the Colonel translated his reply, Clara exclaimed:

“Good heavens! have we indeed been passed from one band of illegal cut-throats to another of legal assassins?”

“We indeed seem to be the foot-balls of Fortune,” replied Harley; “and where the foot of the fickle dame will send us next, Heaven only knows!”

“I think,” said I, “this fellow’s gruffness is not a standard by which to judge our foes: I have heard that Spanish officers are gentlemen.”

“And so, doubtless, we shall find them,” rejoined Harley.

While we were thus conversing, an order came to conduct us into the presence of General Arista. To be brief, we found him very polite and gentlemanly; and after hearing our story, and asking us a few questions, he said that we did not properly come under the title of prisoners of war—as, when taken, we were not in arms against Mexico; and if we would give our parole not to take up arms against his country during the war now pending, we should be at liberty to depart when and where we pleased.

We held a consultation among ourselves, and came to the conclusion that such a parole too much encroached upon the liberty of free-born Americans, and we declined to accept his proposal.

“Then policy will compel me to order you under guard,” was his reply.

“Let us give our parole not to attempt to leave the city for a week,” suggested Harley.

To this proposition we all agreed; and on making it known to Arista, he cordially accepted it, and invited us to dine with him on the following day, when he said we should meet some captured American officers. He then gave us written permits to go any where within the limits of the city, and politely bowed us out. We left the presence with a very favorable opinion of the Mexican Commander.

Before setting out on his expedition in search of me, Harley, with his usual forethought, not knowing what might happen, had sewed up in the lining of an under-garment a number of gold coins, which the freebooters, in searching him, had not discovered; and these now proved of incalculable benefit to us—all of whom, save him, were penniless. With true generosity, he now made a general distribution among the party; and as gold will always command attention and respect in any country, we soon had the satisfaction of knowing that, for the present, we should want for nothing, and our spirits rose accordingly. In a very short time we found ourselves fixed in comfortable quarters; and a surgeon was sent for, who skillfully set my friend’s arm, and carefully dressed the wound. While my friends procured such articles of clothing as they stood most in need of, I made an entire renovation of the outward man; and with a cleanly shaved face, and a decent wig on my head, I flattered myself I once more had the appearance of a very respectable white individual.

Beyond the exciting incidents of my adventures, I feel that the reader can have very little interest in my personal narrative; and were it otherwise, I have neither time, space, nor inclination to record commonplace affairs. I trust I may, therefore, with propriety, pass over all periods of comparative inaction with a very few words.

During the week that I remained in Matamoras on parole, I held frequent and long conversations with Clara—my friends ever managing to leave us alone together, the Colonel not excepted. These days, as I recall them, are among the most pleasant of my life; and it was with joy inexpressible I saw her spirits revive, the bloom of health gradually return to her wan, faded cheek, and a look of happiness beam from her soft blue eyes. But withal, I was not wholly contented with my situation. I foresaw there was soon to be a fearful struggle between the armies of my country and Mexico; and I felt that in the present crisis the former had need of every arm that could be raised for her support. Love struggled in my breast against duty and patriotism. I could not bear to think of tearing myself away from one I so dearly loved, perhaps never to see her again; and yet to remain here, inactive, with my gallant countrymen contending against overwhelming numbers, seemed a species of cowardice at which my soul revolted. True, I was a prisoner, and not a soldier; true again, I was but a single individual; and of what advantage would be a single arm in so unequal a combat? Then I reflected that an army was only so many single individuals—that a thousand was only so many units—and if all should reason thus, who would be left to sustain the honor of my country? The first battle I knew would be an important one—and if won by Americans, would be of incalculable benefit, in inspiring confidence and damping the ardor of the foe; if lost, vice versa. The events of the week gradually determined me; and I

resolved, if it were possible, to effect my escape at the expiration of my parole.

On dining with General Arista the day following our arrival in Matamoras, I met two American officers who had recently been made prisoners. In conversation with them. I learned that Taylor's whole force was but little over two thousand, while that under Arista was nearly treble this number. The General, too, aroused my national pride, by a remark which was translated to me. Speaking of Taylor, he said it was a pity that such a handful of troops should be entrusted to so fool-hardy a commander, who, to gratify an over-weening confidence and vanity, might yet venture to give him battle, when his whole force would be swept away like chaff before the wind; and added, that he pitied the soldiers as much as he despised their leader. My cheek burned at this recital, and I felt I should like to be one of the *pitied* few.

At the time of our capture by the Mexican troops, General Taylor was encamped opposite Matamoras, hourly expecting an attack. This attack, however, was not made; and three or four days after, he withdrew with his main force to Point Isabel, leaving the fort he had constructed garrisoned by a regiment of infantry, under the command of the lamented Major Brown. The news of his *retreat*, as the Mexicans termed it, was hailed by the ringing of bells, discharge of arms, and other demonstrations of joy.

On the second day after Taylor's departure, I was startled early in the morning by a heavy cannonade, and soon ascertained that the Mexican guns had opened upon the Fort. The streets, too, were thronged with soldiers, who were already marching out of the city, and crossing the Rio Grande above and below the town. I knew by this that a battle must shortly take place, and I felt more than ever anxious to have a part in it.

Nothing had been said to us, meantime, about extending

our parole; and I augured that, during the excitement of more momentous affairs, we should be overlooked entirely. At all events, I had resolved not to give any further parole, and escape if I could when the present one should expire.

And I had further resolved not to let my friends know of my design till I had attempted to put it in execution—and for these reasons: Clara, I knew, would strongly oppose my going, and I wished to avoid a scene; the Colonel, even, might not approve of it; Harley would object, because his wound would not permit him to be my companion; and Walter, I feared, would insist on accompanying me, in which case all would have to be made known to his father, or I be censured for his clandestine departure. In view of all these things, I wrote a few lines to each, telling them my plans, and giving my reasons for doing as I did, and enclosed the whole in one envelope, addressed to Colonel Moreland, and left it where it would be found the morning after my departure.

To be brief, on the night following the expiration of my parole, I managed to get past the sentinels stationed at the lower part of the town, and, descending the Rio Grande about a mile, swum across, and immediately repaired to Fort Brown. Here, on being challenged, I answered:

"I am an American, and have just escaped from the enemy."

This procured me admittance; and on entering, I was surprised to meet Captain Walker. He did not at first recognize me, owing to my altered appearance; but on mentioning my name, he offered me his hand, and said:

"I am glad you escaped—I hope your friends did also."

In a few words I told him what had since happened to us, and how I came to be at the Fort now.

"So," he rejoined, "you wish to have a hand in the

expected fight? Well, it is not far off, and we shall need all the men we can raise. Taylor is now at Point Isabel, and between him and us the enemy is gathering in force. The General heard the bombardment here, and resolved to communicate with the Fort before setting out on his return march. I brought his despatches safely through last night, and within the hour shall be on my way back. If you would like to accompany me, I will provide you with a horse and arms."

"The very favor I would have asked," returned I, eagerly.

"It is by no means a safe journey," he rejoined. "Between here and Point Isabel are some four or five thousand of the enemy, and we may not expect to get through without a brush."

"I will join my fortune with yours," said I.

"Enough!" he replied; and turning away, he gave directions that a horse, etcetera, should be provided for me.

At this moment another person was admitted into the Fort; and what was my astonishment to recognize in the new comer Walter Moreland! He was no less astonished to find me here before him.

"Can I believe my eyes?" he cried, as he seized my hand. "Why, Henry Walton, how in the name of all that is wonderful do I find you here?"

"The very question I was about to ask you," I replied.

Mutual explanations followed, by which it appeared that we had both been seized with the same patriotic idea, and each had planned and executed his escape like the other. For the very same reason that I had kept my design a secret from him, he had kept his a secret from me, and from his friends also. Like myself, he had left a note behind, had set out at the same hour, had got past the sentinels in

the upper part of the town, and had swum the Rio Grande above Matamoras, while I was swimming it below.

"There is something very curious in all this," said I: "and it goes to prove, what never before occurred to me—namely—that we may *think* alike as well as *look* alike."

Another horse was provided for Walter, and we set out on our perilous journey—our party, with the gallant Walker at its head, numbering only nine, all told.

About five miles from Fort Brown, we suddenly came upon a strong picket-guard of the enemy, drawn up directly in our way. They challenged, and Walker answered by firing some three or four shots in quick succession, and shouting to us:

"Charge through the — yellow skins, comrades, and give them a volley as you pass!"

He led the way, and we followed, firing right and left; and ere the astonished Mexicans had fairly comprehended what was taking place, we were far on the other side of them, speeding onward like the wind.

About a mile beyond the picket-guard, as we were dashing on at the same furious speed, Walker, who was still on the lead, suddenly wheeled his horse to the left, plunged into some thick chaparral, and shouted:

"The enemy! the enemy! Bend low in your saddles and follow me."

Scarcely were the words spoken, when crack, crack went some fifty muskets; and the balls whizzed over us, under us, and about us, so that it seems a miracle none of us were harmed. For the next ten miles we had to ride with great caution; for we were completely surrounded by the enemy, and nothing but the darkness saved us from being killed or made prisoners. We had several other narrow escapes, but got through in safety; and in five

hours from leaving Fort Brown, Walker was making his report to General Taylor at Point Isabel.

Great fears had been entertained that he had either been killed or taken prisoner; and his safe arrival, and cheering intelligence that all was right at the Fort, was hailed with every demonstration of joy—not only by his own men, but by the whole army—and great enthusiasm and high spirits were the consequence.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE FIELD OF PALO ALTO.

THE day following our arrival at Point Isabel, was one of general bustle in the Camp. The report of Walker that the enemy was encamped in great numbers between Point Isabel and the River Fort, as it was at this time called, led every one to anticipate a general battle on the return of Taylor, which he had decided on, and for which he was now making active preparations.

In a brief conversation we held with Captain Walker, Walter and I offered our services for the approaching engagement, but told him for the present we did not wish to enlist for any definite term of service. He replied that it was unusual to accept volunteers on such conditions; that it was necessary for all new recruits to go through a certain routine of discipline before being brought into action; but concluded by saying that the present was an emergency—that he was short of men—that all who could and would serve against the enemy were needed—and that if we felt disposed to take part in the approaching contest, we might remain in his corps.

The next day, the seventh of May, General Taylor issued marching orders; and at three o'clock in the afternoon the whole army, a little over two thousand in number, was put in motion, with a large train of provisions and munitions of war. We proceeded some five or six miles on the road to Matamoras, and encamped for the night! Alas! the last night preceding the awful night of death which many a poor fellow, then buoyant with hope and glorious anticipations, was ever destined to see. The morrow! the eventful morrow!

Before the break of day the Rangers were in their saddles, and we set out in advance of the main army to reconnoitre the position of the enemy. When we reached what had been his main camp, we found it deserted. This looked as if he were not intending to give us battle; and returning, Walker made his report to General Taylor.

A little after sunrise the army and train were put in motion, while we again set off in advance, being detailed as scouts. Before noon we came in sight of the enemy, whose whole force was drawn up directly across the road, and whose lines, extending some mile and a half, gave him a very formidable appearance. On making this discovery, we turned back, met our General, and reported accordingly.

About noon the two armies came in sight of each other. Taylor's forces were at this time upon a wide, level plain, and near a pond of clear, cold water. In front was a row of dwarfish trees, which the Mexicans denominated Palo Alto; and beyond these, the bright uniforms of the foe could be faintly discerned, their polished arms glittering and flashing in the clear sunlight. Here our considerate General ordered a halt, and permitted his men, one half at a time, to fill their canteens at the pond—after which he permitted them to rest an hour.

This proceeding, trifling though it may seem, I have no

doubt gave us the brilliant victory of Palo Alto; for the troops had marched twelve miles, under a burning sun, had suffered much for want of water, and were greatly fatigued; and had they been brought into action immediately on coming in sight of the enemy, I do not think they could have withstood, for hours, a fresh, vigorous foe of treble their numbers.

As soon as the men had sufficiently rested, the columns were formed, and the order to march was given; and with slow, firm, martial tread, the whole force moved, with the precision of a drill, over the soft, matted grass of the prairie, which gave back no sound.

These were the awful moments to try the nerves of the bravest. Slowly, but surely, they were approaching an overwhelming foe, and knew that in a few minutes, at the farthest, the terrible carnage of battle would begin, and that Death, riding on the iron hail of belching cannons, would be busy in their midst. Now they had time to think—to reflect—to *see*, as it were, the danger upon which they were advancing; and if their cheeks paled, their hearts beat faster, and they felt that their limbs were growing too weak to support them, it was no proof that they lacked courage, but only showed how nature instinctively shrinks from inactively meeting the grim King of Terrors. To perform daring and valorous feats amid the smoke and carnage and roar of battle, is nothing; but to march slowly, deliberately, up to the death-dealing engines of war, while a breathless silence prevails, which, when next broken, may be the signal of your transit to another world, will try the nerves of the hero of a hundred battles.

When about seven hundred yards divided us from the advance of the Mexicans, they opened a heavy fire from their batteries on the right. The moment they did so, General Taylor spurred his charger along his van, gave

orders to have it deployed into line, and exhorted the men to be firm, and prove themselves true descendants of the heroes of other fields. At the same time the artillery received instructions to return the enemy's fire; and then all minor sounds were drowned in the roar of these mighty engines of death. The battle had truly begun.

It is not my intention to describe the fierce engagements of the eighth and ninth of May—the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Other pens, abler than mine, have already done justice to the gallant spirits who there fought, and bled, and won immortal renown in two of the most brilliant victories on record; and to these vivid descriptions I must refer all who may be curious beyond my personal adventures.

When the action began, the Texas Rangers, with a squadron of dragoons, occupied an advanced position on the right; but soon after we fell back, and took a position on the extreme right, where we awaited further orders. We were not long kept idle. A body of lancers made a demonstration as if to outflank us and seize our batteries; perceiving which, Walker gave the command:

“Forward! charge!”

Away we flew, the earth trembling under us; and soon friends and foes were mingled in fierce and bloody action; and groans, shouts, curses, the clash of steel and report of fire-arms, made a horrid din.

From this moment we knew no rest. Charge on charge was continually made, in different directions, on different parties, till, I believe, ere the day was won, the Rangers passed over every portion of the field. I saw no flinching; all strove to be first upon the foe; and valiantly did we all do our duty. But none could outdo our gallant Captain. He was every where foremost; and when I saw the activity he displayed, the power and rapidity of his blows, his daring, and his unequalled skill in horsemanship—while his

thin nostrils seemed to expand like those of a war-horse rushing to battle, and his eyes, lately so cold and dull, flashed and burned with fierce enthusiasm—I no longer wondered that his name was a word of terror to his foes.

The sun was drawing near the verge of the horizon, and yet the battle was raging as fiercely as ever, and none could say on whose banner victory would yet perch. Side by side Walter and I had charged and fought unharmed, while many a saddle of our gallant corps had been vacated, and more than one horse and rider had fallen to rise no more. We were at this moment pausing on the left wing of our army, striving to get a view of the enemy's manœuvres through the sulphurous smoke, that, cloud-like, rose to the very heavens, and from out which came the loud thunders of artillery, the sharp rattle of musketry, and shouts, and shrieks, and groans, and all the concomitant sounds of bloody strife. Suddenly Walker turned in his saddle, and pointing to a small body of horsemen, barely seen manœuvring on the enemy's right, cried:

“Yonder is Romano Falcón and his accursed band of Guerrillas. We must annihilate them! Forward! charge!”

As he spoke, he buried the rowels in his own high mettled steed, we followed his example, and the next moment the earth seemed flying under us. Away, away we sped; and in less time than it has taken me to record the fact, we were bearing down, with the force of a thundering avalanche, straight upon the foe. He saw us just in time to meet us in full career; and we came together with a terrible shock; and balls whizzed, steel clashed, and men like demons strove in the struggle of death.

Suddenly I felt my horse sinking under me, and I made a hasty effort to leap from his back. But my foot became entangled in the stirrup; and ere I could extricate myself, the animal fell, with a death-groan, and rolled heavily upon

my imprisoned limb. I shrieked with a pain too intense for sensitive nature to bear, and instantly the dark night of unconsciousness closed around me.

When I next opened my eyes, the shades of coming night were stealing over the earth, and objects at a distance were fast growing dim and indistinct. The sounds of strife had ceased—the smoke of battle was clearing away—but who were the victors? I now felt the most excruciating pain in my leg, on which the fallen beast still lay; and this pain, darting up into my body, seemed at intervals as if it would again deprive me of my senses. I made an effort to extricate myself; but oh! pen and tongue are inadequate to describe the terrible agony it caused me! and I soon fell back exhausted, uttering a deep, heavy groan.

My groan had an echo; and on turning my head, I perceived near me a dark human object. After two or three more groans from this object, it uttered words that thrilled me:

"Water! water! give me water or I die?"

It was the voice that thrilled—so like—could it be? I shuddered, but kept my eyes riveted upon the human mass.

Presently it began to move—seemed to roll together like a ball—then slowly rose to an upright posture and staggered toward me.

By the waning light I now had a fair view of that face. I knew it. Ghastly, bloody, with rolling eyes and livid lips, I failed not to recognise it. Great God of Justice! Thy hand was here in awful retribution! My blood seemed to curdle in my veins, as I gazed upon that face, already working in the convulsions of death.

It was the face of Willard Warncliff.

"We meet strangely!" said I.

"Ha!" he cried, trying to steady himself and fix his

fading sight upon my face: "I should know that voice! Yes! yes!—ha! ha! ha!—it is you!" he cried, with a wild, unearthly laugh, while his contorted features assumed a demoniac expression. "It is you, Henry Walton! Enough! we meet thus; but not to part; death claims us both."

He drew a knife as he spoke, and, with a howl of mingled rage and pain, made a lunge toward me. But death had too firm a hold upon him—nature was too much exhausted—and he fell heavily to the earth—his head within two feet of me. At first I thought him dead; but presently he gave a groan, raised his face, and turned its ghastly visage full upon me. Oh! that look! that awful look! I shall never forget it—would to Heaven I could! His strength, what little remained, was now failing fast—he saw and knew I was beyond his feeble reach—and slowly grinding his teeth together, he hissed out between them:

"*You triumph yet!*"

Then grasping convulsively the matted grass, he slowly sunk down to the earth, gave one long, gurgling gasp, and expired. Thus did I witness the death of my rival and foe; but oh! the sensations I then and there experienced none may know.

I now made another effort to extricate myself; but finding I could not, and the pain excessive, I lay back upon the earth, and for the next hour suffered, both physically and mentally, more than words can describe. It had now become quite dark; no living soul was apparently near me; and the thought that I might thus be left to pass the night, filled me with horror.

At length I heard voices, and, by the gleam of a torch, beheld some half-a-dozen figures approaching me. Whether they might prove friends or foes, I could not tell; but I was in a condition to feel that any change could not be for

the worse, even though it were death itself; and I called to them for help. Instantly they quickened their pace, and came up to me on a run; and judge of my delight, when in the foremost I recognized my valued friend, Walter Moreland!

"Alive!" he fairly shouted: "alive! thank God, Walton, we find you alive! I was fearful you had fallen to rise no more."

"And we are victorious, then?" said I.

"We have won the field to-day, my friend—a glorious victory—but what will be our fate to-morrow none can say."

Walter had seen me fall, heard my shriek, and, the battle over, had come in quest of me, believing he should find only my cold remains; his joy therefore may be imagined. On removing the carcass of the horse from my leg, it was found to be broken above the knee—but I had sustained no other serious injury. The men raised me carefully, and bore me away; but ere they did so, I pointed to the corpse of Warneliff, and said to Walter:

"Look there!"

He turned over the dead body, and by the light of the torch recognized the features.

"Tis well!" he said, with compressed lips; and then turned away with a slight shudder of disgust.

I was carried to the train, which was parked, and placed among the other wounded, to wait my turn, for the surgeons were all busy. I will not describe that night of horrors. It is enough to say that I suffered as much in sympathy for the poor fellows every now and then brought in—(and whose shrieks and groans, under the knife or saw of the men of science, made my heart ache)—as for myself.

In my turn my wants were attended to—my broken limb was set and splintered—and though at another time I might have thought my hurt a great misfortune, yet when I looked upon the bleeding, mangled and dying beings who

surrounded me, I felt truly grateful to God that I had been spared such awful affliction as theirs.

Notwithstanding I repeatedly urged Walter to leave me, and try to get some rest, to be prepared for the eventful morrow, he remained up with me a great portion of the night; but toward morning he took his leave, and our parting was a sad one.

The next day the wounded, myself among the number, were sent back to Point Isabel, where we remained in anxious suspense, listening to the booming cannon, which told that another fearful battle was raging. Oh! how tediously and anxiously passed the hours, till the welcome news came that another brilliant victory had been won, and that the enemy, totally routed, had returned to Matamoras. Then the shouts of enthusiastic joy that went up, seemed to infuse new life into even the dying—for more than one eye, already glazing in death, was seen to brighten at the glorious intelligence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"LAST SCENE OF ALL."

SOON after my return to Point Isabel, not wishing to remain among the wounded, I rented a shanty of one of the sutlers, and had myself removed into more quiet, if not more comfortable quarters. I also procured the services of a black fellow, who, though by no means a second Tom, attended upon me faithfully, and did all that lay in his power to render himself useful to me. I experienced much pain from my broken limb, and was at times very

despondent; but when I reflected how much worse it might have been, and recalled the awful sufferings I had seen others undergo, I truly felt I had more cause for rejoicing than repining.

But what had become of my friends? what was their present fate? I had seen nothing of Walter, nor heard a word from him, nor of him, since our parting on the battlefield of Palo Alto. Had he been wounded or killed? I had looked anxiously over a list of names reported, but his was not among them, and I knew not what to think regarding him. And Clara—dear Clara—how fared it with her? and with her father and Harley? Were they still prisoners in Matamoras? and would our victories give them freedom? or serve to render their situation more disagreeable, not to say desperate?

Days passed—weary days—days of deep, heart-felt anxiety: nights passed—lonely nights—nights of feverish restlessness, in which I often awoke from wild, horrible dreams. During this period I suffered much, bodily and mentally; and it was only, as I have said, when I considered how much I had to be thankful for, that I could feel resigned to my situation, and bear the attendant ills without a murmur.

One day, one bright and beautiful day, toward the latter part of May, as I was half reclining on my rude pallet, gazing out through the open doorway upon the sandy beach, and the blue, calm waters of the Gulf, and envying those who could walk abroad and enjoy the fresh air and glorious sunshine, my servant entered hastily, and said:

“Sir—Mr. Walton—dar’s two gen’lemen and a lady, sir, ’quiring for you just back here, and dey’re coming dis way, sir.”

My heart seemed to leap into my throat, and I replied, with great agitation:

“Show them in, Peter! show them in!”

“Yes, sir! I thought mebbby you’d just like to fix up a little, sir—they’re quite ’spectable looking, sir!”

“Never mind—never mind—there is no time, and they must take things as they find them.”

Peter hastened out; and immediately after, Harley burst into the room, and was quickly followed by Colonel Moreland and his daughter. The moment my eyes fell upon them, I gave vent to my feelings in a loud cry of joy. Harley was the first to reach my side; and seizing my hand, while his eyes filled with tears that he seemed struggling to repress, he said, in a voice half choked with emotion:

“Ah! Harry, Harry, was it kind, was it like yourself, to leave an old friend thus?”

“Perhaps I did wrong, Morton—but—”

“There, there, Mr. Walton—that will do,” interrupted the Colonel, seizing my other hand, and speaking in a warm, frank, off-hand manner: “let Palo Alto say the rest. In brief, sir, I see you are a young man of true spirit, and I like you the better for it—at your age I would have done the same. Come, Clara, what say you?”

Clara had approached timidly, and stood behind her father while he was speaking; and it was not till he stepped aside, as he appealed to her, that I caught a fair view of her features. Her lovely face was now crimson with blushes, and she seemed greatly confused and embarrassed. For a moment her soft blue eyes rested anxiously and tenderly upon mine; and then a tear of sympathy dimmed her vision, and her gaze fell to the ground.

“I trust I see you well, Clara? and that I shall find you willing to forgive me for deserting my best friends in the manner I did?”

I said this in a voice tremulous with powerful emotions;

and as I ceased, Clara raised her eyes; and though still seeming embarrassed, replied, in low, sweet accents, that fell upon my ear like music:

"I have nothing to forgive to one who more than once perilled his life to save mine." And then, after a slight pause, added: "If you really did wrong in leaving your friends, your awful sufferings would atone for far greater errors. I hope we find you better—a—Mr. Walton?"

I took her hand, and holding it in mine, with a gentle pressure, looked meaningly into her sweet face, and, with pointed emphasis, replied:

"I am better *now*, Clara." Then perceiving she was uncommonly agitated, I turned quickly to the Colonel, and exclaimed: "But Walter—where is he? I hope no harm has befallen him!"

"Safe and well in Matamoras with the army. They say he fought gallantly through both actions—at least Captain Walker so reported him to General Taylor; and as a further proof that he did something worthy, he has been offered, and has accepted, a commission, and will remain with the army. He sends kind greetings to you, and regrets that he will not be able to see you again for the present—for I suppose it is not your intention to enlist?"

"No," said I, "I have seen adventure enough; and as soon as I am able, shall set out for home—there probably to remain for the rest of my life. But I am glad to hear of Walter's success, and can sincerely say I believe he deserves it. But now tell me of yourselves! How were you treated after we left? and how did you procure your liberty?"

"No further notice was taken of us," replied the Colonel; "and when Taylor entered the city as victor, we of course found ourselves free. I must admit we had suffered much anxiety on Walter's account, and yours; and great

was our delight to meet him safe and unharmed; and, need I add, we were not a little grieved to learn of your misfortune. So it seems our old foes are dead at last?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"D'Estang and Warncliff."

"Ha! D'Estang dead also?"

"Yes, he was slain on the battle-field of Resaca de la Palma—shot by Walker himself, as he was bearing down upon the Rangers at the head of a body of lancers: Walter saw him fall."

"Well, let God judge him!" said I.

"You speak of going home," pursued the Colonel. "May I be permitted to say that you will go home with us first?"

"I may do myself the honor to call upon you before I start for Virginia—but go home *with* you I cannot."

"And why not, sir?"

"Because I shall not be able to attempt the journey for days—perhaps weeks."

"Well, we can wait till you are able."

"No, no—I could not think of detaining you from your family."

"Now hold!" cried the Colonel: "not another word! I am a man, sir, whose purpose is not easily changed; and I tell you I have decided to remain in Point Isabel till you can leave it with us. Why, you look surprised! Good heavens! is gratitude then so scarce an article that you must necessarily be astonished because we have resolved not to desert the noble friend who perilled his all to save us from a fate worse than death? Heaven forbid!"

Tears filled my eyes as the Colonel pronounced these words, for I perceived they came from his heart. I had felt lonely, dejected, desolate—but I felt so no longer. I had found a warm-hearted, true friend in him, whom, of all men, I most desired to call friend, the father of the only

being I truly loved. And Clara would remain also, and be unto me as a ministering angel! Need I say that in the present, with a thought of the future, I experienced a happiness that amply compensated for all the perils, privations, and sufferings I had undergone?

But Harley—my companion—my more than brother—there was no necessity that he should remain through the tedium of my confinement; and I urged him to go whither love and duty called him. He had done for me, I told him, all that a noble friend could do; and were there even more to do, he had a young, tender, and lovely wife, whose claims on him were paramount to all others.

He grasped my hand, and in a voice of deep emotion, replied:

"Perhaps what you say is right, Harry. That I love my dear Viola, you know; and you know how well I love her; and you know, too, if she deserves my love. And you can imagine the lonely hours of agonizing suspense she must pass in my absence, under the soul-harrowing uncertainty whether I am among the living or the dead! I need not tell you how I long to see her—to relieve her of her mental torture—to clasp her once more to this heart that beats truly for her. But notwithstanding all this, I could not face her and say I had left you in distress, in the hands of strangers; no, no, I could not do that; and were it not that I know my place will more than be supplied by the kind friends who will remain with you, dear Harry, no persuasion should induce me to leave you. But since my presence here is not needed, I will take your advice, and set out for Mexico the first opportunity—for part we must, sooner or later."

The day passed off happily in the companionship of my friends; but it was the last I was destined to spend with Harley—at least for many long years—and it may be we

shall never meet again. The next day, unexpectedly, a vessel touched at Point Isabel, which he learned would touch at Vera Cruz; and with a hurried, but tearful farewell, he took leave of us, and embarked.

While on this subject, I may add, that though I have never seen him since, I have frequently heard from him by letter. He reached the city of Mexico safe and well, and rejoined his lovely wife, who had begun to despair of ever seeing him again. In his last communication to me, of a recent date, he speaks of returning to the land of his nativity, with his family, to lay his bones with those of his fathers. Should he return, we may meet once more to go over, by the quiet hearth-side, the perilous scenes of the past. But that meeting belongeth to the Future, and of the Future God alone knoweth.

And here let me drop the veil for a time, to lift it once more, and then let it fall forever.

* * * * *

It was on a scorching mid-summer's day that we reached the quiet home of the Morelands. I pass over the scene that ensued, when a long lost daughter and father were first restored to a weeping mother and sister. We came not unexpectedly upon them, however. The Colonel had many times written home, apprising his wife and daughter of his and Clara's safety, and had acquainted them also with the thrilling events already known to the reader; but there was much still to be told, and a thousand questions to be asked and answered on both sides. Then the news having spread of the Colonel's safe return with his daughter, crowds of anxious friends, eager questioners, and wondering listeners thronged the mansion; and for a time we were literally besieged—till, in fact, I began to think the horrors of battle a pleasant pastime compared to this inquisitive torture. Among all my follies, I never

had any desire to be made a lion; but I was now, in spite of myself, elevated to that disagreeable position; and in my private journal I have recorded the fact under the head of "Awful Sufferings." I should perhaps remark here, *en passant*, that I had at this time so far recovered the use of my broken limb as to be able to walk without crutches—but there was a slight limp in my gait, which remained for weeks afterward.

Mrs. Moreland and Mary, I perceived, showed marked traces of the anxiety they had undergone, and the latter continued for some days quite serious; but her natural gaiety and vivaciousness at length returned; and her clear, merry laugh once more rung through the recent abode of sorrow and gloom. There seemed but one thing wanting now to complete the happiness of all parties—the presence of Walter. But though he was missed by all from the social circle, none took his absence so deeply to heart as his doating mother. He had recently passed through great perils—and, as a soldier, would continually be exposed to new dangers—and she longed, with maternal fondness, to see him once more—for she had withal a presentiment that he would never return.

Alas! it is with deep, heartfelt sorrow I now record the mournful fact, that her presentiment was verified. He fell on the glorious battle-field of Buena Vista, and now sleeps in a soldier's grave. Poor Walter! these eyes have paid many a sad tribute to his memory.

Although the Colonel and I had been much alone together, during my confinement at Point Isabel, and also on our journey homeward; and though I had often been on the point of asking of him the dearest boon in his power to grant, the hand of his lovely daughter; yet, somehow, when the most favorable moment had come, my heart had always failed me—the words I struggled to utter had died

upon my lips—and the important question still remained unpropounded. More than once, I think, he must have been aware of my intention; but it was not, for him to introduce the subject, and I did not for the reasons named. But now the time had come for me to "speak, or for ever hold my peace;" and summoning all my resolution, I prepared myself, as well as I could, for the trying event. Seeing him enter the library one morning, with a paper in his hand, I soon followed him, and closed the door. He looked up from his reading, and seeing that I was unusually agitated, kindly requested me to be seated. I half staggered to a chair, but did not sit down.

"Colonel Moreland," began I—and methought my voice sounded strangely, my heart fairly fluttered; and I was half startled at my own boldness—"I—I have come—to—to ask a boon," I stammered.

"It must be a great one that I will not grant to one to whom I owe so much," he replied, with a bland, encouraging smile.

"It is, Colonel—it is."

"Say on!"

"I seek the hand of your daughter."

Good heavens! the words were out before I knew it.

"Ah!" he said, with a peculiar smile, at the same time rising from his seat: "I will send you an answer directly;" and he went out, leaving me standing half bewildered, and not knowing what to think of his singular proceeding.

I was not long kept in suspense, however. Presently the door, which was partly ajar, swung quickly open, and Clara entered in haste, her features pale, and wearing an expression of alarm.

"Are you ill, Henry?" she cried, anxiously.

"Not that I am aware of—why do you ask?"

"Why, I just now met father, who said I should find

you here, and that there was something very serious the matter with you."

"Only an affection of the heart, I believe," replied I, smiling at the Colonel's joke.

Instantly Clara's recently pale features were suffused with the deepest crimson, and her eyes fell to the ground in confusion. I advanced to her, took her trembling hand, and continued, gravely, in a low tone:

"This hand, dear Clara, I just now ventured to ask of your worthy father. He immediately left me, saying he would send me an answer. He has sent me you, and I am answered to my wish. With his consent to our union, dear Clara, I need but one other's to make me the happiest of mortals: Will you be mine?"

She did not reply in words; but she trembled violently, her head drooped gently, and methought the crimson of her cheeks took a deeper hue.

"Thus am I a second time answered," I whispered; and gently throwing an arm around her, I drew her fondly to me, and was about to imprint the seal of love upon her lips, when I chanced to espy a pair of sparkling black eyes peering at us from around the half open door.

"Good faith! is that the way you lovers settle the mooted point?" cried the mischievous Mary, the moment she saw she was detected, at the same time bursting into the apartment, with her merry, ringing laugh.

Clara sprung from my side, and disappeared in an instant.

"Heigh-ho!" said Mary, looking after her, with an affected sigh: "how much she has lost by my interruption!" and again her laugh rung out, merry and clear. "Well, well, Mr. Walton, (looking up demurely into my blushing face) you needn't get the scarlet fever on account of it. So, sir, you did sing, 'Come share My Cottage,' to

some purpose it seems. Ah! well, it only proves that Clara was easily caught—you should have tried *me*."

"And you will be caught some fine day, my little torment," returned I, laughing.

"It may be," she answered, slowly, and with a mischievous twinkle of her black eyes—"but not with sentimental *chaff*;" and without giving me time to reply, she bounded away, in high glee; and soon after I heard her gayly singing:

"Hymenial chains let who will wear—
No bonds for me;
The eagle in the upper air
Shall be less free:
From melancholy
Heights of folly,
Let me delivered be!"

A week later, and with a joyous heart I was speeding over the briny waters of the Gulf, bound for my native land. But I was not alone. There was beside me a gentle being, whom I had sworn, before High Heaven, to love, cherish and protect; and in her soft, blue eyes, as ever and anon they turned upon me, beaming with tenderness, I could read that my happiness was now shared by one who had been a sharer in my perils and sufferings. Clara Moreland was mine forever.

In due course of time we reached Virginia, and found warm friends ready to give us a reception worthy of the Old Dominion,—need I say more?

* * * * *

Years have passed since the date of the foregoing events, and to me they have been years of unalloyed happiness. The holy tie which first bound Clara and me together, waxes stronger with time, and our love daily grows even deeper

and purer. The parents of Clara are still living, and in the enjoyment of health and prosperity. The light-hearted Mary is still with them; but I understand they are about to lose her. She is about to enter into that bondage against which she once so merrily declaimed; but he who will cast around her the "Hymenial chain," is worthy of his prize.

* * * * *

Reader! my adventures, I trust, are ended—my tale is told—my task is done. What more belongeth to me and mine, lieth in the great Future; but ere I enter that untrodden realm, I close the scene, and pass forever from your ken. Adieu!

THE END.

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