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THE TRAPPERS PASS



GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS.

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OR,

THE GOLD-SEEKER'S DAUGHTER.

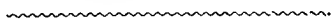


LONDON AND NEW YORK
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE RAID OF THE BLACKFEET.

ON a tributary of the Yellowstone River, and near to the Bighorn Mountains, there stood, at the time our story opens, a cabin. Though roughly constructed, there was an air of nicety and comfort about it which could hardly be expected in a frontier loghouse. On the outside, the walls presented a comparatively smooth surface, though a glance would be sufficient to satisfy one that the work was of the axe, and not of the plane. On the inside, the walls seemed to be plastered with a material which, in its primitive state, resembled stiff brown clay; and it was through a chimney of the same substance that the smoke of the fire within found vent.

A fair girl stood in the shadow of the rude doorway. Her hair, golden as the memory of childhood's days, floated in soft ringlets over her exquisitely formed shoulders, half concealing in its wavy flow her lovely checks, mantling with the rich hue of life—checks which long ago might have been tinged with the sun's brown dye, but which now, miracle though it might seem, bore little trace of old Sol's scorching hand, or tell-tale mark of western marches. Blue eyes she had, and a lovely light lingered in their liquid depths; while her form was one corresponding to her face, slender, but lithe and springing, well calculated

to endure, along with a stout heart, the privations which must come upon one thus so strangely out of place.

Half turning, she threw up one beautiful arm, and with her hand shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun, at the same time glancing to the right. As she did so, she gave a slight start, for in the distance she had caught sight of an approaching horseman. All cause for fear was, however, quickly removed, as she almost immediately recognized him as a friend. Murmuring lightly to herself: "Ah, John Howell! What can he be after?" she watched with some interest his onward progress. Why was it that he so suddenly halted? Why did horse and rider remain mute and motionless, gazing in the direction of a mound which lay not far distant from the cabin?

From behind its concealing shade, with a horrid yell, a band of Indian braves, at least fifty in number, in single file approached.

The majority of the band came directly toward the house, but the form of Howell, stationed, sentinel like, upon the crest of a knoll, having been speedily observed, a squad of four well-mounted and well-armed braves dashed toward him at full speed.

Half the intervening distance had been traversed before the trapper—for such was the white man—had fully determined whether their advance was friendly or hostile in its nature. When at length he caught fuller glances of their forms and equipments, it was with remarkable celerity that he unslung his rifle and brought it to bear upon the nearest of the advancing foe, tersely exclaiming:

"Blackfeet, by mighty!"

At the touch of the finger upon the trigger the weapon was discharged, and he who had been the mark fell. Without waiting to see the success of his shot, Howell turned his horse and struck the heavy Mexican spurs deep into his sides, speeding in hot haste over the rolling ground, with the three red-skins following in close pursuit.

While these things were transpiring, the main body was marching steadily toward the cabin. Simultaneously with the report of Howell's rifle, the band halted in front of the dwelling.

In front, mounted before a sturdy looking brave, was a noble looking white man. Although his hands were tied, yet, from time to time, they had not scorned to eye him with anxious glances, seemingly fearful that by some Sampsonion attempt he might free himself. Thus, when the party halted, men closed around him, upon either side, guarding against such a catastrophe.

The young girl still stood in the shadow of the door, with the fairy hand shading her eyes; but her face was pale as ashes, and her heart must have throbbed at whirlwind speed, to have corresponded with the way in which her bosom rose and fell. It was very sudden. A single horseman in sight, and he a friend; then to see in a moment more half a hundred yelling, savage foes! For a moment she looked at them, but as her gaze rested on the captive she raised the other arm, and stretching forth both, feebly cried: "Father!" then slowly sunk to the floor.

The prisoner, too, caught sight of the girl, and, with a violent wrench, sought to free himself from his bands. Strong as is a father's love, the cords of the savage proved yet stronger, and he found himself, perforce, compelled to act as best suited his captors. They, evidently fearing something of an ambuscade, were slow to enter, and with weapons poised and eager eyes, they glanced through the open door. Finding that their fears had no foundation, they dismounted, even allowing and assisting their captive to once more set foot upon the ground. At this close approach the girl somewhat revived. First consciousness of existence came back, then recollection, then strength, and she sprung to her feet, rushed between the two Indians who led the van, and throwing her arms around the neck

of her father, exclaimed: "Father, father! what *does* this mean? Why are you thus a captive?"

In the background, gazing with a look half inquisitive, half scowling upon these two, was a man, who, though dressed in the garb of the tribe, and his cheek deep tinged by exposure, still gave evidence of being of the white race. He was a short, stoutly-built man, of perhaps thirty years of age. His hair, dressed in the Indian style, was black, eyes small, and set deeply in his head, and the brow, though broad, was low and retreating. From some cause, the end of his nose was wanting, and this, with the wide and disproportionate shape of his mouth, tended to heighten the outlandish expression of his physiognomy.

Toward this person did Major Robison—the captive—turn his eye, and, raising as best he could his bound hands, pointed with them, at the same time saying bitterly:

"For this I may thank you, you renegade, Tom Rutter. It was through his means that I was taken; and now that it is done, let him take good care of himself, else I may be speedily avenged."

"Look a-here," interrupted the man thus addressed, a dark scowl sweeping over his brows, "I don't keer about havin' you er yer darter; 'taint no interest o' mine; 'twon't do me no good. It ar' 'cordin' to orders. I don't know as they wants *you* particklar bad either. Whatever they wants, their guyan to hev—you hev to go 'long now; an' when yer free to locomote agin, by an' by, we'll squar accounts. Don't go to sayin' hard words agin me an' them red-skins, ef you don't want to be purty effectooally rubbed out. Jist keep a cool, civil tongue in that ar head o' yourn, make yer tracks in the right manner, an' you'll fare well."

Major Robison, considering that to bandy words at that time would be dangerous and effect nothing, turned to his daughter, and in a low tone inquired what had become of her brother, Hugh. The answer was given in an equally low voice.

“ He left me but a short time ago, for a ride across the plains. I know not what else he had in view; but I much fear that he will return before these marauders leave, and so fall into their hands.”

“ Never fear for Hugh. If he is mounted, and with weapons in his hands, the fleetest horseman in the tribe could scarce overtake him in a day. These men have no time to waste; for, by the scalps at their belts, I see that they have been on the war-path. Doubt not but that they are fearing the revengeful hand of pursuing justice. They will be too cautious to linger here long. The cabin will be rifled, perhaps burned; then they will depart for a hurried march. At present we are in no danger for our lives, but what may happen if they are closely pursued, or what will be the end, I dare not even conjecture.”

As Robison stated, it did not seem to be the intention of the Blackfeet to remain here long. But a short space of time was occupied in ransacking the dwelling, and as they emerged, bearing in their hands whatever of desirable plunder they had been able to find, Tom Rutter, who seemed to have, in some sort at least, the command of the expedition, addressed them in words which, if rendered into English, would read:—

“ I tell you we must be making tracks out of this. We have been successful in our undertaking, but we must not trust to a run of good luck. You understand, Blackfeet, what we want the prisoners for. It is for your good more than mine, and they must be taken care of. The girl can't be expected to walk, so one of the braves can take her on his horse. If we had time, we might scout around to find the other young one; but, as we have not, and as he is not necessary, let us be moving at once.”

If this was Rutter's opinion, it appeared to coincide with that of the chiefs who stood around, and preparations were accordingly made to start immediately. These preparatory performances were very simple, being merely to kindle a

fire in the middle of the floor of Major Robison's dwelling, on which fire they piled a quantity of dry wood, along with all the combustible material which was at hand. Then they mounted, and only awaited the assurance that the work of destruction would be complete before starting on their retreating journey. In a few moments, with hiss and roar, the fire shot upward and outward, sweeping through the light dry roof, waving over the cabin in long streams of rich bright flame. Then, with a yell of triumph, the line of march was formed, the captives occupying the middle of the file.

As they wound their way around the clump of trees which lay at the distance of a few hundred yards from the late site of her residence, Adelia saw, nearly half a mile away, standing on a small elevation, John Howell. He had led his pursuers in a half circle, and, having escaped for the time from their range of vision, was evidently bent on discovering what course the Blackfeet intended to pursue with regard to their prisoners. Turning her eye from him, it fell upon a moving object coming over the plain in a direct line toward them. The Indians, too, saw this object, which, it could easily be discerned, was a horseman, riding at a quick rate. A halt was made for a moment, and the renegade, who rode immediately in advance of the captives, half turned on his saddle, and said :

“That ar' person comin' is yer son, Hugh, an' ef he comes a leetle closer he'll rush right into our arms. I ain't got nothin' agin ye myself, but it does seem as tho' luck was down on yer family to-day.”

The bad luck of the family, however, seemed to be partly averted, for, fortunately, the young man had a companion. This person gave token that he was an old *voyageur* on the plains; for his eye, ever on the alert, quickly caught sight of the hollow and the savages therein. Their horses were held in, a long survey taken, and then, to all appearance, satisfied that, for the present, no good

could be done by them, the two turned to one side, and pushed their steeds into a swift gallop. About the same time, the detachment which had started in pursuit of Howell, again caught sight of him, and, fired by their success, rode at a sweeping pace toward his station. He, casting a last look at the smoke of the burning cabin—plainly visible from his position—another at the captives, and a third at his pursuers, commenced a rapid flight.

Nothing now remaining for the war-party to mark with their devastating hand, they fell again into file, and marched on under the guidance of Rutter.

Signals had been made to recall the men who were in pursuit of Howell, but their signals, in the excitement of the chase, had not been seen. Perhaps if they had been, they would not have been noticed. One of their number had fallen, and his death demanded vengeance. The scalp of the white man must hang in the belt of a Blackfoot.

The pursued took the chase coolly, carefully managing a horse that already seemed somewhat tired; he lifted him at every stroke, keeping sharp watch that he was not gained upon, and evidently steering for some place of refuge.

A long way off appeared the course of a stream, stretching its slowly winding length from south to north. Directly ahead lay a small, but thickly studded copse of trees. Could the white man see what lay behind or within it?

There was another cabin there, not very large, but strongly constructed, and just at the edge of the copse, peering anxiously over the plain, a young man of some twenty-four years of age. Tall, well proportioned, with dark brown hair and piercing grey eyes, he made no bad appearance as he stood there, holding in his hand a wide-brimmed sombrero, garnished with a deep black plume.

“It is time,” he was murmuring, “that Howell came. He has been gone long, and it is not often that he delays beyond the appointed hour; yet—ha! Yonder he comes, and comes right gallantly, too, though his horse seems

weary. By heavens, horsemen are following him—Indians at that! He needs my aid, for three to one is too long an odds even for him!”

So saying, the young man snatched up his rifle, which was resting against a tree near by, and threw himself upon his ready saddled steed, making the best of his way out of thicket, starting at reckless speed in the direction of his friend and the three pursuers.

The Blackfeet, seeing a mounted man emerge from the thicket, though the distance was full half a mile, partly drew in their animals, as if fearing an ambuscade; then, seeing that no one else appeared, they rushed on with an increased fury. The five men, thus triply divided, were gradually approximating, but the red-skins seemed likely to overtake their intended victim before his friend could come to his assistance; and this likelihood appeared to be reduced to a positive certainty, as the horse of Howell stumbled, rose, and then sank in its tracks, completely blown. His rider was instantly on his feet, and facing the foes, now within fifty yards of him, and coming on at a rate which must, in a minute more, have brought them to the spot where he stood. But the hardy northern trapper is not a man who shrinks from danger, nor does his courage fail him at a critical period. Howell was one who, in all his eventful career, had never allowed his heart to falter or his hand to shake. His movements, to be sure, were quick, but not flurried, as he brought his deadly rifle to his shoulder. A careful aim, the trigger was pulled—a flash, a report, and then, with an half-uttered yell, the foremost of the three persons wildly threw up his arms, reeled, pitched heavily off his saddle, and fell with a dull thud to the ground.

The comrades of him who had fallen, seemed scarcely to notice the fact, and only hastened on with greater eagerness, in order that they might come upon their quarry whilst his rifle was discharged.

Howell gave a rapid glance over his shoulder. His friend, at a furlong's distance, had halted. It formed a perfect picture. The sun rode high in the heavens above the great mountains of the west. In the shade, with the woods and the mountains for a background, his horse motionless, the young man looked keenly through the deadly sights of his long rifle. In front of him, with the broad light of the afternoon streaming over their wild forms, came the swooping braves. The whip-like crack of the rifle broke the charm. Perhaps it was a chanee shot, but one of the Indians fell, the leaden messenger of death passing through his heart. Immediately afterwards a crushing blow, dealt by the butt of Howell's gun, swept the third and last of the party from his horse. Half stunned, as he was, he was on his feet in a moment. Bounding towards his white antagonist, he seized him before he had time to draw a weapon, and a confused hand to hand encounter ensued. Both fell to the ground, and, tightly clasped in each other's embrace, rolled over and over. The savage accompanied his struggles with frantic shouts and cries, but the white man held his teeth firm clenched, and in fierce silence essayed to end the contest. Nor was it of long continuance. An arm was suddenly raised, there was a shimmer and a flash of steel, a gurgling cry—then the hunter shook himself loose, rose to his feet, took his tired horse by the bridle, and walked toward the grove of trees and the cabin before mentioned.

The half mile which was now to be accomplished was soon passed over, and, as the space in front of the cabin was entered, to the traveller's delight, a fire was seen, with long strings of juicy meat suspended over it, whilst the coffee-pot, that article ever present at the true *voyageur's* meal, bubbled and sang a merry strain of welcome.

The repast was now prepared, and though Howell ate with gusto, yet, with a touch of that taciturnity which at times is visible in men of the wilds, he refused to utter a

word. At length, when the repast was over, he raised himself from the ground, on which he had been reclining, and took a long, earnest, and sweeping glance over the plain. Then, returning, he took his former position, and opened a conversation with his companion.

"Wavin' Plume, I was down the river to-day, and turned aside to get orders from the Major."

"Well, what did you see? I've been waiting for you to speak. It looks like danger; yet if there had been danger, you would have spoken."

Without moving from his scat, Howell pointed over to where the bodies of the dead Indians lay.

"Take it in a bunch, Charley, though, it's mighty rough. The cussed Blackfeet hes bin on a fight with the Crows, and eomin' baek they just burned the Major's eabin, and gobbled up him and his darter, nice as you choose."

As if waiting until he had taken in and digested the whole of this intelligence, Waving Plume sat silently for a brief time, gazing at his companion. Then, leaping to his feet, he exclaimed :

"Saddle your mustang, quickly ! We must leave some token here for the boys, if they come in to-morrow, as they ought to, and then start in pursuit. Linked in, as we are, with Robison, no question of odds ean, for a moment, allow us to think of deserting him and his daughter. We ean follow close on them, Hawkins ean hurry his men along our trail, and we may be able to attack them before they reach their village."

"It ain't no use to get in a flurry. My animal won't be fit to start for a couple of hours yet, and I always was in favor of taking things cool. Saddle your horse though, get your traps ready, leave your signal ; and when you're in the saddle, I guess Jack Howell won't keep you too long awaiting."

As they could not start for several hours, all their preparations were made with deliberation. Their saddles were

first examined, every strap and thong undergoing a close scrutiny. Next their arms were inspected, and those things which might be necessary to them while following the trail, were brought out from the cabin. A moderate supply of provisions, prepared to keep, a canteen for water, a small flask of liquor, a rifle, a pistol, a blanket, and a hunting-knife comprised the equipment of each. With these, and a sufficient stock of ammunition, the hardy hunters and trappers would willingly strike out upon the surface of the broad prairie, or into the deep recesses of the rugged mountains, though stirred only by the prospect of a small pecuniary compensation. Having these, the reader may suppose that the two would hardly hesitate as to the course which they were to pursue, when urged on by a strong friendship and a stern sense of duty—and, with one of the two, a still tenderer sentiment.

Howell led the horses out of the thicket, and stood waiting for his companion.

“Come on, Archer! We mustn’t lose too much time, or the scent ’ll lay cold. The black rascals has got a good start on us now, an’ the sooner we wipe that out the surer we’ll be about our job.”

“Wait a little,” was the reply. “We must leave a note here for Ned and his party, telling him what is up, and what we intend. The Crows, too, if they make any pursuit, will doubtless send a runner here, so that it will be well to show them the direction in which they can find us.”

“Yer right about that last, though I didn’t think of it afore. As fur Ned, what’ll ye bet he won’t be on the trail, and closer up than us by to-morrow mornin’?”

With the touch of a good amateur artist, Charles Archer—or Waving Plume, as he had been named, from the feather that, through storm or shine, floated from his sombrero—was busily engaged sketching on the rough door of the little house; and the bit of charcoal was sufficient to convey a rude, but significant hint to the eyes of any beholder. A

pair of feet, as black as soft coal could make them, and an arrow pointing in a northward direction.

Simple as this appeared, yet it was abundantly sufficient for the purpose. The Crows, if they saw it, would understand, at a glance, that the trappers were not only aware of the presence of the Blackfeet, but had also gone in pursuit. In fact this idea struck Howell rather forcibly, for he remarked:

“There you are? If Ned comes in, he can understand that without any spectacles at all, and so kin the Injuns, if they come to get our help, which they couldn't if it was writin' ”

CHAPTER II.

THE STRATAGEM OF THE TRAPPERS.

WITH the privilege of the romancer, let us transfer the reader to a spot some thirty miles distant from the locality mentioned in the preceding chapter. It is a beautiful place. On the west, the mountain; on the east and south, the plains; on the north, a spur of hills running out from the original chain. Here vegetation flourished, and the sweet breath of nature was fresh and dewy. Trees and flowers, and green grass, and sparkling streams, greeted the eye, and the soft undertone of winds and waters, so like to silence itself, rang soothingly in the ear.

Hard by a spring of clear water, which bubbled out from under the huge trunk of a fallen tree, a small body of men were encamped around the smouldering embers of the fast-dying fire, on which they had prepared their evening meal. That duty having been disposed of, and their horses seen to, they were, after the manner of their class, engaged in a talk. The subject, too, which claimed their attention, was one of more importance than mere calculations as to peltries, or the ordinary run of camp-fire stories.

"I tell you," said one, the youngest, apparently, of the company—"I tell you that's the trail of a party of Black-feet, on the war-path. You kin see that with half an eye. That feather come out of the top-knot of a chief, with his battle fixins on. That track's deep, and cut up enough to show a large band, even if it is narrer. So I tell yer, Bill Stevens, as my idear, that we'd better be movin' toward head quarters, 'stead of loungin' about here to-night. I ain't afeard for ourselves, but it's a duty, an' Wavin' Plume an' Howell are alone in camp, and might get circumented. They ain't up to *all* the Injin dodges yet, an' ef the redskins get that 'ere cabin, there's all our pelts gone, slap."

"Bah!" contemptuously remarked the man addressed as Bill Stevens, "I ain't goin' to admit it's a war-party; but ef it war, I'd back Charley Arden's long head agin 'em all. I'll allow we'd better be gettin' out o' this, but the cabin ain't in no danger yet a while."

"I don't know," chimed in another. "It's nigh onto fifteen year since I first crossed this here region, and I calkerlate that them resembles Injins tracks, an' made by a crowd it 'ud be cussed onhandy fur us to meet. They're bent on mischief, an' we'd better outen the fire and make a clean break, fur we can't tell how many of 'em may be about."

"The Biting Fox is right," said a voice which seemed to come from their very midst.

Instantly the whole party leaped to their feet, and, with surprise pictured on their faces, gazed in the direction from which the voice proceeded. Right by their fire stood a man, tall of stature, and apparently of the Crow nation. In full war-paint he stood, leaning on his rifle, and gazing intently upon the hunters.

"The Biting Fox is right, for the trail is of the Black-feet. Their number is large, and their blood is warm, for they seek the scalps of the Crows. Three suns ago they passed here; to-night they will return—Antonio waits for

them. The fair-haired daughter of the great white Medicine may be with them, and they will pass quickly; but the rifle is long, and the eyes of the young eagles are sharp. Will they wait for them?"

"Yer right," shouted Biting Fox, springing to his feet. "They'll pass the Major's house, sure as death, an' ef Wavin' Plume an' his chummy ain't along here on their trail, I'll never look through sights agin."

"The white men will need all help. The two braves may come, and the warriors of the great Crow tribe will press hard on behind them, for they are very brave."

"I know it—an' I know you, don't I? Ain't you the half-breed Antonio, who was along with Major Robison the time when I met him in the Wind mountains, with a dozen Snake Injins arter him?"

"Biting Fox is a big brave. He killed them Shoshnees with a knife. Snake squaws tell it to their papooses, and the death-song is still in their wigwams," and the half-breed crossed over and gravely shook the hand of the trapper.

The person whom we introduced as the first speaker had been viewing Antonio rather curiously for some time, and now, with a half-puzzled sort of tone, he asked:

"Look a here, I've got two questions to ask—how did that ar log git thar, an' how did you happen to be in it? Ef you had a bin one of the sneakin' cusses as made that trail, you could a knocked both of us over before we could a knowed whar the shots come from."

"The Great Spirit placed the tree there—three suns ago I was here at the spring, when the dogs of the Burnt Stick came, and I crawled into the tree to hide from them. While they were at the spring I heard their plans, and to-night I waited for them to return. I was sleeping, but awoke at the sound of your talking."

This conversation, carried on by two of the party, reassured, as it was intended to do, the rest; and, satisfied

that the half-breed was a man to be trusted, they were now ready to enter into a discussion as to what was to be done. One of the first things to decide was as to the probable course which the Blackfeet would pursue. Should they come by this route, would they be likely to have in their possession either the Major or his daughter? If these questions were answered affirmatively, what was to be done?

The discussion was short but harmonious. Only one feeling was manifested—to attempt a rescue. Thus it was that Ned Hawkins—a sharp-witted and experienced hunter, who had command of the men—having spent some little time in thought, and some little more in conversation with Antonio, announced his determination.

Well knowing that the traces of their presence would not be so effectually obliterated as to deceive the vigilant eyes of the savages, he resolved upon trying the effect of a blind trail. This he did, not from fear of personal danger, but from the thought that though Robison and his daughter might be prisoners, yet it might be so ordered that any immediate attempt at rescue would not be advisable. In this case the known immediate presence of white men—who would naturally be the friends of the prisoners, and ready to aid them in any attempt to escape—would cause the march to be hastened, and vigilance redoubled.

Hawkins threw himself upon his horse, making a signal for the men to mount and follow. Without questioning the propriety of this move, they obeyed, and all set out in the direction—nearly at right angles with the trail—of the nearest encampment of the Crows. They held on this course for some distance, until the bed of a stream was reached, and then forward for a few hundred yards, till the noofs of the horses struck upon hard ground, pointed out by the half-breed, and over which it would be difficult to trace them. Taking, at length, a bend over this, they returned to the stream at some distance from the spot where they had previously crossed it. Halting at the

stream, the leader made a sign for the rest to stop, and at the same time, taking his blanket from its place, behind his back, he dismounted, and advanced to the low, shelving bank, spreading the blanket carefully along the ascent. The blankets of the others were used in like manner, and soon a sort of bridge was made over the grassy turf, upon which the animals were led. Then the hindmost blankets were raised, and placed in front, the horses proceeded a few steps, and the same process was repeated. A few rods thus passed over, brought them into their old trail. Along this they hastily galloped, for much time had been consumed in the operation, and if the foe should arrive a little before the expected time, their plans might not admit of a full completion.

At the old camping-ground they found Antonio awaiting them; and, by the same means employed at the stream, they began to transfer their horses to the shade of the clump of timber upon their right. All this took time; yet, so methodically was everything done, that not a moment was lost. As the green foliage of the overhanging boughs and interlaced bushes received them into their embrace, half a dozen hearts beat easier at the thought of the haven won.

Antonio leading, they soon came into an opening; but, as man after man defiled into it, from the opposite side came a scream, so shrill, so weird and unearthly, that in mute amazement they halted. A shudder, quick and involuntary, went ruffling through the frames of all, and every eye was searchingly bent in the direction from which came the sound. Through the low bushes that, with their trailing branches, surrounded the circle in foliage drapery, they could indistinctly see overhead a dusky body. Silence brooded over the group, touching all with its icy hand. The horses shrunk back with an irrepressible fear, and not a man was there whose thumb did not strike, with startled quickness, the lock of his rifle.

Coolness came back to them; first to Antonio, then to the others, but Hawkins, as his eye gleamed along the barrel of his piece, in a low, repressed tone, muttered:

“Injun devil, by mighty!”

Biting Fox murmured:

“A *caraque*,” and at the same time drew a bead on one of the two fire-flashing eyes that scanned them from within the bushes.

The half-breed’s hand rested upon his hunting-knife, though he did not unsheath it, and a low and warning “hold,” issued from his lips. The word was scarcely necessary. Though all had so suddenly thrown themselves on the defensive, yet no one seemed anxious to take the responsibility of a shot.

The two fire-eyes remained stationary for a time, steadfastly and unwinkingly regarding the group. Then, to the astonishment of all, the fixed and steady gaze was withdrawn, again was heard the wild, unearthly scream, and with rapid bounds, the animal vanished in the darkness.

The leveled pieces were let drop into the hollow of their hands, and Hawkins turned to Antonio with:

“I’ve heerd tell o’ this critter often, an’ I’ve seed him myself, twice afore, but I never heerd, and I never knowd of his gettin’ that elost to a man without tryin’ to git closter. Ther an ugly brute, an’ I b’leve I’d sooner try a rough an’ tumble with a grizzly, hisself. What does it mean?”

“It is a sign,” responded the half-breed.

The men threw themselves down, to await in patience the expected arrival. The trapper, who, on the first apparition of Antonio, had recognized him, was disposed to continue the conversation. Some few words passed, and then the question was asked, as to what time the Indians might be expected.

“An hour yet. The horses of the Blackfeet will be wearied; but, when the moon rises, their scouts will be at

the spring. If my white brethren had been unwarned, they might have been seen. Then they would have traveled fast. The golden haired would have been mounted on a swift horse; the road to their land is but short, and a young squaw, given to the Great Spirit, is never seen again."

"Right, by mighty! You know the red varmints, like a book."

"Four nights ago, the Blackfeet encamped by the spring. They kindled no fires, and Prairie Wolf was in the hollow tree. Then he heard the chiefs say that the girl should return with them."

"That hollow tree business is none of the safest. If they should happen to look in there, they'd knock you in the head without hesitation. I wonder a man of your class would run the risk."

"Antonio lurks in the woods, and along the mountains for revenge. His bullets sing through the forest, and his arrows whistle across the plain. He does not know fear. He has no home now, but once he dwelt in the wigwams of the Crows. His squaw was the Drooping Lily, and his children played in the shadow of his tent. No one followed the buffalo and the deer closer, or kept the trail of the foe better. Though the blood of the pale-face mixed in his veins, yet the tribe was proud to call him brother, for he was a Great Medicine. When Antonio had journeyed far to the east, the Blackfeet came upon his wigwam, and the Lily and the young children were scalped. When the brave returned, he found nothing but the ashes of his cabin. Then Antonio followed the trail for revenge. He has killed many braves, but his revenge is not yet done."

Silence came upon the group, after listening to this sententious story. Then to the anxious watchers there appeared a faint glow along the eastern horizon, rapidly growing brighter, and heralding, in silver letters, the rising of the moon. Bill Stevens' eye swept over the plain

in a long and steady glance, returning to the half-breed, weary and somewhat disappointed.

"I'm mighty afeered, that them Injuns ar a goin' to be among the missin'. It ar rayther doubtful 'bout ther follering the same trail back. Don't look natral, ye see."

"The white brave does not understand the red-man, like Antonio. The chiefs said in their council that they would return to the spring at the rising of the moon on this night. The Blackfoot is no true brave, but he does not lie to himself. At the set time, he will come."

Ned Hawkins, meantime, had been diligently watching the horizon, straining his eye-sight in the endeavor to discover something to repay him for his trouble. Now, more through surprise than fear of the presence of any enemy, he uttered a warning "Sh!"

On the plain a long line of dark moving forms could be seen, coming on at a fast pace. There was sufficient light to show to the breathless watchers that they were Indians; but to what tribe they belonged, could not be told until they drew nearer, or the moon should fully rise. There was, however, but little doubt in the minds of the trappers, that they were the expected enemy. The story of the half-breed had so far been verified.

All doubts which *could* be felt on the subject were quickly dissipated, by their arrival at the spring. True to the agreement made in council, those who followed this trail kept well the appointed time, and at the moment the leader sprung from his horse, the under edge of the moon's disk leaped lightly above the mark of the eastern horizon. As they were not fearing a close pursuit, a halt of the whole line took place, and such preparations were made, as would indicate a stay of several hours.

As they filed one after another into full view, and no signs of prisoners could be seen, the half-breed shook his head in an unsatisfied manner, while Hawkins said in a whisper:

"Prairie Wolf, I allow yer sharp in Injun matters an' death on Blackfoot critters, but you've mistook the thing this time, an' run us inter a purty snarl asides. There's on'y about twenty of the red-skins, an nary a pris'ner."

"Antonio was right. The band was twice as large when it passed, three suns ago."

"Ef yer right, it beats me," put in Stevens, in a gruff, but low tone; "only one way to elar it up. They've been whipt like thunder, an' consekently ther in a bully frame of mind fur rubbin' us out, ef they once get scent."

"If the pale-faces will wait till they are settled, they shall learn why but half of those who went, returned. They look not like men who have been beaten."

"Waal, I allow it might be some sort o' a consideration to know about them things, but then, as the Major 'pears safe, there's other things nearer home to look at. S'posin' them thunderin' sneakin' rascals takes a notion to turn their noses up here, what's to be done? They hain't no pris'ners, so we don't want to make no muss; ef they do, we're in a perdicament. In front, thar ar copper-skins, this here thicket runs back a little, but then, thar ar a hill, forty horses couldn't elimb. 'Long one side, fur the greater part, the hills are nigh as bad, an' the tother is a swamp, jist as hard to travel. We're in a box, we ar."

This speech, notwithstanding the important facts which it contained, was somewhat dangerous to their safety, for Biting Fox, the speaker, had incautiously let his voice rise to a very loud whisper. Accordingly, Antonio expressed his opinion on the question of what's to be done, by admonishing silence.

"Ef we were squaws, who talk, we might be in danger; but we are men, who fight and do not talk. Antonio will creep up to their camp, and hear what they say."

No dissenting voice was raised to this proposition, and he departed with that quick and stealthy step, for which

the aborigines of our country have been so noted. So weird-like was his motion, that he seemed like a ghost flitting through the trees. When he reached the edge of the copse, he disappeared entirely.

When the scout had crept up within hearing distance of the encampment, he redoubled his caution. Advancing like a serpent, he felt well around before he drew his body forward, fearful that something might lie in his path, which, giving forth a sound, might herald his approach. Long practice in this kind of work, enabled him to advance noiselessly to within a few yards of the nearest group, where, sheltered by the already mentioned trunk of the fallen tree, he could easily understand their conversation. The halt was a temporary one, but a number of the braves, tired by their long journey, had sunk to sleep, only four or five, apparently, being yet awake. These, engaged in a conversation as earnest as would be consistent with their savage dignity, were stationed nearest to the cover which concealed the hunters. All of them appeared to be chiefs of some importance.

Antonio remained in his position, near a quarter of an hour; then, having learned those things which he wished to know, sought to retrace, unobserved, his steps. This he succeeded in doing, and, just as the hunters were becoming anxious, on account of his prolonged absence, he stood in their midst.

"Waal! what did yer make out?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Antonio was right. The white chief and the young squaw, his daughter, are prisoners. Those who have the two, followed another trail, but they will meet each other at the great crossing of the Yellowstone River. These, at the spring, have the scalp of the Crow at their girdle, and the Prairie Wolf would fight them for revenge."

"This ar a nice piece o' business. Here we ar, cooped up, an' every minute wasted. Ef them Injuns don't leave

afore mornin', there won't be no time left to help the **Major**, an' he'll have to go under, sure," muttered Bill Stevens, while Biting Fox seemed to coincide in the opinion. As for the leader, he thought more than he said, being a man of few words, while the half-breed stood gloomily apart, leaning upon his rifle, and moodily meditating some scheme of revenge.

The time wore slowly on; an hour or so would have to elapse before the period fixed by the savages for their departure. So taken up with other matters had they been, that none of the party thought to ask Antonio whether he had heard any remarks concerning their presence at the spring. Now, when the question was asked, he was so self-absorbed, that he did not at once hear it; but when it was repeated, he answered:

"The Blackfeet have scented the presence of the pale-face, and have looked up the trail. They think the white hunters have gone in a path which leads to the encampment of the Crows, and they say they may fall in with the rest of their brethren. But Talmkah, the great brave, is with them; he is not easily deceived. He may lead them to this hiding-place, if he takes the time; let the white men keep watch, lest they be surprised."

Even as the half-breed was speaking, the four Indians in council raised themselves from the ground, swiftly wending their way to the spring. Standing there for a moment, they cautiously set out on the trail which had been made. As the form of the last brave was lost to view, Ned Hawkins whispered in a meaning tone:

"We're in fur it now, boys! Yer can't blind old Eagle-eye, nor yer can't run away. It'll be a fightin' matter, an' it ar a blessin' that half them varmins ar sleepin' Don't fire unless they're right atop of you, or gin the yell. Then fight like grizzly b'ars er catamounts. Ef yer don't, yer har will be riz, sure."

The conjecture that the false trail would not blind the

eye of Talmkah, very soon proved to be true. Perhaps any of the other braves would have been satisfied at losing the trail in the distance; but he, revengeful and war-like—two traits which, combined with great personal courage, are not often found in the same character—knew that the band was but small, and was willing to carry home scalps of the white man, even though it should be at the risk of meeting their unerring rifles. In the course of ten or fifteen minutes the whole party returned, and, throwing themselves down as before, appeared to be cogitating on their want of success.

“I do b’lieve, boys, they’re off the track. If so we kin lay still for an hour or so, an’ then they’ll move off. What do you think, Prairie Wolf?” queried Biting Fox.

He, thus addressed, quietly shook his head for an answer, making a gesture indicative of doubt.

“Yer in doubt. Now, I allows it ar a doubtful subject, an’ ef—hillo! Fire an’ yer a dead Injin!” whispered he, in a stern, low voice, at the same time bringing his rifle in line with the heart of Antonio, who, regardless of their dangerous position, was aiming in the direction of the Blackfoot camp.

The movement and address of Biting Fox recalled him to his senses, and, carefully letting fall the muzzle of his gun, he pointed to a dark object, dimly to be seen creeping slowly along toward the thicket, and, in a voice even lower than he had formerly used, he whispered:

“That is Talmkah.”

With a sagacity all their own, the Indians had divined that the whites had taken refuge in the thicket. Moreover, it was patent that from the care which they had exercised, and the time occupied in the movement, that they did so with the intention of watching them—perhaps of making an attack, if a favourable moment presented itself. The wary Talmkah, fearful, perhaps, of a feint and an ambuscade, would not allow an onset to be made

by his men, unless with overwhelming numbers on their side. Controlling their emotions he bade them remain silent, and apparently unconcerned, until he should return from a reconnoissance.

Delicate as was the feat of crawling up to a hostile camp when the enemy were watching all movements in front of them, the chief might have succeeded had not the keen eye of Antonio, kindled up with the fire of revenge, now that his mortal foes were near, been fixed upon him. A moment after he had been pointed out, he was again invisible. The half-breed turned to the hunters.

“Prairie Wolf will go fall upon Talmkah. If he can meet him the chief shall die, and know not the hand that struck him. If it fails, let the white men ride straight through the camp, and they will escape. Fear not for Antonio—he can take care of himself. If the great braves of the Crows and the white trappers do not rescue the prisoners before, we will meet at the Great Crossing.”

Before nay could be said, he was gone. Five minutes passed as an age, and there was heard a wild, fierce yell; two figures arose from the ground, then fell again, writhing together in a desperate, deadly encounter. Quick as thought the score of warriors were on their feet, and rushing toward their horses. As they rose, five steeds, with their five riders close clinging, charged madly out of the thicket, and bore down upon the confused mass. With a volley from their fire-arms, the horsemen dashed through them, and several of the savages fell. Before the Indians could bring their arms to bear, they were comparatively useless, for the whites were out of range.

A cry from the throat of Antonio brought them to their senses. The grasp of Talmkah had slipped, and his antagonist drove home his knife. Then a piercing whistle rang out, so shrill and loud that Ned Hawkins, at the distance of a quarter of a mile, turned in his saddle. As the last sound of the note died away from the shrubbery, with

crash and tear, came a coal-black mustang, dashing for the spot where the single combat had taken place. Then Antonio separated from his antagonist, and threw himself upon his horse. One more cry of exultation, and he rode recklessly over the plain, coal-black mustang and stout-limbed brave vanishing from sight of both friend and foe.

"Enybody hurt?" was the first query, after the trappers were out of gun-shot.

"Nary one," said Bill Stevens.

"Blessin's don't come single-handed. Got out o' the durned scrape easier than I 'spected. An' the half-breed, who ar el'ar grit, 'eordin' to all appearances, 'il save his scalp, too. Meanwhile, what are we to do? Stay here, strike for head quarters, er foller 'em on?"

"Why, jest wait till they get a leetle start, an' then tuck on ahindt. Ef they warn't to meet the rest at a 'painted time, they would be after pitchin' in; an' ef it wan't that Robison an' his darter ar pris'ners, that'd be jist my game, too. Keep out o' sight; we may do some good, yit."

Here Gus Woods, another of the party, whom we have not before introduced by name, took part in the council.

"We know that the two parties are going to meet—this one and the one which has the prisoners. It will not do us much good to follow these when we have nothing to do with them. Is not that so, Ned?"

"Yaas."

"Well then, if they are to meet at the river, and if we knew whereabouts, we can tell pretty near which way the other party will be likely to travel. If nothing happens they will get there first, and can't we come up with them before these form a junction? Wouldn't we be doing more good to the Major by acting in that way?"

"Yaas."

"Then what I want to say is this. By judging of the distanee these have traveled, we can tell where the others are. Whenever we have done that, let's make a bee-line

for the spot. Twenty miles traveling to-night will put us right across their trail. Our horses are in good condition now, and we can fight them at once, if we see a good chance, or skirmish with and detain them until we do."

The mind of a *voyageur* is like a steel trap. When an idea once gets in it, it closes tight, and holds it there.

"Yer right," was the response of all.

A little conversation, a few questions as to route and distance, and then, with a hardy assurance, the hunters struck across the broad prairie. Now along its level surface, now through thin belts of timber, or clumps of bushes; again over undulating mounds and through the beds of numberless summer streams which lay in their way, they ceaselessly pursued their course. Every sign which lay in their way was instinctively noted as they flitted by, and, by long practice, they could see far around them.

For several hours they traveled on, until the moon seemed nearly ready to sink behind the mountains, which lay off and away to the west. Noticing this, Biting Fox partly drew rein, and remarked: "I should calkerlate that it war time, nigh about, to stop. We haven't so very many more miles ahead, an' ef we should happen to cross the trail too soon, we don't do any good, an' mebbe a sight o' bad. The hosses ar a lectle blowed; here's a good place to rest 'em, so I'm in fur holdin' up."

"All right," responded Hawkins, and the party halted.

As they did so the moon dropped quietly behind a black cloud, and, for a few moments, they were left in nearly total darkness.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTIVES.—FRIENDS ON THE ALERT.

WEARILY passed the day to the captives; when night came down there seemed no sign of cessation from the toilsome march. On, still on, the column kept its way, until it was

only an hour or so before midnight, that the savages gave signs that their resting-place was nigh. Then some of the younger braves began to stretch their wearied limbs, while Rutter glanced eagerly around, striving, through the darkness, to see the various landmarks with which he was familiar. Though the renegade had said but little during the afternoon and evening, yet he ever rode near to the prisoners, keeping a watchful eye upon them. Now, as they came to a huge boulder, around which they were compelled to make a circuit, he ventured to inform the Major that they were near the end of the day's journey, and that they would soon encamp for the night.

This intelligence, welcome as it was, elicited no remark from the captives; but, had there been sufficient light to observe the face of Adele, Rutter could not but have noticed that she considered it a gratifying piece of intelligence. She had been compelled to take a seat behind a grim-looking brave, who, though he handled her tenderly enough, nevertheless had but little sympathy for his fair companion. The journey had not been accomplished at a snail's pace, and little compassion was shown to the weary pale-faces.

At length the foremost of the file of warriors uttered a not unmusical grunt, expressive alike of satisfaction and intelligence. They were in a small timbered bottom, admirably suited for an encampment. It was toward this spot they had been aiming, through their hurried march.

Thomas Rutter, however, was not the first man to take advantage of the location. A party of red-men had evidently remained on the spot for some time, and the lodges which they had occupied were standing in a good state of preservation. One of the best of these Rutter immediately set apart for the reception of the captives. Two other huts remained, rather larger in size, though hardly as well constructed. These were made the head quarters of the chiefs; the braves were compelled to take up with beds on the bare ground, the sky their only roof.

After these dispositions had been made, Rutter sought out one of the older chiefs, and held an earnest consultation with him. During the course of the conversation, glances were more than once cast towards the hut, and then across the dimly lighted prairie. Pursuit was evidently feared, and the white man was asking the opinion of the chief, whether it would be safe, under the circumstances, to build a small fire. For some reason, best known to themselves, it was important that the Major and his daughter should be brought, safe and sound, to the land of the Blackfeet, and in order that this might be done, Rutter insisted that they should have some refreshment after eight hours' travel without rest or food.

"The white brave may do as he pleases," was the response of the red-man. "If he fears only the Crows, he may do so. But it is not they that we need fear; the white captive, when he came to our hunting-grounds, brought men with him to protect him. They have eyes like the hawk and noses like the vulture. When they find that their friend is gone they will follow on the trail. Biting Fox and his friends can strike before they are seen."

"Yer partly right thar, but I don't keer fur Biting Fox. Thar ar a leetle matter atween us as'll hev to be rubbed out the first time we meet, an' the sooner that time comes the better. I guess we kin risk a leetle fire ef we keep her shaded. An Injun mout see her here, but a white man can't."

The brave made no reply to this, and soon a thin column of smoke, arising from the centre of the encampment, announced that Rutter had settled the question in accordance with his own wishes. There was something about this man, which was by no means easy to understand. That he was a renegade, and that he had played a conspicuous part in the capture of Robison, was evident. That, unlike most persons of his class, he had yet a heart for his own people, numerous little acts, insignificant in themselves, clearly told. That he had from the first kept on a stiff

upper lip before the Major was true, but he had so arranged matters that their captivity was by far less irksome than it might have been. It was through his influence that the savages showed more respect for him and his daughter than was their usual wont to their prisoners.

Now, when Rutter entered the cabin, bearing a meal, plain, of course, and such as western men and western women are obliged to be content with, but abundant and substantial, there was actually an expression of benevolence on his countenance.

It is supposed by some that sorrow destroys the appetite. If such be the case, then were the prisoners not at grief's lowest depth, for they did ample justice to the renegade's preparations. Perhaps it was this that so far softened Robinson's heart as to enable him to speak to the man before him.

"Perhaps, Rutter," said he, "you can tell me what this thing is going to end in. You know well enough that I never had any difficulty with the tribe of which you are now, I suppose, a member. If every white man had treated the Indians in as fair a manner as I have, there would, or ought to be, a more friendly relation existing between the two races. I never was really in your region but once; and then the only harm done was shooting a deer or two and a grizzly. According to the best of my knowledge, no Blackfoot's eye fell on me from the time I entered until the time I left their hunting-grounds."

"Waal, Major, yer c'mencing to talk kind o' sensible. I got nothin' agin ye, an' would'nt of myself a hurt ye; but I had my orders. If yer done as ye say, yer won't be hurt, ner yer darter neither; if yer didn't, it'll be apt to be rough for both. I don't want yer bad will, but what I done was all on account o' justice."

"I don't really understand what you mean, but if the tribe thinks I ever did it wrong, they are greatly mistaken. Can you give me any idea of the matter?"

"You'll find that out soon enough. I got orders not to

teel yer anything, but ye kin calculate on yer darter's life bein' safe, any how."

"Thank heaven for that! For myself I do not care. What I have done, I have done for her and her brother. Her brother is safe; if she remains so, I am satisfied."

The inside of the lodge presented a wild and picturesque appearance. Rutter was standing near the entrance, and the light from the torch which he held in his hand fell full upon his curiously shaped head, bringing it out in all its strange oddity. The girl, young and fair, half reclined on a bed of skins, which formed part of the spoils of the Black-feet in their late foray. The third one of the party stood in the shadow, so that his face could not be clearly seen, and his voice, when he spoke, was low and guarded.

"One more word with ye, Major," continued Tom. "Don't try to run away, fur ye can't do it. If ye do, I won't be responsible fur yer safety. A chance shot in the dark sometimes goes home."

"I make no promises, but so long as success seems improbable, I will not attempt anything of the kind."

"Thar ar one thing. Ef ye git clar out o' this it'll be the best thing that could o' happened to you. It'll pay."

Muttering over the words, "it'll pay," he stuck the torch in a crevice, and left the lodge. As the sound of his step died away, Robison turned to his daughter, who appeared more alarmed concerning his fate than her own.

"Be not unhappy, for there is less to fear than you dream of. Were I alone, I should not dread for my ultimate safety; though the thought of a captivity, more or less lasting, is not a pleasant companion. You can rely on what the man has just told us, and, I think, if on meeting the head council of the nation, I can prove my innocence of any wrong doing, that our release will be made."

"What dependence can you place on a man who would leave his people, his country, and his religion, to become a savage?"

“Such reasoning may all be very fine, but I say, in this case, as though he had done nothing of the kind. I have heard of him before, even as he, by reputation, knew me. He used to be honest, but strange. I believe his honesty remains unchanged, though, for a time, to say, I doubted.”

“When he explains why he threw himself beyond the pale of civilization, and consented to sell his birthright for the privilege of consorting with Indians—perhaps I may think as you do.”

“That explanation might be easier than you dream of; we will not discuss it. We have enough of trials before us to cause us carefully to husband our strength. You had better endeavour to rest now—and you may feel assured that there is as much safety, as far as the present time is concerned, as you would be able to find under what once was our own roof.”

Stillness reigned within the rude cabin, and in half an hour father and daughter were buried in a profound sleep.

Outside all was silent. At different places around the camp, sentinels were placed—four in all—but these gave no cry, standing mute and grim, their forms scarcely to be distinguished in the dim gloom of night.

For some hours nothing of importance occurred, though the fleecy clouds scudding across the heavens were drawing more closely together, and moving in darker and thicker procession. The wind, too, came sweeping along with a moist and dreary sound, that foretold an approaching storm. These threatening appearances could scarce escape the observation of the outposts, and their experienced eyes had clearly foreseen that a rain gust was fast coming.

The red-skins were not the only ones who foresaw the approaching storm. Hawkins and his party, some two miles distant, looked dubiously about, and making the best of an apparently bad bargain, prepared, in the absence of shelter, to submit to a drenching. Not exactly knowing in what place they were, they did not think of turning their

footsteps in the direction of the deserted lodges, though they had doubtless been seen by some, if not all, of them.

"I say, Ned," muttered Biting Fox, "ef the Major an' his darter is dragged through this here rain, we mout as well pull horses an' take baek track. She won't be likely to git over it; an' ef one goes under, you can bet the other will too."

"Wait till it rains, will ye," was the rather surly response. "Ef it rains hard forgit sights if they don't find cover. I hain't voyaged here so many years fur nothin' I know Injun nature an' Injun luck right up to the handle. Ef the Blackfeet hes the Major an' Adele, an' wants to keep 'em, jist bet yer back load o' pelts they'll take 'em along sliak an' smooth, ef we don't stop 'em."

"Yaas, that's ther ticket. Mules an' Injuns hev good luck to pay em fur the hard licks everybody's bound to give 'em. Meanwhile, I wonder, now I'm thinkin' of it, whar's Jake. Nothin' would do him but he must go on a lone scout, 'cause he felt copper-skins in his bones, an' he must er fell in with these 'dential cusses. Wish he was along agin. If he does blow like a tired buffalo, he's some on a fight. Wonder what's become of him?"

"Like enough he's rubbed eout," remarked one, and the conversation ended.

"Rubbed out," quaint ungainly words, these; but full of pithy meaning. Highly suggestive, too, taking one across the broad prairies, through the tangled wild-wood, and into the deep ravine. A hunter is missing. "Rubbed out" say his friends, and you hear no more of him; but in yon far-off dingle, where the murmuring stream winds through the rank and reeking grass, and the grim mountains stand as sleepless sentinels, through the long watches of the silent night, and through the mellow hours of day, lies an unburied corpse, its bones bleached by rain, and snow, and frost; its skeleton fingers clutching in vain for the stolen rifle. Whether the end came through flood or

fire, whether from the bullet, the arrow, or the slow hand of cruel disease, the epitaph and obituary are the same: "Rubbed out." These men have hearts, too—great, rough, honest, hearty hearts, but death and danger are such old friends, they have so long felt that—

"Come it slow or come it fast,
It is but death that comes at last,"

that the death of a trapper is never an unexpected event, and it is with a feeling of pride that they say of a friend: "Poor Bob, the red-skins rubbed him out, but we saved his top-knot."

But Jake Parsons was alive and well.

In our first chapter we mentioned that Hugh Robison, when to the eyes of the eager Indians he made his appearance, was accompanied by a companion, who was none other than Parsons himself.

Jake, by the way, was something of a character—characters are frequently met with in the far West. Though a painter might hope to convey a pretty fair idea of his face, an author could scarce hope to give a respectable description, for but one distinctive feature could be mentioned, and that was hair. The hair on top of his head was long, but that on his face and chin was, if anything, longer. A weather-beaten old hat, slouched over the whole, gave him a rather ruffianly appearance, utterly at variance with his real disposition. His voice was by no means unmelodious. As has already been hinted, he was somewhat addicted to "blowing;" but fighting imaginary battles, as he sometimes did, he was not, for that, any the worse a fighter in the general scrimmage of an India *mêlée*. Self-reliant and courageous, he cared little for companions, and was willing at any moment to set out upon a tramping excursion into the very heart of the country of a hostile tribe. From such an expedition was he returning, when he fell in with Hugh, and was fortunately with him when he ran so near a chance of being taken prisoner. Hardly had the excite-

ment of retreat subsided, when the natural feelings of the young man began to find expression—he hardly thought of pursuit. The trapper, on the contrary, took a more philosophical view of the case, and in words well suited for the purpose, cheered up the young man's spirits.

"I tell ye, Hugh, it ain't as bad as it mout be. Neither on 'em's hurt; they have a long journey afore 'em, an' it'll be darned queer ef we can't git 'em out 'o bad hands afore they stop. When ye've seen as much as I hev, ye'll not give in so soon to misfortun!"

"But what can we two do against so many?"

"Waugh! Don't ye know that Jack Howell has seen 'em, an' that Ned Hawkins will be on the trail afore tomorrow night. They're in camp, not forty miles from here, and'll scent the game right away. Ef we foller strait on ahindt—we'll be in at the death, sure."

"You know more about such matters than I do, and so I put myself in your hands. Do whatever you think best, and rest assured that I will aid as much as possible."

It was a long march, which they were compelled to make that day, and beset with difficulties, inasmuch as it was necessary to follow the trail, and at the same time to keep carefully out of range of vision. They came, at length, to a place where a separation had been made, the party having divided into two nearly equal squads. With but little hesitation, and offering no reason for so doing, Parsons decided to keep to the right. He saw that some of the horse-tracks in that division were deeper than others, and so jumped to a conclusion, which the reader already knows to have been correct. When night began to come down, then, for the first time, was the trapper somewhat at fault. Not knowing whether the fugitives would choose to continue their journey through the hours of darkness, of course he was not certain, but that, at any minute, he might stumble over them if he went on; while, if he halted, they might entirely distance pursuit. Pushing slowly on, he

occasionally paused and glanced around him, for it was every moment more difficult to keep in the right direction. During one of these pauses, his eye rested upon something worthy of attention, for, pointing with his finger, he turned to Hugh. "What do yer make out of that, yonder? It looks to me rather like a rise of smoke, though they'd hardly be fools enough to light a fire."

"It must be a cloud and yet—"

"Ef I'm mistaken, why then may grizzleys eat me. They ar a campin' in them old lodges what the Crows left, when they war on a big buff'ler hunt up yender. I know the lay of the land, fust rate, an' ef you stay here, I'll go ahead an' reconnoiter a bit. I can't tell exactly whether we kin do any good, but, I kin, when I see 'em onct."

"Remember to be careful. I would be but an infant here, without your advice and assistance."

"In course, I will. I haven't got sich a great desire to 'pear at a Blackfoot burnin', so I'll try to keep a sound scalp for some days to come. Lay low now, an' ef any thing happens, you'll soon know it, an' clear out accordin' "

In a little less than half an hour, the light-treading scout reappeared. He found Hugh standing on the spot where he had left him, though he had dismounted, and was allowing his horse to pick up such nourishment as he could find within reach.

"Waal, Hugh, I kinder guess we can't do much to-night. They ar just whar I thought they war, camped in the old lodges. I war in among 'em, an' found the Major war in the middle wigwam; but, as thar war a copper-skin lyin' right acrost the door, I didn't think it advisablc to try to git in. It's a ticklish job a scoutin' thro' an Injun camp at night, though it's one I've undertook more ner onct, afore this. There ain't no hope o' gettin' 'em off to-night, without a scrimmage, an' that's what won't pay. Ef it war only the Major, now, it might work; but, as yer sister is here, it's too reesky. Chance shots of a dark night is the very duce."

"You say that the prisoners are confined in the middle one of the three lodges, are you certain of this?" anxiously queried the young man.

"Purty much so. That war the one whar the guard war a lyin' acrost the door, an' at the other two, every one war on the inside. But then, thar ar half a dozen or so lyin' around loose, so as it's rather hard to get between 'em all."

"Parsons, my mind is made up; I *will* see my father to-night. I do not entirely expect to rescue him, but I intend to see him, and, if I can, let him know that he has friends near, who will do all in their power to aid him. If I am discovered, I can but give you the same advice which you gave to me a few minutes ago, make off in the dark."

Astonishment at this foolhardy proposition for some minutes, as well it might, held the trapper speechless, but he finally recovered his breath sufficiently to exclaim: "Why, bless yer innocent soul! Yer sure to be took and scalped. If ye had had all the experience in sich matters that I've had, I wouldn't say you couldn't do it, but I've did it onct to-night, an' I swar, I wouldn't try it agin for any money. What 'ud I say to yer father, when he asked me whar Hugh war? D'yr think I could tell him I let yer go, an' get killed all for nothin', in a place I wouldn't ventur myself?"

"I have no doubt but that you are sincere in what you say, and that I would be acting more prudently, as far as I myself am concerned, if I did not venture; but I have made up my mind, and go I must, no matter what the consequences are."

These words were spoken in a resolute voice, not the least shaken, though announcing a determination to do a deed fraught with such terrible uncertainties. Jake could admire the heroism of the act, though he could not appreciate the motives which prompted his young friend to run headlong into almost certain destruction.

“As yer bent, the thing must be done; why, *I'm ready* to go baek and try it, so tell me what yer want done, fur I've no notion of yer goin' under, and yer father layin' all the blame on me.”

“I know perfectly well that you are willing to do all you can for us; but that is not the thing. I want to see him myself, and hear from his own lips whether he is in any danger.”

Further conversation was carried on, but finally, the trapper, finding that young Robison was obstinately bent on going, and going alone, reluctantly yielded his consent. He carefully explained how the camp was situated, and the sentinels located, cautioned him about being either too confident, or too timid, and then saw him depart with much solicitude, considering that he stood a very poor chance of ever seeing Hugh again.

“The young 'un,” he soliloquized, “comes from a good stock, an' a plucky stock. It ain't many of the old 'uns, even, as would dare to slide into a camp, that way. I like the lad; but I'm glad, somehow, that I ain't along. Ef I war, we'd both loose top-knots, *sure*.”

“Sure,” was a great word with Parsons.

Hugh, having obtained such full instructions, was enabled to pursue his journey more swiftly than the scout he had employed, and accordingly was soon within the confines of the Indian camp. There was not sufficient light to enable him to distinguish objects with any plainness, and the column of smoke which had guided Parsons had vanished. Still he pressed onward, carefully but rapidly. That he managed to pass the outpost, who was but a few yards from him, seemed afterward to be little short of a miraele; but he *did it*, and soon the three lodges loomed faintly up through the darkness—the goal for which he was aiming seemed almost within reach. The Indian who guarded the entrance, fatigued with his long journey, slept heavily. To attempt to pass over his body, and raise the back curtain which served as a door, running the risk of making a rust-

ling noise sufficient to awake him, was too foolhardy an attempt. Another and better plan presented itself. Crawling to the other side of the wigwam, he drew from its sheath a long, keen knife, and vigorously attacked the easily yielding substance before him.

Working swiftly but silently, an opening sufficiently large to permit his body to pass through was soon made. With a long glance around, in which he held his breath, and listened intently, Hugh strove to discover whether, by any means, his presence had been suspected. All remained silent, and so he entered.

The smouldering remnants of a torch cast an uncertain light over the objects within, yet it was sufficient to see that the place was tenanted alone by those whom he sought. With all their clothing on, they reclined on their rough couches, their slumbers as sweet and unbroken as though captivity and danger were old songs often heard and nothing cared for.

CHAPTER IV

A DANGEROUS ENTERPRISE.

BENDING tenderly over his father, Hugh gazed in the face of the sleeper. Then he touched him lightly on the shoulder, so lightly, in fact, that it produced no more effect than to cause him to turn partly, and mutter in the uneasy manner of one who is disturbed in his slumbers. Again Hugh laid his hand on the shoulder of his father, and giving a gentle shake, the Major was awake.

An exclamation trembled on his lips as he caught sight of a dusky form standing by his bedside; but a hand was pressed, for an instant, tenderly but firmly upon his mouth; by the time the hand was removed, Hugh was recognized. The reader may imagine the surprise caused by his unexpected appearance. Both were silent: the young man, anxious to learn what would be his father's opinion con-

cerning his act, the Major because he scarce knew what he ought to say. At length, in a low and guarded whisper, the latter spoke. "Hugh, you grieve me! Misfortunes have gathered around sufficiently thick without this. You cannot possibly do good by this visit, and it will be a mercy if you can leave without notice. Indeed, how you were able to get here without raising an alarm, is something I am unable fully to understand."

"If I could come without being discovered, why may I not go away; and if I can escape, why may not Adele and yourself?"

"Do not count on such good fortune attending us. I look farther ahead, and have a faint hope that all may yet turn out well. Doubtless you may rely on your ability to manage the Indians, and believe that you will finally escape uninjured; but I am sorry to say that Parsons, who is not a quarter of a mile distant, does not coincide with you. Though you have never done anything against the Black-foot nation, yet will they destroy you. It is the nature of the savage; and nature will show itself. Nevertheless, an attempt to escape would be more dangerous than quietly remaining. If I was by myself, I would embrace the opportunity in a moment; but your sister must be thought of. Instant death would, in all probability, follow such a movement, should it be discovered. This running the gauntlet in the dark is but a forlorn hope."

"Will you attempt it?" persistently continued Hugh. "The Indians, with all their boasted cunning, are not infallible, and my being here proves that. You must make up your mind soon, for every moment of delay endangers the success of the attempt."

"Hugh, I dare not risk it. As I said before, for myself I do not care, but encumbered as we would be with Adele, we *could* not succeed, and failure would be equal to death. I have strong hopes that I will come out of this difficulty unhurt, and come out of it, too, in a legitimate way."

THE TRAPPERS' PASS.

"You will not go, then?"

"Once for all, no!" answered the Major.

"Then I will leave this place, though I will not lose any chance of rescuing you. But before I go I should like to speak with Adele; perhaps, if she could hear what I have to say, she might be able to persuade you to do as I wish."

"It would be useless as well as foolish to waken her. Useless, for she would only feel grieved at your presence here, and would doubtless take the same view of matters which I do; and foolish, because she would be likely to utter some exclamation of astonishment at seeing you near her."

There was something noble in the way in which Major Robison acted. To be sure he did that which seemed to be the safest, in rejecting the plan of escape laid down by Hugh, but, notwithstanding that he did so, many others, if they were placed in the same situation, would not have scrupled to employ any means, even the most desperate, to effect their escape from a probable death at the hands of the savages. There were other reasons, perhaps, which induced him to act as he did, but these shall be explained more fully hereafter.

The young man silently wrung the hand of his father, and then approached the rude couch of his sister. The torch, which had faintly illuminated the tent on his first entrance, had died out, and barely sufficient light was left to enable him to find his way across the lodge. Hastily Hugh bent down, and lightly pressed his lips to the cheek of the sleeping girl, and then, throwing himself upon the ground, he disappeared through the opening.

The heavens were even blacker than before, and the darkness was inky; so dark was it, that the lodges could not be seen at the distance of a yard, and Hugh was in a dilemma as to how he should proceed. Though he could take nearly the same route that he had followed in coming into the encampment, yet he could by no means be certain that he was going in the right direction; and a deviation of

a few yards might bring him into the arms of the enemy. Revolving in his mind, for a few minutes, the chances of escape, the path he must pursue, and giving one glance behind him, Hugh assumed a stooping posture, and boldly pushed on, resolved to do his best, and, should it come to that, not to allow himself to be taken without a hard struggle. His progress was difficult; more than once he felt inclined to rejoice that his father had refused to accompany him.

There was one thing in his favour now; a low, but mournfully-wailing wind was blowing, and the leaves and branches of the surrounding trees and bushes were tossed about at a rate which seemed likely to deaden any sounds an unwary step might make, but then this wind brought with it a disadvantage sufficient to counterbalance its good effects. The savages, ever alive to any change in the weather, would, doubtless, be roused into more activity than usual, and would be doubly vigilant, since the darkness and the storm would favor an attacking party.

Again, the young man was fearful that his companion, the trapper, would become alarmed at his absence, and set out in quest of him; if this should happen, then would he be in double danger. Not only would he stand the chance of alarming the savages himself, but Parsons would be likely to do the same; and, though the darkness seemed to be an impenetrable shield, yet the risks which he would be compelled to run were such that, to him, considering over the matter, escape seemed almost impossible. The distance from the lodges to the different outposts was not many yards; but, compelled to go on slowly, Hugh had plenty of time to make all these reflections before he could be out of danger.

Still the wind kept rising, and it whistled over the surface of the plain, and through the bushes, and into the face of the youth, and nothing else but its sound was heard throughout the camp.

Perhaps two-thirds of the most dangerous part of the way had been passed over when a sound came to the ears of Hugh, which seemed to be different from any made by wind or weather. For a moment he listened, and found that he was not mistaken; voices came to him, borne on the night air, and, by a mental calculation, instant as thought, he came to the conclusion that the danger was not three feet distant.

The "ugh" of a sentinel came, with startling earnestness, to the ear of the listener, and then a reply was made, in the shape of a few words spoken—evidently by a different person—in the dialect of the tribe, with which he was but slightly acquainted. A short conversation took place between the two sentinels; the subject of it was the weather. An approaching storm was clearly foreseen, and, as the guard had been but lately relieved—while Robison was in the inside of the lodge—and they would consequently be compelled to endure the inclemency of the weather, they seemed to be desirous, if not of seeking shelter, at least to seek solace in tobacco.

This subject being broached, a search was made for the materials, and then a dead silence, which was not of long duration, ensued. Unfortunately, neither of them possessed the desired weed. They listened attentively. No sound could be heard, though but a yard or two from them the heart of a white man beat loud and strong. No danger appeared to be near, and so they debated the propriety of one of them leaving his post, and endeavoring to find some one who could supply them. The pros and cons being weighed, the proposition was agreed to; immediately afterward, a rustling in the bushes proclaimed that the sentinel was in motion, and that he was coming toward the spot where Hugh was lying. The noise was slight, but an ear sharpened by apprehension could not possibly mistake it, and the young man felt assured that his greatest danger was about to come. Move without attracting attention he

could not, so, drawing his knife, and loosening the pistol in his girdle, he braced himself to meet, to the best advantage, whatever was to follow.

The rustling became louder and more distinct, the bushes close by him parted, a sound, as though some one had stumbled, and then the red-man was precipitated upon Hugh Robison. Closely locked together, they fell upon the ground, the Indian below, before scarce a sound had been made. As they touched the earth, however, a long, fierce yell burst from the throat of the savage, and he struggled violently. Stronger than the young man, he shook off his grasp without much trouble, now that his fright was over, and both rose to their feet, confronting each other in the darkness. Even as they rose, the other sentinel pealed forth his war-cry, and the main force, awakened from their slumbers, came rushing toward the combatants. But high over the shouts, the yells, and the din of the trampling of hurrying feet came a loud, clear shout, and Tom Rutter shuddered as he heard the familiar tones of a former friend, Parsons, as he cheerily cried: "Give it to 'em, free trappers! Go in, boys, and teach the cussed critters a lesson. Hurrah for the Major and his darter!"

And all the while it seemed as though a score of armed men were plunging through the bushes.

"Fight, for yer lives, fight!" exclaimed Tom Rutter, springing forward, looking around for the foe, and expecting, every moment, to hear the crack of the free trappers' rifles and their stern yells, as they rushed into the encampment.

But if such was his expectation, he was doomed to a pleasurable disappointment; nothing of the kind was heard.

The savage with whom Hugh was contending, succeeded in grasping him by the throat. The young man made a fierce lunge with his knife, but it missed its mark, and the hold on his windpipe was gradually tightening. So far, the Indian had had no weapon in his hands; now with the disengaged arm, he reached for his knife. He felt his

physical superiority, and gloried in it. Coolness and self-possession came back, and he believed that his intended victim was at his mercy. But never despairing, knowing that his friend would soon be at his side, Hugh gave a violent wrench, which, while it did not release him, partly loosened the hold on his throat. Reaching out with his left hand, he was enabled to seize his antagonist with a grasp rendered all the stronger by the imminent danger in which he found himself. Within a few yards of him he heard the tread of the renegade and his men, while in front of him the sound of crackling bushes, and a hasty stride, convinced him that his friend would soon be at his side.

The storm, which had been for so long rising, reached its culminating point, and now it burst over the encampment with a tenfold violence, on account of its delay. Just as the red-man was concentrating all his energies for a decisive effort, there came a blinding flash of lightning, revealing, with its lurid glare, the three lodges, the group of Indians, and the death-struggle taking place in the clump of bushes.

The grasp on the neck of young Robison relaxed, as the Indian, frightened by the glare of light, for a moment cowered back. That moment was his last. Even as the rolling burst of thunder came, the knife of Hugh Robison went to the hilt into his heart, and the warm life-blood came spurting out in a crimson tide.

"Whoop!" shouted Jake, divining that the thing was done, though he could not see it. "Go it, boys! Pitch into 'em, and hurrah for the Major!"

The rain came rushing down, and Jake, bound to do all the damage in his power, discharged his rifle in the direction of the group which he had seen. A wild cry told that the shot had taken effect, and, catching Hugh by the arm, he hurried him away from the spot. Through the trees and underbrush, crashing and tearing, the two rushed, the savages, recovered from their momentary panic, and under-

standing how few was the number of their opponents, following hard in their wake.

“Can you find your way?” hurriedly asked the trapper. “If you can, our best plan is to separate—one of us may escape; but this here way, we’re bound to be both of us taken.”

“All right! I think I can make it. If you think it’s best, cut loose, and take the chances.”

“Then here goes,” responded Jake, as he turned almost at right angles to their present course, leaving his companion to pursue his way alone.

The distance was but short, and soon he found himself within the limits of their camp, with his hand resting on the bridle of his steed.

“Safe at last!” he cried, vaulting into his saddle. “Jake can take care of himself. It is a fearful night, but I must leave him; the blood-hounds may strike my track if I delay.”

With a cheer, expressive of delight and of defiance, he clapped spurs to his horse’s sides, and dashed away through the darkness, leaving his pursuers to give vent to their disappointment in yells and curses. Tom Rutter listened for a moment, and then shouted out: “There’s another one to look arter. Can’t ye tell that by the sound?”

Ned Hawkins and his party, in doubt as to what course they should pursue, were discussing the state of affairs when the first flash of lightning, and its attendant thunder-clap, came. As the rain rushed down, the five drew closer together, sheltering themselves, as much as possible, with their blankets. They had stood perhaps for a quarter of an hour exposed to the pitiless drenching of the rain, when Bill Stevens uttered a low, warning “hush!”

All listened, and the sound of a horse, traveling at a full gallop, was distinctly heard. The hands of more than one of the little party went under their blankets, to rest on the locks of their rifles, and, as the person thus recklessly riding in the darkness, came near, two or three sharp clicks were heard.

"By thunder, I ought to know that gallop," whispered Stevens. "Ef that ain't the Major's bay mare, then may grizzly's eat me. It can't be that one of them cussed Indians has her. I goes in fur hailin' 'em, and see. Ef its Injun it's all right—we're near the Major. Ef it ain't Injun, we're all right any how, fur it's one of Robison's family."

The stranger was now so near that he seemed to be likely to run right upon them, if they did not give him notice of their presence; accordingly Ned Hawkins hailed him, with: "Who goes thar?"

A sound followed, as though the horse had been thrown violently back on its haunches, and the response came: "A friend! Who are you?"

"Hurrah!" sang out Bill Stevens, "I know'd I was right. It's Hugh Robison, on the little bay mare. We're friends, too, so come along this way, and take care you don't stumble over us. What in thunder are you doin' here?"

"I should know that voice," responded Hugh, for it was he; "if I am not mistaken, it is Bill Stevens', and I am glad enough to meet you. But be careful how you talk, for I am not sure but that there is half a score of Blackfeet after me. It has been a touch and go!"

"Let 'em come, cuss 'em. We let about twenty on 'em keep their scalps to-night out o' pure marcy; but ef we get another chance, they'll hev to look out."

"There is no need for any explanation," remarked one of the five, "as we have information of all that has happened. All that we want now is to be put in the way of doing something for the benefit of your father and sister. From what you say, the Blackfeet must be encamped somewhere near here, and, if you think there is any chance of success. I, for one, am ready to join in an immediate attack. Is not that the state of affairs, Ned?"

"I should rayther think it war."

"Now, can you tell the number of the Indians, and how they are occupied?—in fact, give us all the information

possible, as well as your opinion about the success we will probably meet with."

"By making a bold stroke, we might succeed in carrying off my father, but as I have just had a conversation with him, I can look at the matter more rationally than you would think. There are twenty-nine of the Blackfeet, besides Tom Rutter, who is as good as three more. The whole camp is alarmed, and it's my opinion that we wouldn't stand a chance with them. My father says that he thinks they are acting from a motive, in carrying him off, and he has hopes of escaping without having recourse to violence. If it were not for Adele, he would feel perfectly at ease."

"How in thunder did you see him, Hugh? If he war in their hands, it 'ud be nex't to onpossible for a perarie-dog to git in to him without bein' shot, let alone you, who, meanin' no disrespect, never had any experience of scoutin' "

"To tell the truth, it was none of the easiest, but Jake and myself followed the trail all day, and then, when night came, he crawled in on them, and found out how the land lay. I could not stand it, to know that father was so near, and I not to be able to speak to him, so I made him give me the directions, and I struck for the place. I had not much trouble getting in, but it was a near thing with me getting away again; and, as I have not heard anything of Parsons, I'm afraid he has got into difficulty."

"Never mind Jake; he's an old hand at Injun fightin, and you kin bet yer head, he'll come out all square. But this don't make matters a bit clearer. What's to be done?" said Biting Fox.

"Why, nothing," responded Hugh. "Do nothing until ycu are certain of success. Keep quiet for to-night; if we live through this rain, and keep our powder dry, we can give them a brush yet."

"Yer father showed his sense in not tryin' to run through camp, fur the idea of crawlin' through a score of Injuns,

and a carryin' a young girl along in the bargain, isn't one to be took up at a minute's notice."

"I am more concerned just now about the fate of Jake, than for the fate of my father. If he is taken now, it is ten chances to one but that they will lift his hair."

"Never mind him. Just you keep cool, and as dry as possible, and by day-break we'll be on the trail; git 'em startled, and there is no such thing as calming 'em down."

The rain still beat down on the party of six, but their heavy blankets were sufficient to shield their ammunition, as well as their persons, from its power, and, though the time hung dully on their hands, morning light soon arrived, the darkness and the rain being driven away very nearly at the same time.

As Hugh Robison had stated, the Indian encampment was in a beautiful state of confusion, the different braves being greatly surprised at the sudden attack—for attack they at first supposed the presence of Hugh and his companion to be. Tom Rütter was the first to understand the true state of affairs. It took but little reflection to show him that Parsons, with one other, constituted the whole force of the invaders. He came to this conclusion from the fact that he had seen the two together but a few hours before; that, if there had been more than one trapper, they would have given a more substantial proof of their presence; and, finally, that the young man would be just the person to make a desperate attempt to rescue his father and sister. There might, of course, be more men within supporting distance, and thereupon he held a consultation with the most experienced warriors of the party. The decision was unanimously arrived at, that it would be best for them to start forward on their journey as soon as the first flush of morning should illumine the plain. The driving rain would be but little felt by the braves, while the prisoners could be protected from its violence by covering themselves with blankets, which the warriors would be willing to give them.

There was but little desire for sleep on the part of any one in the camp; even the captives, Adele having been awakened by the noise, were deeply excited by the events which were occurring around them.

Major Robison felt all of a father's anxiety for his daring son, and every moment he feared that he would hear the shouts of the savages as they bore him back a captive, or perhaps flourished the bleeding scalp, torn, with a ruthless hand, from his unprotected head. Adele, not knowing of the presence of her brother in the camp, thought only of a bold attempt at rescue, and though her heart told her it must be unsuccessful, yet she awaited with intense eagerness the result of the affair.

Minute after minute passed by, the shouts died away, and then the tread of the returning savages was heard. At the moment of deepest excitement, Tom Rutter had not been forgetful of his charge, and had increased the guard about the lodge, which held the pale-faces, so that now there were half a dozen stalwart sons of the forest standing around it. Returning from the unsuccessful chase of the fugitives, Rutter immediately bent his footsteps in the direction of the prison-house of the Major, desirous of ascertaining, with his own eyes, that his escape had not been effected.

He entered the hut with a brand from which the blaze had been extinguished by the rain, and the few coals remaining on it were crackling and spitting, as he endeavoured to blow them again into a flame. By the uncertain light of a half-extinguished torch, he could perceive the fair young girl and her father, reclining on their separate resting-places, and watching his movements with anxious eyes.

Half apologetically, Rutter remarked: "Yer see, Major, I wanted to know whether yer war here yet; fur I thought yer must hev slipped off in the scrimmage."

The torch now burnt up with a steady flame, more plainly revealing the interior of the lodge—shining on the face of the Major and his daughter, and on the opposite wall.

Perhaps the renegade scrutinized everything closely, or, perhaps it was done by accident; however it was, his eye fell upon the hole cut in the side of the hut by the hand of Hugh. He took a step forward, and then, pointing with his finger toward the aperture, he remarked, with an inquiring look: "How did that hole git thar? It warn't thar last night, and someone must hev made it."

"You can feel easy, as far as either of us are concerned, for it was made by neither of us," was the response of Robison. "If your guards choose to go to sleep, or permit such things to be done, I am sure the fault is none of mine."

The old chief had followed Rutter, and saw the aperture with as much surprise, although he uttered no exclamation. He remarked to the renegade, in a low tone, and using the Indian dialect: "The young man has been here, and has entered the lodge. The braves, who watched, must have slept at their posts. He has come once, and left his mark; next time, he will leave a broader one. We must hasten into our own country, where he cannot follow, for I see he is very brave."

"That's so, the whole tribe on 'em is of jist sich stock, and there's a dozen or more o' trappers, as is clar grit, what'll be arter us as soon as they git wind o' the Major's bein' off. Yer ain't safe from them kind o' fellers, even when yer sittin' in yer own lodge. They'd think no more o' shootin' ye, than popin' over a beaver or a bufferlo. But we must set a man to watch that ar hole till we start, which, accordin' to my notion, won't be so drefful long." |

"Ugh!" said the chief, and the two departed to their lodge; there to wait until the morning dawned.

There was but little sleep for Adele during the rest of the night. She now learned that her brother had been near her, and she expressed her sorrow that she had not been awake at the time. As it was, she had missed seeing him, and must wait, in the darkness, listening to the rushing rain and longing for the morning.

Toward daybreak the storm abated, and when the sun

arose, it shone with a brightness but little dimmed by the broken clouds which lay scattered along the eastern horizon. A sort of breakfast was prepared for the benefit of the prisoners, which, having been finished, the train set out in the same order as on the preceding day, the horses' hoofs sounding drearily enough on the soft soil of the prairie.

CHAPTER V

ARCHER AND HOWELL.

It is now about time that we should return to Waving Plume and his friend. The two, as our readers will doubtless remember, were starting to follow the trail of the Blackfeet, and at the time when they make their reappearance in our chronicle, they had traveled near a score of miles, Howell having struck the track by making a cross-cut, saving, thereby, time and distance. Though night came down upon them, they could easily follow by the moonlight, the broad and undisguised trail which the Indians had left behind them. At length the horses were becoming wearied with the hurried march, the two determined to rest for a few hours, by which time they hoped again to proceed. Scarcely had they dismounted, when the signs of the storm that was fast brewing thickened about them, and Howell, with a shake of his head, remarked: "I'm afeared we'll hev to hold on fur to-night, fur accordin' to appearances, it'll be darker ner pitch in less than an hour. Ef I'm any judge o' matters, an' I think I ort to be, there's a regular hurricane comin' up."

"I hope to heavens not. An hour lost now, may be of more consequence to me than a month at another period of my life. We *must* get ahead, if it is in any way possible."

"I kin purty near calculate on how yer feelins is, jist now; but, fur all that, we can't blunder ahead through the

dark. We'd be doing more harm ner good, an' mout spile —what's that?"

In an instant, two rifles covered a dark object, which two hundred yards ahead, was moving toward them. Howell, warningly exclaiming: "Who's that? Speak, er I'll let drive!"

The reply came floating back on the night air, in good, plain English.

"A friend to the true white man, and one who hates the Blackfoot."

"A rather queer answer that," said Waving Plume, who, though at the first startled, was by this time cool enough. "If you are a friend, advance, and let us see what you look like."

The unknown continued steadily to advance; but at the distance of a few yards halted, and said: "Let the white man put down his rifle. I know him, I am his friend, and wish to do him no harm."

The tone was familiar, the rifles were lowered, a steady inspection of the nocturnal visitor proved him to be an Indian whom both had seen with Major Robison, and whom they knew as Antonio, the half-breed. When this recognition had taken place, all fear of treachery was dispelled, and the stranger received a cordial greeting. This being over, of course the first reference was to the perilous position of Robison and his daughter, with a demand upon the half-breed for his assistance in the pursuit. But Antonio, as our readers are aware, was better posted on all that pertained to the subject than even Howell himself, and soon showed them that they had better submit to his guidance, than he to theirs. He told them of the fight at the spring, and the escape of the trappers, winding up with:

"Follow not the trail of those fleeing, but make your way to the great crossing of the Yellowstone. Be there to-morrow night, in the willows of the fartherest bank. There will you meet Biting Fox, Ned Hawkins, and the other

braves, your friends. There I will try to join you, when the sun is low down in the west."

"Good again, by mighty!" was the exclamation of Howell. "Who says we ain't havin' stormin' luck! Half-breed, yer a jewel! an yer kin bet yer left optiek fur a bull's-eye, that we will be thar. Stand from under, Blackfeet, for its goin' to be rough on the mourners."

Archer smiled slightly at this graphic jubilation of his comrade, and proceeded to ask Antonio why it was that he preferred not to accompany them to the rendezvous.

"Think not that Antonio is double-tongued or would deceive the friends of his friend. The warriors of the Crows are very brave; but they will want me to hasten them on in the right direction. Antonio goes to meet the pursuers to urge them in the right path, and to tell them that the white trappers will attack the Blackfoot in front. Then they will fall upon his rear. Perhaps they will have delayed—then will Antonio be late at the crossing; yet he *will* come."

"No tricks, mind yer," put in Howell. "We'll do as you say, we'll strike fur the crossin', an' ef your foold us any, remember here's a shootin' iron as sends her ticket clean center. Ye know that, though, an' I don't doubt ye, either, so it's no ust a tellin' ye that."

"May you have a good journey. If Waving Plume and his friend would find cover from the storm which is coming, let them hasten on. A lodge where they can shelter themselves is near. It is not so dark that they can not see the forms of three tall trees. In the bushes at their feet is the hut. Hasten, now, for it will soon be too dark. I must go on my mission. Good night!"

As silently as he had come, did the half-breed depart; but the two had no time to watch his receding form. Realizing the necessity of seeking cover as soon as possible, they hastened onward in the attempt to find the lodge spoken of by Antonio.

Hardly had they advanced three hundred yards, when they came upon the clump of tangled bushes, from the midst of which, solemn and serene, rose the three trees.

It was somewhat difficult to penetrate through the interlaced shrubs and saplings, but at last it was done, and then they found, as they expected, the lodge of the half-breed. This man, who had sworn vengeance against the whole tribe of Blackfeet, seemed to have his lairs everywhere. This whole region of country—a sort of neutral ground—he was thoroughly acquainted with, and never was he at a loss for a safe camp. This hut was rough, but stoutly built, one in which he had, doubtless, spent many days, and promised to be a safeguard from much of the violence of the approaching storm. Feeling perfectly at ease, and dreading no intruders, the two soon stretched themselves upon their blankets, bound for a short journey to the land of dreams.

The day was just breaking, the rising sun rapidly clearing away the clouds which remained after the outpouring of the previous night. Archer muttered uneasily, moved from side to side, and finally opened his eyes. At first he was somewhat confused. Everything around him was perfectly new and strange. The sound of a steady “drip, drip,” caused him to turn his head to one side. There lay John Howell, asleep and snoring, while, from an interstice in the roof above, drop by drop, came the water. During the storm it must have come down in a stream, for their blanket was most thoroughly saturated. Waving Plume smiled. With that smile the state of semi-unconsciousness passed away, and the recollections of the previous day came thronging back upon him. Springing to his feet, he shook the sleeping trapper, shouting: “Wake up, John, wake up! We have a long journey before us!”

The sleeper did not take time to think twice before he arose. He heard the words, “come on,” and accordingly throwing his blanket to one side, he leaped to his feet, exclaiming: “Whar’s the hosses?”

“True enough, they must be looked to. I trust, though, that they are all right and near at hand.”

The two moved to the door. They found the animals all right; nothing was in sight to hinder their journey. In less than half an hour, Howell leading, the two were on the march toward the Yellowstone.

It was near four o'clock, in the afternoon, when a party of six men, clad in the rough garments of trappers, and under the guidance of the redoubtable Ned Hawkins, pushed their jaded horses resolutely into the Yellowstone River; now swollen, by the rain of the previous night, to a very respectable stream. They did not cross at the regular fording-place—so frequently used as to have received the specific name of “the Great Crossing;” but, fearful that if they did, their trail would be observed by those from whom they wished it to be concealed, the six struck the stream five or six hundred yards further up. Somewhat wearied and worn with a long march, Hawkins led his little command into the thick clump of oziers, and then, without saying a word, threw himself from his horse, his companions following his example. Scarce ten minutes from the time when the last man disappeared, two other men might have been seen urging their steeds in the same direction. Hawkins, ever watchful, had observed them when they were at least a quarter of a mile away. The trail, recent and plain, had attracted their attention, and one of the two had dismounted from his horse to examine it. Presently his cap was seen to fly into the air, and he waved his hand, as though he had made a pleasing discovery; then he remounted, and, with his comrade following close by his side, pressed upon the trail bearing straight for the river and the clump of oziers.

“Sure as death, thar comes Wavin' Plume and Jack Howell. I thort they'd be makin' in this direction 'fore long;” murmured Ned to his friends, who were engaged in scrutinizing the strangers.

"They'r welcome as fair weather! The more the merrier; and if a few more on us turns up we kin jist walk off the Major without sayin' by yer leave."

Ten minutes more brought Night Hawk and his friend into the centre of the little circle, which stood waiting to receive them. A hearty welcome greeted them, and then one of the men asked: "How did you come to follow us here? You must have made a straight shot to make such a centre hit."

"I cannot say that it was through our own peculiar sagacity;" said Waving Plume. "A ghost, spectre, wizard or something of that kind, but looking, however, like an Indian, stumbled upon us while we were roving about last night, and ordered us to be at the Great Crossing before nightfall of to-day. Knowing no other place of that name, my friend and I journeyed in this direction, and here we are."

"In course you heard about the misfortin' of the Major?"

"Most assuredly we did, else you would not have found us deserting our post. Jack was at the Major's when the capture took place, and it was a pretty close thing about his escape. As soon as possible after hearing the news, I got ready for the trail, and here we are, ready to do or die. But how did *you* hear that he was captured—I suppose that it was through Hugh, here?"

"You are out thar. It was the same Injun or half-breed that sent you here. We stumbled upon Hugh last night in purty much the same way as you did on Antonio. That is, we were standin' still an' he come up to us."

As the men were wearied by their long march, and the foe might come at any moment, Hawkins ordered that supper should be eaten, and though the fare was rather scant, yet such as it was, it was eagerly discussed.

In a cloudless sky the sun set, round and red, its gleams shimmering on the waves of the turgid river. A cool, soft wind was blowing, lifting the low hanging branches of the

small willows, but not at all disclosing the forms of the eight white men who lay concealed behind them. All were anxiously looking for the arrival of Antonio and his followers, and fearing lest he might have been misled, and the Blackfeet have taken another rout. This state of suspense did not last long; not half an hour from the disappearance of old sol, the ready eye of Bill Stevens discovered, through the deepening twilight, a line of horsemen, rapidly approaching by nearly the same route as he and his comrades had come, a few hours previously.

Almost at the same instant, Waving Plume's eye rested on the same object. "Here they come," whispered he. "Is it friend or foe, Ned?"

"Could hardly tell at this dis'ance. Mout be mistaken, as the half-breed mout be commin' with twenty or thirty of the Crows. Rather of the opinion, though, that its Blackfeet; if so, get ready your shootin' irons, and loosen yer knives. We'll have one pelt at 'em anyhow."

Five minutes more and the train were within a few hundred yards of the river—there could be no doubt now but that they were the anxiously expected enemy. The moon had not yet risen, but by the starlight their numbers could be easily counted, and it was observed that there were two persons with them, who were evidently white—a man and a woman. It was with difficulty that the cheers, which rose to the lips of the men, on recognizing the Major, could be repressed. "It will never do to attack them before they have crossed;" said Hugh Robison. "If we do, the chances are that they run without firing a shot, and if they do, good care will be taken that the prisoners are not left behind."

"That's so, Hugh!" replied Hawkins. "Just wait till they hev crossed over, and are mounting the bank—then pick your marks, and let drive. Be careful you don't hit the prisoners, though, and sallying out on the red varments, kinder take 'em by surprise. We *may* ring through with-

out trouble, and then agin we *mayn't*; but you ain't the boys to be scared at the prospects of gittin' a few hard knocks in a scrimmage, and remember, you'r fightin' to rescue yer best friends."

This was the speech of the Captain to his army, and its effect was as great as though he had harangued them for an hour; the men looked at their weapons, and then to the leader of the Indian file, who had ridden his horse into the river.

Several minutes passed, of intense interest to those ambushed, until the last of the horsemen reached the river bank, and began its ascent. It had been conjectured that the party might stop, for a while, at least, at this spot, but they gave no indications of any such purpose.

With a low-whispered "fire!" Ned Hawkins raised his rifle to his shoulder—the six followed his motion—then came a single, loud, clear-ringing crack, and three of the Indians were seen to drop from their saddles, while two or three others swayed violently in their seats.

The red-men, though for the moment panic-stricken, involuntarily closed around their prisoners—but, before they could decide from whence came the shots, the white men were upon them. With fierce yells and clear ringing shouts, the little band precipitated themselves upon the savages, striking home with clubbed rifles and keen-edged tomahawks. Then ensued a hand-to-hand encounter, the chances of which seemed, for a while, to be most evenly balanced, though the odds were so greatly against the white men.

Bringing down the stock of his rifle upon the head of the first Indian he met, Waving Plume began to breast his way toward the prisoners, Hawkins and his men following close behind—by his side Hugh Robison. Words cannot describe the scene. The horses, catching the spirit of their riders, begun to rear and plunge, the whole mass knitting and entwining itself in wild confusion.

The hand of Waving Plume was already on the bridle of Adele, when Tom Rutter pushed his horse between the two. The young man made a quick pass at the head of the renegade, but the blow was guarded off by the latter, who threw up the stock of his rifle in time to catch it. Then, that weapon being dropped, the bright-bladed knife of the recreant flashed from its sheath. Quick passes were made, and as quickly guarded, but already had a glancing blow drawn blood from the head of Tom Rutter, when a cheer was heard from the whites, followed by a yell from the Blackfeet. The mass swayed to and fro more violently for a few moments, then the conflict was over. Bursting away in a body, the Indians fled. With one look Rutter comprehended the state of affairs, and, throwing his left arm over his face, to guard it from a blow, he caught the bridle of Adele's horse in his right hand, struck spurs into his horse's sides, and bounded off after his fleeing friends.

The Indian who had been specially appointed to guard Adele had fallen from his seat, struck dead by a chance shot, and the half-fainting girl, though unconstrained, unconsciously clung tightly to the saddle, totally disregarding the cry of Waving Plume to throw herself off.

One of the prisoners was rescued—the other was not. The trappers' work was but half done. Ten Indians lay dead on the plain, and a number of those who escaped had received serious wounds, while none of the whites had been killed. Bill Stevens had received a severe cut on his shoulder, and a blow on his head, but neither wound was mortal; and though the rest had not all passed through the struggle unscathed, yet they were as fit for fighting as when they first entered into the conflict. The cords which bound the limbs of Major Robison were speedily cut, and his first exclamation, upon being loosed, was: "My daughter!"

"She is still a captive," was the response of Hawkins; "but we will rescue her to-night or die!"

Vain promises those, which are easier made than kept.

When hot the iron, then strike, nor wait a moment! Cool heads sometimes will err, and rashness belongs to all. Thinking their object had been accomplished, the Indians had not been pursued by the trappers, and now neither the men nor the horses were in a fit condition to follow, even though but a few seconds had elapsed. Bill Stevens was almost fainting from his wound, so that he was in no condition for a ride, while the left arm of Biting Fox hung powerless by his side.

"Where is Waving Plume?" asked Howell, glancing his eye over those who stood around him.

This question was not to be easily answered, for that personage was nowhere to be seen.

"He must a'followed 'em," replied some one; and this was all that could be said of him.

Lost in the distance, a single man among a score, he had followed the Blackfeet, determined to rescue the Major's daughter or die. Thinking of this put new iron into the strong arms of the trappers; the determination that the consultors came to can be guessed. Pursuit, stern—not ceasing till the aim was accomplished, even though it led them into their very villages.

Bill Stevens, much against his wishes, was left behind, and Major Robison was to take his rifle, as he was unarmed; it would be of no use to Stevens—it was a weapon to be depended upon—and one of the guns of the fallen foe would serve all the purposes for which the wounded trapper would wish to use it.

When, at the expiration of ten minutes, the little band rode away in quest of Tom Rutter and his savage auxiliaries, it was with a cheer, and a firm knitting of the muscles of the brow, which told of stern resolution and untiring determination. Though the light was but uncertain, yet, so broad and deep was the trail, that it was easily to be followed, and the seven kept on at the best rate of speed that could be gotten out of their horses.

Seconds glided into minutes, minutes lengthened into hours, the moon rode high up in the heavens, and the night trod hard upon the heels of day, but still there came no sight of the fugitives.

When the renegade, perceiving that all hope of victory had fled, suddenly broke away from Waving Plume, he did not follow directly in the wake of his companions, but took a course more to the west. He was mounted on a horse of extraordinary speed and endurance, and, had he been alone, would have felt but little doubt of being able to distance those behind him. With his hand firmly grasping the bridle-rein of Adele's steed, he pushed on, undismayed by the sound of footsteps which he heard hard in his wake.

The state of semi-unconsciousness was but gradually leaving Miss Robison. The yells and groans no longer existed in reality; but their echoes were still ringing in her ears, and, with a shudder, she glanced around, half expecting to see the mangled bodies of the wailing crew. The painted savages had disappeared; the sound of battle had died away. The cold, white moon looked kindly down into her face, voicelessly encouraging her. All over the wide prairie she could see naught of mortal form save the renegade—his face horrible to look at, smeared with gore, stern, unyielding, pitiless—as he galloped on at her side. The cool night wind fanned her cheek, and while it tossed the mane of her gallant steed, it brought to her ear the sound of horse's hoofs, rapidly following. As she turned to give a look behind her, Rutter stared her full in the face. Slowly drawing a pistol, he spoke, with desperate calmness:

“One word. I swore to the chiefs of the tribe that I'd bring you there, and by heavens I'll do it, dead or alive. Make one scream, one move—do anything but sit quietly on your horse—and I'll blow yer brains out that minute. I never miss my aim.”

Adele answered not a syllable, only bowing her head. She might, indeed, have thrown herself from the horse, but that would have been self-destruction; so she clung to her saddle, while the ground seemed to slip from under her.

The nature of the ground over which they were passing was beginning to change. Instead of the smooth, level turf, the surface was diversified with rocks and hillocks, while in the distance a spur of high hills, jutting out from the mountains, lay across their pathway.

Though the steeds seemed beginning to feel the effects of the pace, Rutter did not slacken his speed in the least, but kept on, his horse slightly leading, but the renegade retaining a firm hold on Adele's bridle.

CHAPTER VI.

IMPRISONED IN THE TRAPPERS' PASS.

TOM RUTTER was well acquainted with every inch of the country over which he had determined to travel. He was now striking for a spot which he judged to be most suitable for him under the present circumstances, and which he also, with some reason, judged to be a sure retreat—for the time, at least. Though, perhaps, it would have been his best policy to have moved on immediately to the regular hunting-grounds of the tribe, yet, for several reasons, did he prefer to linger in this vicinity. The detachment which had separated from him, and which was to form a junction at the river, had not yet made its appearance, and until it did he did not feel justified in leaving. He was not afraid of immediate pursuit by the trappers, and would much prefer letting some of the Blackfeet braves arrive at their village before him. Then it would be apparent that he was a deserted rather than a deserter—one who, encumbered as he was by a prisoner, nevertheless remained behind till the

last shot was fired. Therefore it was that he turned the horses' heads toward the mountains, appearing to Adele as though he were determined to ride, at a racing speed, straight up their rugged sides.

Gradually an opening became evident—a rough, seldom-traveled, and almost impracticable pass—apparently extending through into the Oregonian territory, on the other side.

Man and beast being so well acquainted with the route, the rate of speed was scarcely diminished. On either side, towered the mountain, the almost perpendicular walls covered with draperies of green at the top, where the moonlight fell; but lower down, dark and chill. Eyesight could be of little avail here, without a thorough knowledge of the place and its surroundings. And still, as Rutter clattered on, an answering noise from behind, as it were an echo, showed that the pursuer held his own. A dark smile swept over the blood-smeared face of the renegade, as he listened to the noise: "Come on, come on, clost behind. Ye come fast, but it may be a long time afore ye take the back trail at sich a rate. Them as comes in at The Trappers' Pass sometimes gits passed out. We're safe here; but that's more than him behind kin say."

In order to prevent Adele from leaping down, and endeavoring to escape in the darkness, Tom changed his position so that she could not make the attempt at dismounting without leaping straight into his arms. There was little necessity for this movement. Had it been light he could have seen that no such thought entered the brain of the young captive. She only clung tightly in her seat, and, in breathless suspense, awaited the end.

For half a mile, at least, the two horses plunged on through the dimness, and then, at a slight touch on the bridles, they turned to one side, and began ascending an inclined plane, which led along the wall of the pass.

"Steady, gal," said Tom, in a coarse, thick whisper. "Be keerful how yer move now, fur two foot out of the

road might break that purty neck o' yourn. A stumble over these rocks is an ugly thing, and Tom Rutter's work would all go fur nuthin' if yer got it."

For a second the idea of self-destruction flashed through Adele's mind. What so easy as to fling herself away over the rocks, and at once put an end to her troubles, and to life itself? Friendless and alone, in the power of an outlawed desperado, with but little hope of succor, why should she longer live?

It was but for a second. Far behind, from the darkness, echoed the sound of a horse's hoof, striking against a stone. She was not entirely deserted—friends yet sought her; rescue might be near at hand. Why, then, despond? The steeds ceased their upward motion. For the present their journey was at an end.

Apparently proceeding from the solid rock, a stout, squat-figured man emerged, bearing in his hand a small lantern. He glanced at the two a moment; then, in a hard, dry voice, said: "So yer coming back to the nest once more, Tom Rutter; and you bring a purty bird along. Come in, and I'll put the hosses away."

"Shade that light, will yer, if ye don't want a ball singing up here. There's somebody comin' through the pass that's looking fur somethin' he's lost, and if he catches sight o' that glim, there may be an extra job put out that I don't kecr about having a hand in."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the man with the lantern, as he put the slide down. "Ho, ho! somebody looking for a lost thing in 'The Trappers' Pass! There's lots o' them things goes in, but powerful few goes out. What's he lost, Tom? A bit o' calico, or a back load o' pelts, or a money purse? Them's bad things to lose on the prairie or mountings, but nice to find, most mighty nice, most—"

Here his words became indistinct, for he had entered a fissure in the rocks; but something very like an oath emphasized the concluding sentence. Rutter and Adele followed.

The light from the lantern, which was now permitted to stream forth, was but barely sufficient to give the captive some idea of where she was.

The air felt damp and cave-like to her, and, looking around, Adele saw, as, indeed, she expected to see, that the place was part of a cavern, of how great extent it was impossible to say. The man who was, for the time being, porter, led the horses to one side, and then returned to where Rutter was standing.

"Come on, Tom; we have the kennel all to ourselves to-night. All the boys ar out, an 'ef Big Dick don't come back, we'll hev a nice evening of it. Strike into the room, an' tell us whar you come from, how you got that bloody face, and whar you picked up that young squaw. I hain't seen a face for threc or four days, an' am splitting fur somebody to talk to."

The renegade did not appear to be in a very loquacious humor, but he followed the advice of the man insomuch that he "struck" into the room, to all appearance only too glad to find that the place was not tenanted by the usual dwellers therein.

The underground retreat was of considerable size. The room in which they all three finally congregated was at least twenty feet square; the one through which they had passed was much longer, while a curtain of skins did not entirely conceal the passage to other rooms farther on. An air of rude hospitality was visible in Tom Rutter's face, and in his talk and actions, as he motioned Adele to a seat.

"Take a seat, gal, and don't be skcered. No one is agoin' to hurt ye, and yer wants'll be pervided for as long as this huyar hand kin hold a rifle. It's only a necessary o' war that makes me do this, an' I'll take keer that no hurt comes to ye, though I won't say how soon or how long you'll stay in the camps of the Blackfeet; that's something I ain't got the say about."

Adele sunk on the pile of skins pointed out by the rene-

gade. She hardly knew what to do or say. She could not divine the intentions of her captor. She could only guess at where she was, though that guess was not any cause for self-gratulation or delight. From expressions let fall by the man who held the lantern, the idea flashed upon her that she was in the hands of one of those bands of outlawed trappers that have, and had, an existence throughout the far West.

Which was most to be dreaded—captivity at their hands or at those of the red-skins?

One thing, only, somewhat reassured her. Tom had treated her with more deference than she could by any means have expected, and, somehow, there was an air of honesty about him, when he assured her of support and protection, that was almost satisfactory to her, and which caused the other man to open his eyes, as though astonished to see any thing like honor in a renegade, and sometime denizen of The Trappers' Pass.

In his rough way, Tom intimated, if she desired it, some refreshment would be prepared; but Adele shook her head in the negative.

“I s'pose yer sleepy, then, and so just follow me, and I'll show you whar you may turn in.”

Mechanically, the girl obeyed Rutter, and followed him through the curtained aperture. A short, narrow passage led into another apartment, somewhat smaller than the one they had just left. Strange it was, yet did it seem to her that the air was too dry for an underground room, and it was almost impossible to realize that it was not part of a legitimate dwelling-house. The furniture was simple—a pile of dressed skins serving as bed and seat, a brace or so of guns, apparently much dilapidated by hard service, a few miscellaneous articles, such as might accumulate in a hunter's lodge; and, in one corner, a good-sized chest. It was not a clumsy affair, built by some rude mechanic of a trapper, but a well put-up article, of

good material and workmanship, made as though it could carry in safety within it articles of value.

Placing the lamp—a rude dish containing bear's oil—upon the lid of the chest, Tom, with a few words intended to quiet and soothe the feelings of the unwilling guest, turned and retraced his steps, leaving Adele alone in the guest-chamber of the outlaw's retreat.

She did not feel at all like sleeping. Her situation was not one which would be apt to act opiatewise on her nerves. Strange, horrible fears coursed up and down in her mind, and she suffered the light to die away and go out with a flicker and smoke, while she sat there on the pile of skins, absently gazing at her before-mentioned *vis-à-vis*, the old oaken chest. Just as the waning light shot up in one last expiring gleam, then disappeared, leaving her in the dark, she heard the sound of voices coming from the front part of the cave. Without any settled reason, she rose from her seat, and groped her way to the entrance of her prison.

Light as the evening breeze touches the fallen leaves and moss carpets of the forest, her feet fell upon the cold earthen floor of the passage. A square of light marked the curtain of the ante-chamber, and here Adele paused. The sound was no longer a hum, but every word of the speakers was uttered with distinctness, so that the listener could understand the conversation fully.

Evidently, there was an addition to the number, for there was a voice heard—rough, boisterous, well suited for the utterance of round rolling oaths. Probably, this man was "Big Dick," spoken of by the porter, as one who might possibly make his appearance before morning. This man was speaking.

"He came so almighty sudden along, and made sich a horful noise, that I thort he war one of us, a-course. To make sure, I hailed him, but he didn't stop, only licked up his hoss, an' come faster than ever. I knowed ef it war any of the boys, they wouldn't be doing any such tricks,

so I throwed my shootin'-iron up to shoulder, and let drive whar I thort he mout be. The noise stopped most mighty suddent fur a second, and then I heard a boss gallop away in sich a manner, as said he hadn't any rider aback of him. It war a good shot to make in the dark."

What answer would have been given, was interrupted by the entrance of yet another man, who immediately exclaimed;

"We'll hev to lay low and keep dry for a few hours, my coves, fur there's more'n fifty red-skins hoverin' 'long that way; and they ain't coming very peaceably, either. They're bound to blaze, from their looks."

"Whar yer from, Bill?" said Big Dick, "an' whar did yer see them red-skins. I've just been a tellin' how I wiped some one out in the pass, here, but I didn't see any thing like Injun signs."

"I war down South Branch, somewhat on the scout; and I see lots of people goin' about, all of 'em with lots of arms and nary plunder, but these red-skins are strikin' fur the pass, strait, an' from the looks of ther top-knots, I should take 'em to be Crows."

"What the deuce are Crow Injuns doin' up here?" queried Dick.

"On the war trail, I guess."

"Waal, there's no ust a pickin' a fout with 'em, and it's a hard matter to meet with any body, we don't —, so we kin jist keep under kiver, and act cautious till they're cleared out."

Adelc Robison listened for a short time longer, but finally determined that it was best to retire.

A heavy burden rested upon her young heart. Some one had probably been shot in the pass. That "some one" was doubtless the friend who had so closely followed on after the fight at the crossing of the Marias River.

Who was it?

Her heart grew faint, and her mind dared not suggest an answer. At last sleep came to soothe her wearied brain.

It was a calm and quiet sleep, that lasted a long time. At least, so it seemed to Adele, when she awoke. In the darkness she lay and wondered where she was, how long she must remain, how it would end.

There are some human beings to whom morning never comes. There are those who dwell away down in the depth of the mine, in among the black ore and the grimy coal, where sunlight enters not, where the air is damp and noisome, where time has but two divisions to mark its lapse, the moment when work is commenced, and the moment when it ceases. The sight of the sun to them marks a momentous epoch; they are born, live, die, and are buried by the light of a lantern, while their very bones moulder in the dark.

There are others, on whom dawns not the morning of the soul. No bright light gleams in upon the spirit, but they dwell, cased in misery's walls, with forlorn wretchedness as a bed-fellow. Perhaps, they may wake up suddenly and find it is day; but more probably, they will travel out of this world by the sad glimmer of sorrow's dark lantern, little regretting what is behind, little thinking of that before.

Misfortune and woe are second Joshuas, inasmuch as they can command the light and darkness which may rest upon the soul. They differ in this. He exercised his power for a day, they use theirs, sometimes for a week, sometimes for a month, sometimes for ever.

Neither of these two mornings could well dawn on our heroine. Tom Rutter's appearance, with refreshment, told her that without the cave it was daylight.

He was very silent. From anything he might say, she could glean no information as to the probable length of her stay in the cavern, and her ultimate destination after having emerged therefrom. She would have asked, concerning the movements of the Indians, whom she had overheard mentioned as approaching on the previous night, but she cared not to confess herself an caves-dropper. Tom saved her

from trouble on that score, by saying, just as he was leaving: "Keep yer spunk up for the next few days. There's a kernsiderbel lot o' Injuns about here, that I don't keer about meetin' jist now. Ef we don't do that, we'll hev to lay low hcre, till they clar out, and there's no sartainty when that'll be."

When Tom returned to the front room, he found its three occupants were moving about, getting ready for their several occupations.

The men of The Trappers' Cave were not by any means disposed to lose their rest for the pure love of duty; the consequence was, they were late risers. Those who chose, might rise at daybreak and prepare their breakfast, but the majority preferred to sleep on till the sun had risen far up in the heavens. For that reason, when Tom Rutter entered the room, although he had long since finished his morning meal, Big Dick was sleepily handling his rifle.

"Which way yer goin', Dick Dawson?" inquired Tom.

"Goin' to see whar that feller lit, that I tumbled off hoss, last night."

"Look out fur them red-skins, then, and put him out o' sight. 'Taint any ways good to git them sneakin' raskels lookin' around too clost."

With a nod of the head, which showed that he considered that he was able to take care of himself, Dawson left for the outer world. Passing through the place in which they kept their horses, he entered the crevice which served as both hall and doorway. As he neared the outside, he threw himself down flat, and quietly wriggled himself out into the open air.

Nature had provided a fitting retreat to these mountain outlaws. The opening of the pass was by no means easy to find, and presented difficulties which looked to be insurmountable. After traversing the rough road, for a short distance, the sides, on either hand, rose almost perpendicularly up, though a veil of green-grass shrubs and trailing

plants, sufficed to hide their rugged surface. A narrow ledge, scarce two yards in width, rising up with a gradual slope, led from the trail below, up to a small platform which formed the porch to the cavern. So well had nature grouped the huge boulders, that from below no sign of an opening was apparent, and the path which led to it was only half visible, and seemingly impassable to any but a most reckless footman. Yet, along it did the denizens of the place make their way in safety, though mounted on horseback, and sometimes going at no mean rate of speed.

Dick Dawson, though reckless and self-confident enough, used every precaution in emerging from the burrow. For some minutes after he had gained the open air, he lay perfectly motionless, peering carefully around in every direction; but all was quiet, and nothing possessed of human life was to be seen. Still, progressing carefully, he descended to the ravine or pass below, then started off to prosecute his search. Here and there he could distinguish the imprint of a horse's foot, and soon he arrived at the spot where he judged the stranger had stopped, at whom he had fired on the preceding night.

On a soft patch of ground, he found the marks made by the turning of the horse, and a small hollow, looking as though it were caused by the fall of a human form. A few drops of blood, sprinkled on the grass near by, gave evidence that the bullet fired at random had struck some living object; though, whether it was brute or human, remained a mooted question. The footprints of the horse, returning on the trail, could be seen; but any trace of his rider, beyond the marks before mentioned, at first inspection, could not be found, and, though the top of the short grass and small bushes abounding thereabouts were, in one direction, beaten down, as though some one had passed over them, yet, even this mark soon disappeared—the person had evidently pursued his way over the boulders and broken rocks which strewed the pass, thus leaving no trail behind. Vexation

clouded the countenance of Big Dick. Such a summary way of vamosing was not congenial to his feelings, and his oaths bore witness to the fact.

Baffled, then, Dawson ranged about the ravine for some trace of the intruder, until, at length, giving up the search as a bad job, he roved out on a scouting expedition, for the purpose of finding whereabouts were the Indians, who, on the previous night, had been reported, by a brother outlaw, as approaching.

He found the spot whereon they had encamped for a short time. It was almost in the mouth of the pass, yet no discoveries had been made. Though the red-skins were nowhere to be seen, Dawson could hardly believe that they had left the vicinity for good, and so did not venture out into the open plain; but contented himself with making a careful examination from his hiding-place. He had been absent for nearly two hours, when Tom Rutter, going to the door, met him coming in.

It did not take long to report the result of his investigations, and then the two returned to the cave within.

The manner of Dawson was such, that an attentive observer might have concluded that there was not a complete congeniality of temperament in that burly personage and his friend, the renegade. With nothing particular to engage their attention, it was natural that they should enter into conversation, concerning the business on which Tom had been employed. There was a sort of sneering, bantering tone, in the way in which Big Dick spoke of the Indians allies of Rutter, which aroused the ire of the latter; and before long they were on the eve of a quarrel.

"I tell yer, Tom," finally said Dawson, "yer neither fish, fowl, nor flesh; you ain't neither a square man nor a decent raskil. You come in here when you choose, and make yourself mightily at home, goin' and comin' when you like; but you ain't one of the crowd. You fought for us onct, but leavin' that out o' the question, thar never was a single

time when you done us any good. As long as the Captain says so, it's all right, but hang me ef I believe in it."

"Keep cool, Dawson," responded Rutter. "I've done you all a heap of good, as you know, even ef I ain't in all yer precedin's, and as fur comin' and goin' here, I had the place long enoug before you ever came hereabouts. I come when I choose, but that ain't very often. While the Captain's satisfied, it won't make any difference what Big Dick believes, for Captain Grant ain't ust to askin' his men what they think. He kin trust me, ef you can't; he knows I'm true blue, and wouldn't split on a friend, no matter what advantage it might be to me. I've bin doin' a little business, I acknowledges—Iujuns along fur pardners. We did what we went fur, and a lectle more—but come crost a crowd we wan't expectin'. They flaxed us out, purty nice; but ther a crowd as kin do them things. I struck into this here place, because it was too hot outside, unless I let the gal slide, tho' that wouldn't do, no how. When the coast's clear, I'll leave, an' not much afore, ef I knows any thing on't."

"I rayther think you'll wait till the Captain comes in, then. There's a lot o' rules laid down, as will need a little explainin', an' Grant's the man to do it."

"That don't make no difference," doggedly responded Rutter. "I hinted I had free pass through this Lodge. I don't b'long to yer bloody firm, an' hain't got nothin' to do with laws and regulations."

"Perhaps yer has, an' perhaps yer haven't; but the man that brings calico into this yere camp, must stand by our law, as I said afore."

What caused the curtain, at the farther end of the room to vibrate? Did it conceal a listener? Was there a heart beating wild with fear behind it?

"Look huyer," said Rutter, drawing himself up to his full height, and looking proudly at Dick Dawson and the two outlaws who stood beside him—"look huyer, yer a big

man, and a good man; ye've seen sev'ral serimmages in yer time, an' kin hold yer eandel in a rough and tumble with most men, but you'll wake up the wrong man when you eommenee with me. By the biggest devil in —, if you try to make any of yer rules apply to the gal that's under my wing, I'll put my knife through you—so wide, that there'd never be enuff left to take sight at over a shootin'-iron agin. Here—" throwing baek his rough coat with one hand, exposing the long hunting-knife and braec of pistols belted round him, while with the other he drew toward him his rifle—" is the bells that rings the tune, and ef you don't sing small, you'll git dead man's music."

Quick as light Big Dick sprung forward, his knife flashing out for the eonflict, Rutter presenting himself firmly for the onset. But, as their blades crossed, a deep, stern voice sounded through the cavern: "Hold! Up with those knives! Who dares draw steel in The Trappers' Pass?"

"The Captin'!" ejaculated Dawson, as he leaped back, sheathing his blade.

CHAPTER VII.

MEETING OF ARCHER AND PARSONS.

WE need scarcely tell the reader that the horseman at whom Dawson had fired was none other than Waving Plume. As he reeklessly urged his horse along the rugged pass, he heard the hail of the outlaw, but thought not of answering it. Then suddenly flamed out a light, followed by the report of a rifle. So suddenly and furiously did his horse turn, that, before he could well understand what had happened, Areher found himself upon the ground in the midst of his whole equipage, while the animal was almost out of hearing.

Confusedly rubbing his head, he was about rising to his feet, when a hand of iron rested upon his shoulder, and a

low voice whispered in his ear: "Keep still, boy, ef ye wants to come out o' this place with a clean skin. Yer in a heap o' danger."

There was something familiar in the tone which, with the good sense of the request, caused him to lie still and await what this suddenly-introduced friend would have him to do. Silence reigned in the pass. At times he could hear the low breathing of the person by his side; once, for a few moments, he heard the noise of footsteps, as Big Dick sought the entrance to his retreat; but, with these exceptions, all was still. Perhaps a quarter of an hour had passed ere, becoming impatient, he whispered: "All is now quiet; what is to be done next?"

"Right, by mighty!" responded the strange friend. "I knowed it war you, Charley Archer—rather an awkward tumble o' your'n; but no bones broke, I suppose. Keep quiet a leetle bit longer, till we kin see ef them as fired that shot is agoin' to deny anything."

The speaker was Jacob Parsons. So soon as Waving Plume recognized him, he felt assured, in his own mind, of the propriety of adopting his advice; so, without wasting a breath in asking him how under heavens he came to be at that spot, when he had supposed him miles away, he retained his crouching position. Of course, this could not continue for ever—though a terrible long half hour passed before Parsons thought it safe to move. Then, in a whisper, he announced that it was time; and cautioning Waving Plume to keep close behind, he cautiously moved away, carrying his rifle in readiness for instant use, and scarce making a breath of noise, as he flitted ghost-like through the dusky night.

As one familiar with the way, the trapper moved on, and with full confidence the young man followed close in his wake; though it busied him to keep up within distance of his leader. It seemed to him as though the road had become most terribly uneven since he had so rapidly traversed

it, or that a special Providence had exercised its protecting care in preventing him from receiving a death-fall in this rocky, darksome gorge.

When at length they had nearly reached the edge of the prairie, they caught the sound of an approaching person. Quickly they crouched in the shade of two rocks, and scarce had they done so, when a mounted man swept past them, riding at a reckless rate through the broken pathway. Parsons would, perhaps, have endeavored to stop the man, but so instantaneous was the passage, that before he could make up his mind the thing became an impossibility.

Waiting until this individual was fairly out of hearing, again our two friends proceeded on their way. Arriving at the mouth of the pass, the trapper turned shortly to the left, and immediately struck a trail twice as circuitous and difficult as the one they had left. Trusting implicitly in Jake's intimate knowledge of the country, Waving Plume followed on without once questioning as to where they were going. After three quarters of an hour's fatiguing march, with a low "come on," the leader began the ascent of a most difficult path. Up, up they toiled, until they reached a long level ledge of rock, and here Parsons and his companion halted. For the present their travels were at an end.

"Now," said Archer, as he wearily threw himself at full length on the rock, "now, Jake, can you tell me how you got here, where we are, and what we are to do?"

"Yer askin' a good deal to onet, but, perhaps, I kin. You know I've scouted around this part of the country for quite a time, an' living alongside the red niggers, I got to learn their ways. Las' night I war nigh thirty miles away, an' right in among 'em. Young Robison an' I war on ther trail, 'cause the tarnal critters hes got the Major an' his darter—which is a great deal worse; and that's what I ought to told you at fust.

"Never mind that, I know that part, though you can tell me what's become of Hugh," said Waving Plume.

“He’s all right—will make a bully Injun fighter, he will. They were all round him, but we fit our way through, killed a dozen, more or less, an’ then cleared out. We had to separate, but he kin hold his own candle, so I ain’t a bit frightened fur him. Now, knowin’ the nature of the varmints, I sorter had an idee they’d turn up in this here d’rection, so I shoved ahead. I’ve got a hoss down thar in the dark, an’ ef I ain’t mortal bad mistaken it’ll hev a load to carry soon. We’re jist in the allfiredest purtiest place about the mountains, as I’m goin’ to explain. It’s eight or ten years since I camped about this spot, an’ then I had Tom Rutter for partner, an’ a cussed good partner he was, when he wern’t thinkin’ about the wrongs some white folks had done him. We didn’t camp prezactly here, but in a place we got to from the pass whar you got so near wiped out. Wall, one day Tom goes out, and doesn’t come back, fur the Blackfeet had nabbed him, an’ bein’ alone, I warn’t content with my quarters, so I explored around till I found this place, which is just a hard fort to storm an’ no mistake! The other ain’t so bad neither. When I started iu this direction, I jist thought Tom would strike this way—”

“And so he did!” exclaimed Charley Archer, excitedly leaping to his feet. “It was he that I followed into the pass—he carried with him Adele Robison.”

“Yes, yer correct, an’ you needn’t be alarmed, she ain’t fur off, and we stand a mighty good chance of taking her out of his fingers.”

“Tell me where she is, if you know; and how you expect to rescue her! It will be no easy matter, though it must be done; and I seek for light on it.”

“Easy boy, don’t be in a splutter. Ther’s a cave in the rock, as I kinder hinted, and Tom Rutter has holed thar till he seed jist what to do. And now, while I’m thinkin’ on it, how in thunder docs it come that he breaks in alone with ther gal, and you come alone followin’ him when he

had a party of thirty braves, an' you were with half a dozen free trappers? All the rest on both sides ain't wiped out, be they? I'm kinder curious on them points."

Waving Plume gave a succinct account of his adventures in search of the Major's daughter, together with a detailed description of the conflict at the crossing, the flight, and his lone continuance of the pursuit; of the condition of Ned Hawkins, the Major, and the rest of the party he was profoundly ignorant, nor could he tell what had become of the Blackfeet.

Jake heard the account in silence, reserving his criticisms until it was ended; then he commenced: "Waal, Tom allers was a sharp 'un to handle, and he got a head o' 'em slightually this time. He's a turn-coat on principle, you see, and had been alivin' among the Injuns ever since that time, the black raskils fatched him up a standin' He don't seem to be doin' the square thing to the Major and his darter, but as near as I kin come to it, he's fooled you an' the red-skins both, an' slipped in here—which ar a mighty bad place for an honest man er woman. Maybe you've hearn tell o' The Trappers' Pass—ef you have, this here's the place. Now, I'm sleepy and tired, you perceive, and so will jist dry up an' go to sleep; fur there's plenty of time to-morrow to tend to all our talkin' and sich like."

Used as he was to the hardships of trapper life, to Jake, there was no need of a bed of down to bring sleep. In a few moments he was cosily ensconced in the arms of Morpheus, and the watchful ear of Charles Archer could hear the long-drawn breath which announced his condition. But, tired as he was, it was long before Waving Plume could compose his nerves sufficient to sleep. Try as he might, his thoughts would advert to Adele Robison and her captors. Had he not known that it would be useless, more than once would he have awakened Parsons, to question him on points which suggested themselves to his busy brain. But he knew too well the sleeping *voyageur* to suppose that he

could get the least satisfaction from him after a sudden awakening.

Gradually the blackness of the surrounding night changed to a leaden gray. Mistily thoughts swarmed through his brain. Then came a blank—Archer, too, was asleep.

Even yet was his dream haunted by a golden-haired girl, who struggled in the arms of a heavily-bearded refugee and countless Indians. The fight at the crossing was to be re-fought, the hand-to-hand struggle with the renegade, the sudden retreat, the dark intricacies of 'The Trappers' Pass, and the hurtling rifle bullet—all once more appeared, ere, with the breaking morn, he arose from his hard couch on the level rock.

With keen eye he studied the windings of the path which he had followed to reach this resting-place; and anxiously he gazed around to make himself acquainted with the topographical intricacies of this retreat. A small cavern, perhaps a dozen feet square, let into the side of a precipice; a path of but a few feet in width, winding and twisting up the side of the mountain, led to it. Below him was a great basin cut out of the solid range, its sides and bottom thickly timbered. As he was looking down upon the scenery below, Parsons, who had awakened, remarked: "It's a queer country this, ain't it now?"

"Yes, Jacob, it is a queer-looking country. This is, in one sense, a safe retreat, also. It would require a more than ordinary set of men to dislodge us by force of arms; but I am afraid it would not take long to starve us out—indeed, as far as I can see, that would be the only plan that could prove successful."

"Don't you be too sure of that. There's a quicker way than that, if it ain't a better one. This wall," patting with his hand the rocky side of the recess, "looks amazin' thick an' stout, but six or eight good men could have her down in short order."

Seeing the surprise of Archer, Parsons explained as fol-

lows: "You needn't stare so, it's true. If you look sharp you'll see this rock's limestun—right about here you find lots of it. On the tother side there's a cave a darned sight bigger than this; and the wall atween 'em ain't but a few inches through. Thar's whar you'll find the trappers, and most likely Tom Rutter and the Major's darter with 'em. Ef I didn't think so, I wouldn't be layin' around here. There's no use a foolin', it's a right down ugly job, for ef we're careful, an' Tom gives us time, an' we don't starve, we'll hev her out o' ther paws afore to-morrow, someway."

Sunlight suddenly stole over the face of Waving Plume, and the joy in his soul beamed out through his keen gray eyes.

"So near," he exclaimed, "nothing save a few inches of rock to separate us—she must and *shall* be saved! Quick, tell me your plans, that we may at once begin the work, for delays are dangerous!"

To this rather excited speech of Archer's, Parsons coolly responded: "Don't be in too great a splutter, young man. There's several things to be thought on afore we commence to go in. We had better scout around an' see how the country looks, an' then lay our plans accordin'. I said las' night I had a hoss down in the holler, an' if the cussed scoundrels hereabouts ain't stole him, he's thar yit. He needs feedin' or rayther a general sort o' lookin' arter; an' as we'll be wantin' somethin' to eat an' drink, you'd better come along an' git helped. After that I'll take a li'le scout out on the plain—you can come along or stay ~~here~~ jist which you choose. By the time I git back mebbe we'll hev some plan started."

Charles assenting, the two together began the descent of the path, which served as a staircase to this high eyrie. After a rather wearisome ten minutes the two came upon Parsons' horse, niccly ensconced amidst a thick patch of bushes. Herc, too, they prepared to make such meal as Jacob's limited larder could afford. From under an overhanging rock, at no great distance off, there gushed a pure

spring of clear, cold, mountain water, and by its margin they breakfasted, the steed refreshing himself at the fountain, and then proceeding leisurely to crop the short grass and tender herbage in which the place abounded.

Preferring to leave the difficult duties of scouting to one most thoroughly versed in its mysteries, Waving Plume sought out a comfortable resting-place on which he might seat himself, while Parsons disappeared in the direction of the mouth of the basin, or *cul-de-sac*, in which they were encamped.

Time passed on. At least two hours had elapsed, and yet the trapper did not return. Not on this account did Archer become impatient or alarmed. Only supposing that the difficulties of his task had unexpectedly become enhanced, or that some unforeseen appearance required a more careful investigation, he tried, as best he might, to while away the time. At length, tired of inactivity, and restless from a mind burdened by so great a duty as the rescue of the fair "Mist on the Mountain," he debated within himself whether he should follow in the footsteps of Jake, and seek the plain, or return to the niche wherein he had passed the night. Reflecting that in the one case he would be needlessly thrusting himself into danger, and at the same time drawing no nearer to Adele; while in the other he would be closer to the maiden, even if there was no possible means of access to her, he chose to retrace his steps.

Out of breath, he reached the spot, and flung himself down much in the same manner as he had done on the night before. His head was partly supported by the rock which formed the side, and he lay there for some time looking dreamily at the mountain tops, which rose opposite to him at the distance of a mile. Suddenly, behind his head he felt a slight vibration of the rock, and could hear a tapping sound, as though some one were, with their knuckles, trying its strength or thickness. With a bound. Waving

Plume was on his feet. Circumstanced as he was, he could not at once think what course it was best for him to pursue.

It might well puzzle an older head than was upon the shoulders of Charley Archer to decide what should be done in this sudden emergency. She whom he sought was separated from him by but a few inches of soft rock; she would doubtless be overjoyed to know of his presence there—yet how should he let her know of it without running the risk of defeating all their projects for her liberation. He knew not the plan of the cavern, and therefore was not aware that the prison of Adele was untenanted save by herself. He felt afraid that, if he made any sign to attract her attention, one of two things might happen. Either she would, by some sudden exclamation, put her jailors on their guard, or else imagine him to be one of the trappers, and refuse to be assisted—perhaps, by an outcry, call down destruction on himself and Parsons.

There was one course which seemed most safe, though it was little suited to the impatience of young blood. It was to wait for the return of Jake.

Bending down, he applied his ear to the rock once more; and once more, after an interval of silence, he heard the tapping against the stone. Following the bent of the first impulse which struck him, he drew from his belt the large hunting-knife which he there carried. For a moment he surveyed the seemingly solid wall before him, gave a glance at the edge of his weapon, and then resolutely attacked the only known barrier which lay between him and Adele. It was hard work; but resolution and a strong wrist will carry a man through a great deal.

Noiselessly he continued his work, only pausing now and then to examine his knife, in order that he might judge whether it would hold out. Carefully his labor progressed, and soon could be discerned the outlines of the cavity which he was seeking to excavate.

How long did the minutes seem! Almost a life time

apparently went out in the half hour he spent at his work. Difficulties resolutely attacked often disappear; and so it was somewhat in this case. Though the precise name of the stone was unknown to the young man, yet to him did it seem of a peculiar structure. Before his iron wrist it rapidly flaked away.

All sound within had ceased. Though he worked as silently as possible, he could not avoid making some noise; but whether or no this had frightened the investigator, he was unable to tell.

As Waving Plume progressed with his labor, he began to realize how very thin the partition actually was. At a heavy pressure of his hand he could feel it spring inwards, and he marked well the progress he had made. One more vigorous application of the knife, the point sank into the rock and disappeared. His work, for the time, was almost done.

A hole as big as the palm of his hand testified to the vigor of his proceedings. Anxiously gazing through this, he could see the apartment beyond. A small lamp cast an uncertain light, and almost directly before the aperture a dim shadow loomed up. The shadow was that of a woman.

Motionless she stood there, with eyes bent on the little opening through which streamed the subdued light from the world beyond. The noise of loud voices in angry debate rolled in from the other apartment, and would have effectually drowned any exclamation which she might have made; but she made none, save the loud beatings of her own heart, which to her were plainly audible—there was no noise within the walls of her prison-house. What thoughts trooped through her mind it were hard to tell. So varied, and, to her, exciting, had been the events of the last few days, that but little was required to take away her self-possession; and thus, from having long listened to the stroke of the knife so skilfully handled by Waving Plume, her senses were stolen away, and she was as one bereft of speech and motion.

“ Adele !”

In a low, but audible whisper the word floated into the room. The voice of the whisperer, too, was not unknown and she bent forward to listen.

“ Adele !” Once more the whispered word; but this time the tone was a note or two louder.

Bending down her head, she replied: “ Who is it that speaks ?”

“ A friend—one who would rescue you—Charles Archer.”

“ Thank heaven !”

This was uttered more in the shape of a fervent prayer than of a reply; then, to Waving Plume: “ If you can aid me, be quick.”

In a few hurried words, all that was needful for either to know was told. Waving Plume was assured that there was no immediate danger of interruption, that any slight noise would not be heard by her jailors. Adele was buoyed up by the assurance of immediate relief, and the intelligence that in a few moments another ally, Jake Parsons, would be on the spot. Then again came silence, as to speech, while Charles Archer applied himself to the task of enlarging the orifice.

The minutes passed, and then, through the opening, emerged Adele, while below, a soft, though firm tread, announced the approach of Parsons.

Some speech was on his tongue, but, whatever it was, it was left unuttered. The first thing that met his sight, as he glanced into the niche, was a woman—her outstretched hand grasped in that of Waving Plume.

A strange, unechoing exclamation, redolent with the air of the hunting-ground, dropped from his lips. Then, without a word, he carefully picked up Adele, and began carrying her down the rough path without.

When the three had reached the valley, and were in some manner hidden by the foliage of the trees, a momentary halt was called, and a short consultation was held.

"We're in fur a happy time," said Jake. "I can't see my way clar. Thar war a lot of Injuns of some kind camped fur the night, right outside, an' ther trail shows they struck up North, airly this mornin'. Then ther's another lot comin' to sight on the south of us, an' them's right down rampageous Blackfeet, without any show fur a mistake. Then, here's this here mounting shuttin' us in, with Tom Rutter an' the raskils of The Trappers' Pass right behind, an' ready to come a booming out any minute. There ain't much time fur to spend in talk, an' I swear to gracious I don't know which way to move."

"Come, Jake, you must have some road open on which we can travel. Think a little, and sec if you can't get us out of this difficulty."

"There's plenty of ways for a man like me to travel in, but I don't know what to do with you and the female. We're in a hornet's nest, an' the hole's plugged shut. We can't fight, stan' still, or run; an' heven't five minits time to make up our minds in."

"Is there no place where we can lie hidden?" inquired Waving Plume.

"I'm afraid there ain't," was the not very encouraging answer. "We've rushed things a lectle too fast I'm afeared. If ther wan't any red-skins in ther road, an' all we had to look out fur was Tom Rutter and the trappers, I could put you through, and no mistake. Here we are, an' here we can't stay. I'm circumflumixed."

Matters did not look so perilous to Waving Plume; the serious view which so old and experienced a ranger as Jake Parsons took of the subject was enough, however, to make him feel somewhat discouraged.

Parsons was lying stretched out on the broad of his back, his arms drawn up so as to shade his eyes, and, to one casually dropping upon the group, he would have seemed to be fast asleep. But Archer knew that at no time, for days, had the *voyageur* been more closely engaged in thought.

Not wishing to disturb him, for he felt the utter uselessness of so doing, the young man manifested his restlessness by walking up and down the greensward that lay in front of the spring, casting quick and nervous glances at Parsons and Adele. The latter felt keenly the extreme danger of their position. For her had the men thrust themselves into this predicament, and, as she saw no possible means of assisting them, and as the knowledge dawned upon her that she alone was the drag which bid fair to compass the destruction of all there, she hid her face between her hands and wept.

Environed by difficulties, with two companions depending upon his inventive genius for escape from a most unpleasant position, no light breaking upon the dark road which seemed to stretch out before him, Parsons did all but despair. Think as he might, no good would come of it, and so, after some minutes, he said: "Well, Charley, it ain't no use. We can't git out."

A groan was the only response, so he continued: "But that ain't no reason why we can't stay in. They say, 'what ain't hid's best hid;' an' we'll try it. There's plenty of room to lay by here, an' ef we can only throw 'em off the scent a leetle, it may work. Jist come along now."

Diving right into the thick underbrush, Parsons led the way, until they came to the side of the basin which they were in. Here, in a clump of evergreens, he placed them, and then began to retrace his footsteps, first charging them not to move until they heard from him.

As he returned to the spring, he effaced as much as possible the marks of the passage of himself and friend.

Stepping lightly into the open space at the spring, he glanced carefully around. Nothing unusual met his eye, nor did any suspicious sound fall upon his ear.

"Strange, ther' ain't no sound from 'em yit," was his muttered cogitation. "Tom Rutter must hev got most cussedly careless sence he got among the Blackfeet, or he'd

hev missed the girl afore this. It ain't so likely neither; but there'll be somethin' up soon."

While thinking thus, Jacob was adjusting the saddle of his steed. With a bound he had vaulted into his seat, but scarcely had he settled there when, from the rocks above him, in the direction of The Trappers' Cave, came a wild yell. Drawing in a long breath, he gave vent to an answering cry so loud and clear as even to astonish himself. A moment horse and rider stood motionless, then, with a renewed cheer, he dashed boldly and at full speed toward the mouth of the basin and the plain.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURE OF JAKE PARSONS.

THE yell which had come to the ears of Jake Parsons was sounded from the lips of Tom Rutter. The quarrel which he was having with Big Dick, and which seemed so likely to come to a bloody termination, was suddenly concluded by the appearance of the Captain. With a lowering brow this man listened to the explanations of the two men. A similar light sparkled for a moment in his cold grey eyes as he heard Big Dick narrating the appearance of Adele; and, when the outlaw had concluded, the Captain remarked in a firm, low voice: "Well, we'll have a look at this beauty of Rutter's, and see what *she* says."

The words in themselves were simple, but something in his tone or manner appeared to be displeasing to the renegade, for there was a certain ominous knitting of his brow, and his right hand wandered toward the pistol in his belt. This was unseen by the Captain, who preceded him through the opening which led to the other room.

Carelessly throwing aside the curtain, he stepped into the passage, Tom following close in his footsteps, Dick, the

trapper, remaining behind, sitting moodily upon a rough bench, and the uncouth being who acted warder, standing grinning in the centre of the room. Grant cast his eyes quickly around, then, suddenly turning to Tom: "How is this? There is nothing like a woman here."

Rutter rushed forward, saw the evidences of the handiwork of Waving Plume, and then gave vent to the cry of baffled rage and disappointment. Grant, meanwhile, stood by, with a malicious sneer curling round his mouth.

"Quick! Follow them! Don't stand here idle; your lives depend on it!"

Such were the exclamations which Rutter gave vent to; and the man by his side gradually dispensed with the sneer on his face, as he began to understand fully how matters were. That some one was acquainted with the secret of his retreat, he could plainly see. That the person was courageous and daring, was also patent to observation; and, quick as light, the idea struck him that the man who had done this must be removed.

"Who has done this?" was his first question; and to it Rutter replied: "Did not you hear him? He gave his shout of defiance, and we must be men enough to take him up. It is a man who knows well the mysteries of the place—he lived here with me once, but, till night before last, I had thought him dead. This is no time for idling. He will be out on the plain, and miles away before we can meet him, if we do not hasten."

"Who is with him? How many are we to contend with?"

"He is by himself, or with but one man to attend him. The rest of his gang I threw off the scent last night."

The reader will see that Tom, in the excitement of the moment, had thrown off all roughness of speech. With him, indeed, it had always been more or less assumed.

To turn around, to leave the apartment, to call upon the two men who were in the other room, to mount their steeds

and descend into the pass, all this was the work of but a few moments.

When, at length, they burst out upon the plain, the first sight that met their eye was a band of some twenty Blackfeet. It was that part of Tom Rutter's party which had not been at the fray at the great crossing. The sudden appearance of the four would have immediately attracted their attention, had it not been otherwise engaged.

Parsons had made somewhat of a mistake in his calculations. It had been his intention to keep close to the mountains, and make a trail running southward. If he could do this, and at the same time keep out of sight of Tom Rutter and the trappers, he might make them believe that Adele was with him, and by drawing off their attention and forces in this direction, Waving Plume and the Major's daughter might possibly have a chance to escape. The nature of the place was favourable to the plan, and, had it not been for the Indians, it might have been successful.

Unfortunately they were half a mile closer than he expected them to be, and, as he rode out through the narrow, rocky, bush-sheltered passage, he fell, as it were, right into their hands. With a loud whoop, he clapped heels to his horse's side, and endeavored to dodge past them, but in vain. One of those nearest to him, and who was armed with a rifle, drew sight on the luckless trapper. Without waiting to ascertain whether the fleeing man was friend or foe, he pulled the trigger and fired.

Though the ball missed its intended mark, nevertheless it took fatal effect upon the horse which Jake bestrode, and, with one prodigious leap, its vital energies were expended. Though it fell so suddenly, its rider was not to be caught unprepared. Leaping nimbly aside, he avoided being crushed, and with steady aim covered the Indian who had fired the shot. He, knowing his almost certain fate, attempted to throw himself behind his horse, but his motion was not quick enough. A sharp crack, a whistling bullet,

and the steed was avenged. To turn and rush toward the cover of the woods was his next move, and, with a score of red-skins and the four whites to spur him on, he made the tallest kind of running.

But bad luck resolutely dogged his footsteps during the whole of this day. A row of small thorny bushes lay in his path—the outposts of the woods beyond. Clearing this with a bound, he thought to have held on his way, but his foot caught in a small trailing vine. Immediately he was flung at full length, and with great violence, upon the ground. Before he could collect his scattered senses, the foe was upon him.

A perfect storm of bullets and arrows was launched at him, but still was he unharmed. A number of the Black-foot dismounted, and closed in upon him; but the hardy white disdained to yield.

Drawing his heavy rifle over his shoulder, he anticipated their attack by leaping upon them. For a few moments there was a lively time among the party, but numbers and resolution were too much for resolution alone, and Jake was finally borne to the ground. Even then he did not, at once, give in, but made most frantic efforts to draw his knife. At length, after a most desperate struggle, he was bound, though not without the assistance of Big Dick and Tom Rutter.

“Thar, confound yer ornary picturs, you’ve got me; but ye had a good time adoin’ it. See what yer’ll make of me, ye low-lived, red-skinned devils!”

To this exclamation of Parsons, which showed that his mind was not under control, if his body was, no immediate attention was paid, Tom Rutter, all panting with his exertions, exclaiming: “Whar is the gal, eh?”

CHAPTER IX.

PARSONS AND ARCHER IN THE BLACKFOOT VILLAGE.

It was evening. In the centre of the Blackfoot village were two men well known to the reader—Parsons and his young friend, Charles Archer. Without the lodge, could be heard the cat-like pace of a sentinel. At a few rods distance, a long, low, wigwam, the council-chamber of the Charred Stick section of the tribe, was located, and now and then a wild shriek, pealed forth by some brave, would reach the ears of the prisoners. Within, nothing was to be heard save the measured breathing of the two; both were sleeping.

The face of Waving Plume was very pale. From under a tight bandage upon his forehead, drops of blood, now clotted, had escaped; the hair on the front part of his head was matted together, and the appearance of the man gave evidence that he had not become a captive without a determined struggle.

Loud and clear sounded the death-wail for fallen braves. Though successful in their foray upon the Crows, yet had the expedition, taken as a whole, resulted disastrously to the tribe. At least a dozen braves had fallen, and Talmkah, one of their bravest and boldest chiefs, dangerously if not mortally wounded, in the abduction of Major Robison and his daughter. Thus, in the band of warriors that night gathered around the council-fire, there were deep mutterings, ominous frowns, sharp, blood-red speeches, and actions which told as loud as words that the fate of the prisoners would be one both sudden and bloody.

The two slept on. Days of toil and nights of waking had so far exhausted them, that, even with the prospect of soon-approaching death impending over them, they would calmly woo "tired nature's sweet restorer," and quietly and unbrokenly slumber, while bound and prisoners in the Blackfoot town. They had slumbered perhaps an hour or

so, when the entrance of three men into the hut aroused them. Two were Indians, but, by the light of the torch which one of them carried, to them, suddenly awaking, the third seemed to be a white man. Then, as the fumes of sleep rolled off, Charles Archer recognized one whom, of all others, he less wished to meet—Robison himself.

The Major, a weary, soul-depressed look upon his face, gazed around, finally suffering his eye to rest for some seconds upon his fellow-prisoners before recognizing them. Then, as the Indians retired, leaving the three to themselves, he found tongue, addressing them with: "So we once more meet! For once I am more pained than delighted at seeing a familiar face."

"I can most heartily say the same," was Archer's response.

"Though the explanation of the fact of my being a prisoner here is most easy, I can hardly imagine how you came to fall into the hands of the Blackfeet again, once having been rescued, as I know, by our band of trappers. It can hardly be possible that they, along with you, are sharing the pains of captivity."

"As far as my knowledge extends, they are in perfect safety. I find myself here as much through my own foolishness as through any other reason; yet, knowing as I do, that I must have been imprudent, I can scarce give a succinct account as to the means by which I was captured. Excitement, fatigue, grief, darkness, and delay, must have driven me partially out of my senses, so that I fell into the hands of the very men who were lurking along our trail."

"It is strange," said Waving Plume, "how misfortune seems to dog our every step. Not a move can we make, however fair it may, at the inception, appear, but we are plunged deeper into the mire of difficulties. You, the very embodiment of all caution, just at the critical time, losing presence of mind, seems to be sufficient cause to think that the fates are against us."

And Parsons, too, had a word to say: "By mighty, Major

things hes a villiany look. I'm expectin' nothin' 'cept the hull darned caboodle on us'll jist be packed in here afore mornin', an' to-morrer they'll make a bonfire out o' some seven or eight most cussedly interestin' subjecks, of our weight an' thickness. What the deuce are we goin' to do?"

"We must hope for the best, knowing that while there is life there *is* hope. I have very little fears, for the present, for Hawkins and the rest of the boys, though I deeply regret that circumstances should have occurred to draw them toward so much danger. They are well-chosen men, with years of experience, and, though game to the back bone, there will be a method about their perseveranc which will, as far as possible, preserve them from needless exposure to danger."

"One word as to your capture. Was there a struggle, and if so, was any one hurt?"

"I tell you, Archer, I know but little as to the manner in which it was effected. There is a singular look to the whole affair, which for a while puzzled me completely, though I think that I have come to a solution of the mystery."

The manner in which he spoke aroused the curiosity of his listeners, who pressed him for particulars of the affair. In a dubious, hesitating tone, he responded, apparently not having the fullest belief in his opinion, yet sceing no other way in which he might account for his presence.

"To tell the truth, I know nothing in reality of the causes which led to my capture, though, as I before said, I have very strong suspicions. I have no knowledge of any affray—no remembrance of an attack or attempted escape. All that I can, with certainty, say, is that I came to my senses a long way from camp, on foot, unharmed and alone, the hands of three Indians grasping me, and a severe nervous shock running through my whole system. I must have been taken while following the trail in my sleep."

"In your sleep!" exclaimed both listeners.

"Yes, asleep. From the crossing of the Yellowstone, we followed the trail for a number of hours, till the darkness

that hangs heaviest just before the coming dawn, settled thickly around us. Then, men and horses most thoroughly wearied, we encamped for a few hours' rest. Though it was much against our will, yet we were compelled to do it, and, leaving one of our number to keep guard, we threw ourselves down to rest. Scarcely had I touched the ground when my eyes closed in sleep; and, in that condition, impelled by the anxious state of my mind, I must have silently left the camp and followed the trail, leaving the others in ignorance of my departure. The rearguard of the Blackfeet, seeing me, had silently approached and secured me before I awakened, thus precluding any show of resistance."

Having given such explanation of his unexpected presence, the Major, in turn, made a few hurried inquiries of the two as to the various causes which had led to their being held as captives. Archer told him all the main points—of his pursuit, of his ride through The Trappers' Pass, of his narrow escape, and fortunate meeting with Parsons—of the rescue of Adele, of the desperate attempt of Jacob to escape, or at least to direct the attention of the outlaws from the spot where Waving Plume and his fair charge were concealed. Then came a description of the search of the basin, after the capture of Parsons—how for some time the searchers were baffled, but at length succeeded in unearthing them—and a detail of the rapid marches made by them, for the purpose of eluding all pursuit. And, just as Waving Plume was about concluding his story, the sound of a familiar voice, addressing the guard outside, warned them that he who came was Tom Rutter. A moment afterward the tall form of the renegade stood within the hut.

Notwithstanding the fact that Waving Plume and Parsons viewed the renegade with disgust, the Major seemed inclined to give an ear to whatever he might have to say. Perhaps it was because of the natural suavity of Robison—his generous, confiding, honest, openness of heart—or else that he really believed that the man, thus silently coming

at dead of night, was acting in accordance with what he thought to be right, and that he might possibly, if convinced of the unfairness of his course, afford them some assistance. In either case he received the intruder in a polite manner, making no friendly demonstrations, but also with no hostile ones.

Although the fierce and bitter feelings of Archer and Parsons were expressed in the shadow on their countenances, the renegade cast upon them a friendly glance. Then, drawing near to Robison, he looked him full in the face, and, speaking at once frankly and firmly, he commenced: "Major, it's no use o' my goin' over a long rigmorole of stuff about what's been done to me, an' how I've been treated. That's all over, an' I'm here. I've throwed in my lot with the Injuns; they've done the squar thing with me, an' I'm doin' the same by them."

Robison answered this by an impatient shake of the head, which Rutter seeing, proceeded: "Well, you've bin a livin' in this region for better nor three year. In that time you've bin free to move about jist as ye liked, an' haven't had a single scrimmage with none of the tribes. They know what yer after, an' though it's clean agin 'em to let yer settle hereabouts, still they sort o' took a likin to you and yer ways, an' didn't keer about interferin'. They know yer lookin' fur gold, and they know if ye find it there'll be a rush of white people that'll be sure to kill 'em off in the end. All this here they've bin a standin', an' still didn't lift a hand agin yer—ain't it so?"

The answer was an affirmative nod of the head.

"About two years ago you were over into Oregon, lookin' around, an' comin' back yer found somethin'. What ye did with it I don't know, but we do know that yer took the back trail agin, an' landed somewhar in the region of the Shoshonees. Ain't that so agin?"

A rather perplexed look, which had been on the face of Robison, was now clearing off again. At last he was b-

ginning to understand the meaning of this foray of the Blackfeet, and to understand, too, its probable results to himself. Not wishing to interrupt the renegade in his statements, he again simply nodded, and that personage went on: "Perhaps yer don't know the rules an' regulations among us Injuns. It 'taint expectable; and yet they're simple. To bring this matter down to a pint, the thing yer found was a Injun gal, that b'longed to our tribe, an' this here's the consequences."

At length the Major answered in words: "I begin to see light at last. To be sure, I might have suspected it before, but the thing had totally glided out of my memory. I did find something, and that something was an Indian girl. I did strike the back trail, and land her safely with her own tribe. That she belonged to the Snakes you will not deny. Not only did she speak their language, but I had the pleasure of seeing the happy meeting between her and her mother. In that, though your tribe and hers might be at war, how, following the plain dictates of right and reason, have I erred?"

"I'll tell yer how it war. The gal war a Shoshnee no longer; she war a Blackfoot. The squaw of Talmkah, our chief, lost her son through the men of her tribe, and Minnehaha, a prisoner, was taken by her, to sort o'wise fill his place. She war regularly adopted, had lived in our lodges for nigh onto three year, an' ef you hadn't helped her off, she would a bin thar now. You showed her the trail, an' now our Injun laws come inter play. Ef yer ken bring her back, it's all right, ef not, yer darter stays in her place, an' you stand a mighty good show fur makin' a bonfire. Injun laws, on sich subjects, are mighty hard. I don't say it's not piling it on pretty rough, but its law—an' law, ye know, must be obeyed."

It was enough to strike a chill into the heart of Robison. Till now, though he thought he had been prepared for the worst, he had never realized what the end might be. The

thought of what now would most certainly come, flashed through his brain, and, for the second, the strong man bowed his head, hiding his face in his hands. For himself, he could bear death, or whatever other ill the council might decree to him, but to think of his daughter, the light of his life, the favorite child—the one lone image of her lost, beautiful mother—to think of her as the inmate of the lodges of the Blackfeet, the forced dweller in the camps of the red men, perchance some day compelled to be the bride of an illiterate, debased son of the forest and plain—oh! this was very hard! A spasm contracted his whole frame. One blinding, raging tempest of grief, one sigh heaved from a broad chest, compressed by mountains of sorrow—then he straightened himself up, and once more looked Rutter unflinchingly in the eyes.

“Rutter, I first met you years ago. I know part of the wrongs which drove you from the homes of civilization. We roved together for a year or more, and I believe you to be an honest man, even though somewhat misguided. By that honesty tell me truly—is there no hope? I acknowledge that you have told the truth. Though I never would have endeavoured to conceal it, I am at a loss to know how the act was discovered; yet, now that the so-called crime is to be charged upon me, I will not attempt to deny it. I was ignorant of your laws; I knew not that she was an adopted daughter of the Blackfeet. But such excuses I cannot plead; for, were your law ten thousand times more strict, with ten thousand times the amount of punishment affixed to its infringement, still would I, perforce, obey the dictates of humanity.”

“After what you hev jist said, thar don't seem to be much use to ask ef thar's any hope.”

“You mistake me. I ask not for mercy on myself, for if to do what I have done be a crime, then let me suffer; but is my so-styled sin to be visited on my daughter? Is she to suffer for that of which she is, even now, totally ignorant?”

"Thar's something, Major, in the Good Book, that says the children is to suffer for ther father's sins, down to the third an' fourth generations. I'm afeard Mist on the Mountain will be in some such fix. Thar's more chance of your gettin' off than her. It's law, an' law can't be broke."

"Yes, but a bad law, an unjust one—one, the breaking of which is better than the observance."

"Thar's no ust a talkin', Major—good, bad or indifferent, law's law. When the law come a settlin' down onto me, almost gougin' the very vitals out, I thought it was a most mighty mean, pestiverous sort o' thing, an' I'd move whar thar wan't men nor law. But it's no ust tryin'. Men's everywhar, an' where ther's men ther's law. It's a nateral consequence, an' you've allers got to knock under or get the worst of it. I'm sorry for ye—blamed sorry—but it stands to reason; you took away a darter—you must give one back. It's a fair shake, anyway. Now you mout, perhaps, a heard this afore many days, when they bring you afore the council, but I thort I'd let ye know what war comin', an' what mout be expected. I've a friendly feelin' toward ye, an' I've got, besides this here, a proposition to make. P'raps yer won't agree, but there's no harm done to either of us a makin' it."

"Go on. Let me hear what you have to say."

"Wal, it's nothin' more than this. A white man, with these here savages, considerin' their losses jist lately, ain't o' no account at all. To speak straight up and down, the strong probabilities are that ye'll get Injun justice, an' a stand at the stake afore two days is over. I hain't, in ordinary times, any *too* much influence, but just now I've got none at all. There's only one way of savin' ycr life, an' nothin' but the forc o' circumstances would make me willin' to help ye adopt that. If yer'll give me yer promise to let our laws take their course, an' never attempt the rescue of yer darter, I'll guide ye safely through the village, an' once

out, I'll see that ye make yer escape to yer friends, who, I know, are a waitin' for yer."

A sneer, most contemptuous in expression, swept across the face of the Major at this proposition; though, to some extent, his heart warmed toward Rutter. That the renegade was in earnest in his efforts to help him to escape, he did not doubt, but it touched his sense of honor deeply that he could be deemed capable of so base an action as leaving his own dear daughter to be brought up in the lodges of the red-skins. Mastering the indignant desire to express his feeling in full, he quietly and firmly responded: "Such a proposition is one which is either a deliberate insult, or the result of a total misunderstanding of all of man's finer sensibilities. Think you that I would, for the bare privilege of existence, sell my own flesh and blood into everlasting misery and disgrace? Your residence with the savages must have totally blunted all the nicer perceptions of your soul, if you make this offer with a serious belief that I would lean toward its acceptance. No, Rutter, better captivity or death, than life and misery purchased at such a price."

The renegade did not take umbrage at the decided tone in which his offer was rejected. A slight cloud of disappointment, a shade of regret—these were apparent on his face. Mingled with them was a feeling of added respect, which the Major's self-abnegation could not help but elicit. For a moment he stood silent, as if he were done, and would leave without further entreaty; then, having hitherto kept it as a *dernier ressort*, he brought forth that which he thought might shake the resolve even of a man as firm as Robison.

"I don't blame yer fur what ye say. I didn't hardly suppose ye'd accept the offer I made yer, but 'twas no harm to try. Ef ye was to give in now, I'll allow my good opinion of ye would suffer some; still I'd like to see yer leavin' ef it could be done with justice to me an' the Black-feet. I'll tell yer one thing more, holdin' it out as a sort of inducement for ye to leave, and as a free gift in case any-

thing might turn up, and you should git o' the lines an free to locomote in these here western regions."

Waving Plume and Parsons sat intently listening to the conversation, and the renegade cast a side look at them.

"Come furder over, Major," said he. "What I hev to tell is a secret as long as you stay here. Ef you get once away, I'll trust to yer good sense fur tellin' it to any one ye choose. Here it wouldn't be right to say any thing too much to too many."

When Robison had removed to the opposite corner of the hut, Tom Rutter, in a low tone, continued: "I know what yer lookin' fur, and I can tell ye whar to find it. I've wondered, sometimes—fur I've bin a watchin' ye fur a couple o' year—how it come ye didn't stumble on it long afore. It's thar, an' it's plenty—all it wants is the takin'. I'm the one as kin tell you whar to look, an' I b'lieve I'll do it."

At another time, and under other circumstances, this declaration would have sent a thrill of delight to the soul of the listener. Now it appeared to him like the voice of the Evil One, and the offer but as a temptation to swerve him from the path which all honor, truth, justice, and inclination, commanded him to walk in. Stepping a pace backward, he, by the waning and unsteady light which flickered in the dim room, looked the man firmly in the eye, at the same time raising both hands with the palms toward Rutter, a gesture meant to be forbidding and deprecatory.

"Cease, cease! Do not think that the search which, for the past few years, I have followed with such unremitting eagerness, has been suffered to become the all-absorbing passion of my life. Gold I have sought—but in a fair and open way, not at the expense of honor. I desire no revelation, for I tell you plainly, that all the mines of Golconda, all the wealth of Ophir, spread in their glittering richness before me, would not serve to change my unaltered resolution.

But Rutter stood stolid and unmoved at this hastily delivered appeal.

“Don't misunderstand me, Major. I ain't goin' to try to buy ye over to my idear. I'm only in a friendly sort o' way goin' to say to yer what *may* be o' some use some day. Yer may have the luck to git out o' this, an' then what I, Tom Rutter, outcast an' turn-coat, who's left cursed civilization, an' still more cursed law, ahind him, and joined runnagade to a band o' cut-throat red-skins, am sayin', may help a sort o' honest man to git clar o' diffikilties that the foxes of the East tried to heap on him.”

As the moments wore on, and Rutter's conversation with the Major became more earnest, more and more of the true, inside man of the renegade came to sight. Underneath the uncouth, the positively ungainly, face and form, there lay something worthy of admiration. Inflexible and pitiless to appearance, his justification of his actions at first seemed altogether one of quibbles; yet, in his voice lurked a sort of honest eloquence which won belief in spite of prejudice. Waving Plume and the worthy Jacob, from their positions, being to the louder portion of the conversation, listeners, felt a strange yearning toward him. To Parsons, the meaning of the past few years became as a dream, and the voice of Rutter fell upon his ears, as it fell of old, when, on one blanket, they slept before the same camp-fire.

“One condition only would I make with you, Major. What I've got to tell is a secret between you and me, till you get beyond the range of the Blackfeet. If so it happens that you die here, the secret dies too. If you get away its your own, and yer free to tell who you choose. Is it a bargain?”

For one moment only did Robison hesitate, then he responded: “As a bribe, I would not at any risk receive the information, but under these circumstances I will not refuse to hear what you have to say. As for the condition, I may well agree to it, for the chances arc that I will have no inducement to break it.”

“Then, Major, listen.”

Waving Plume turned away, and closed his ears, lest any stray sound might enter and disclose the secret which was to be divulged to the Major alone. Jake, on the contrary, had both ears open to their widest extent; bound, if possible, to take in all the salient points of the revelation. If he expected to hear anything, he was doomed to disappointment, for the low whisper in which Rutter spoke, precluded all but his intended listener from learning anything of the matter under discussion. For five or ten minutes Tom spoke rapidly in this low tone—then, once more raising his voice, he said: "That's all I hev to tell yer, an' now all that's left is to say good-bye. I expect to leave on a scout to the north in the mornin', an' don't much expect ever to see ye agin' I'm sorry for ye all; but I can't of right help ye."

For a moment the torch flared up with a brilliant glow, revealing the inside of the hut, the renegade, and the three prisoners; then the waving light expired, and with it the sight of prison, prisoners, and prison-keeper; while, in the darkness which ensued, Tom Rutter silently stole away.

CHAPTER X.

WAVING PLUME AT LIBERTY.

THE night wore on. The sighing winds crept slowly around the wigwam, or sorrowfully wailed up the streets of the Blackfoot village. The dim, ghostly circle around the moon deepened into blackness; dim clouds grew in size, looming forebodingly, and a chill, damp feeling filled the air. Without the wigwam, which served as a prison for Major Robison and his friends, three dusky warrior sentinels stalked, their arms well secured under the folds of their close-wrapped blankets. Silence came, like cotton-down, upon the surrounding village, and all was quiet.

From within came no sound indicative of aught of life;

but by the light of the low-burned, smouldering brand, three persons held a whispered conversation. It was Waving Plume who first, after the disappearance of the renegade, spoke out, and asked his companions to make at least one more desperate attempt to escape. It was Waving Plume who first spoke of what all three had before been thinking.

"Time hurries on, Major, and the hour of midnight must be well past. To remain here is certain death, and that, too, without having the consolation of knowing that thereby we are in the least benefiting your daughter. Darkness without appears to be thick, and guards slacking in their vigilance—what say you then to a desperate try for life and liberty?"

"No need to ask me that question, Archer. I have that to nerve me for the struggle which may come; and much of all one loves, hangs trembling in the balance. Here are we, with unbound hands, our lives, and the lives of our friends at stake; the chance of success—to one of us, at least—tolerable. Why, then, should we delay?"

"Right, by mighty, Major. Why shouldn't we start right off. Ef I only hed my shootin'-iron and butcher yet, I'd feel good fur the hull cussed village myself. Here's for a drift through the crowd, a fight in the dark, and a good hard lick fur freedom."

"Time lost in debating will not be regained. Everything looks favorable for our plans. If I mistake not, it was but a friendly turn of Tom Rutter that allowed me to be ushered in here with my hands free—he knowing that I would not long hesitate to unloose your cords. Let us hasten to leave."

The step of the sentinels without had ceased. A low murmur of conversation came in from the corner opposite to the door. The men without had seen Jake Parsons and young Archer most thoroughly bound, and they had not the slightest suspicion but what Major Robison was in the same predicament. A thought of bad faith from Tom

Rutter never crossed their minds. With such subjects as might beguile their savage minds, they kept up their conversation, leaving the tight binding withes which had entwined the wrists of their captives, and the chance of fortune to take care of the prisoners. Thus, in silence, and with lips somewhat quivering, and hearts almost silenced in their beating, the three stole out, all unarmed, save the heavy hunting-knife which Waving Plume carried in his bosom.

Robison and Parsons crept along side by side; but Charles Archer followed some half a dozen paces in the rear, covering the retreat, and occupying, as he thought, the post of danger.

A couple of minutes elapsed—some twenty or thirty rods had been cautiously covered by the fugitives—they had crossed the open circle which surrounded the prison wigwam and the council chamber of the village, and were just entering upon the most difficult part of the enterprise. To steal through the numberless lodges which lay scattered around—each lodge containing half a dozen light-sleeping, vigilant, blood-thirsty foes—was, by itself, no light undertaking. But they were too well versed in savage life not to have already thought of another and still greater danger. Even though the sentinels at the deserted wigwam did not discover their escape, or some sleepless watcher catch the faint echo of their tread, that inevitable concomitant of every aboriginal village, the dogs, would be almost certain to scent them as they passed. But with careful foot and swelling heart they pressed on through the darkness over the *terra incognita* which lay before them.

A faint sound of pattering feet, following close behind, saluted the ear of Waving Plume, so that, with knife drawn, and in a crouching position, he awaited the nearer approach of the object. It proved to be something which is but rarely met with—a really courageous Indian dog. With only a single bark, with only a low, deep growl, he sprang straight at the neck of Archer.

He, however, on his guard, threw up his left arm to ward off the attack, at the same time striking a powerful blow at the side of the animal. It proved a fatal one, for, with a sound, the mere repetition of his warning growl, he fell lifeless to the ground; while our hero, withdrawing his steel, turned to follow in the track of his still advancing friends. They, not perceiving that he had stopped, silently continued their journey, leaving their rear-guard to stand with his reeking knife firmly clasped in his hand, perplexedly listening in the endeavor to guess the direction taken by his companions.

Evil and good are inscrutably connected in this life. What at first sight seemed to be an unmitigated evil, turned out to be a positive blessing. The conflict with the dog, short as it was, proved to be the salvation of the man. Up through the dark, some distance ahead, rose a thrilling, heart-piercing yell, followed by other yells and shouts, and something that sounded very much like most hearty curses, flung out with right free will from the mouth of the stout-limbed, free-thinking trapper, Jake Parsons, Esq.

Thoughts crowded thick and fast through the mind of the lone white man, who listened to the shouting, struggling *mêlée* ahead. What was the real duty of true manhood? Was it to rush forward, and with his good hunting-knife attempt to carve their way through all opposition? Madness! As but a straw would be the help of his feeble arm. Yell after yell in quick succession, from every direction, quivered through the murky darkness. A dozen Blackfeet were upon and around the Major and his staunch ally, while a score more were rushing to the scene of action. Coming toward him, he heard the quick patter of rushing footsteps; from the open door of the Council-house a broad glare of light flashed out—sounds of hurrying, and noise of war-whoops—these, to his ears, seemed to chaunt the death-note of his freedom. What should he do—whither should he turn?

The village was long and narrow; the three had been traversing the street lengthways; the lodges lay close together. Scarce daring to hope, knowing that to go forward or to turn back alike would precipitate him into the arms of his foes, he threw himself upon the ground, and silently crawled to the side of the nearest hut, barely reaching its friendly shade as from the uplifted door-mat bright streaks of light shot forth. The war-whoop of the issuing warrior sounded painfully near, and cold chills curdled the blood of Waving Plume, but a whirlwind of noise swept by, and still he was undiscovered. Torches gleamed along the street, but yet he lay *perdu*.

The unequal conflict could not last long. Twenty stout men precipitated upon two, and they unarmed, must necessarily overwhelm them. The Major ceased his struggles, and the curses of Parsons were hushed. So, as the torches flamed away in the darkness, and heavy-browed, red-faced men sought for the third captive, Waving Plume went crawling off at right angles to his former course.

Words paint actions. Actions are instantancous, as it were, but the artist's work is a labor of time. All this passed suddenly, with a glitter and glare of immediateness which almost blinded: we take our time to tell it.

In five minutes Archer had extricated himself from the village, had traversed a distance of a hundred yards due west, and had then, with a Westerner's instincts, turned and struck a course almost due south. To the south were friends—to the south, help, freedom. But, if to the south lay safety, so to the south lay danger. Outlying pickets, returning bands of warriors, a tangled path—these, and darkness were before him. But death howled behind him; and forward, forward through the night he pressed.

Though much must necessarily be left to chance, yet Waving Plume did not forget to turn over in his mind's eye all the different phases of his position, and therefrom draw a few gleams of hope. These facts were patent:

That on the trail of the Indians, though more or less distant, there were two parties—the white trappers who had fought for the rescue of Adele at the crossing of the Marias River; and a war-party of the Crows, under the guidance of the half-breed Antonio. Though to trust to the word of a half-breed in most cases would be madness, yet in this, and *this* man in particular, he thought it might be done. How closely these two parties might be able to follow the trail; whether their hearts would bear them up and urge them on to the commission of so rash an undertaking as a dash into the very towns of the Blackfeet; how far distant they might be—these were the main points that agitated the mind of Charles Archer. Perhaps he was rather egotistical in his confidence, yet he felt well assured that, could he but once get the start of his foes, then would he, trusting to his educated instincts and good fortune, most certainly fall in with one or the other of these two bands. What he wanted now was a horse and arms. With his own favorite animal under him, his rifle by his side, daylight from behind the hills might leap up, and swarms of pursuers ride hard behind, yet unscathed could he rest his limbs that night in a friendly tent; or, perhaps, turn and give battle for Adele.

Adele! Now that once again he was, in a measure, free, his thoughts flew back to her, and dreams of rescue floated through his brain. Adele, the golden-haired and blue-eyed—Adele, the beautiful! She was behind him—he was leaving her at every step, yet the thought urged him madly on; for he would return again.

Hastening on, his teeth firm set, his eyes straining to pierce the darkness, his hand tightly clenching his hunting-knife—there came suddenly to his ears the sound of a rapidly approaching horseman. Not far distant was he either, and though the danger of halting was almost commensurate with that of proceeding, still he thought it best to halt, and, if possible, escape the notice of the coming foe

—for not one moment could he suppose that any but a foe might ride so recklessly in such close proximity to the Indian town.

Halting, then, he threw himself at full length upon the ground, hoping that good fortune and the darkness of the night might once again befriend him. At three yards distance he was invisible; it would be a keen-scented man indeed who might detect his presence.

The steed came nearer, the soft ground and tangled prairie grass, deadening, though not destroying the sounds heralding his approach. So directly did he appear to be approaching him, that suddenly an unthought of idea gained footing in the mind of the lone white man; a new and strong hope springing up in his breast. It would be a desperate deed; one on which much was staked, yet if executed in the spirit in which it was conceived, it might, indeed, be most successful.

Drawing his limbs warily up under him, every nerve strung to its tightest tension, his sole weapon, his knife, more firmly held than ever, half crouching, half kneeling, facing bravely southward, his eyes piercing the gloom till they could just see a dim shadow, Waving Plume waited for the moment to arrive, when he should cast the probably fatal die.

Onward, and still onward the red-man swept. He was a scout who brought up the rear, a brave, bold warrior, one of the first in the tribe; and he bore great tidings. He knew of the pursuing Crows, and he had at sunset counted the forms of the hardy trappers, who doggedly held on their way along the concealed trail. His horse was light and swift, his arms, not only the bow and scalping-knife, but also the deadly rifle, slung on his shoulder; in form and muscle he was no child to encounter with.

Suddenly, from the very ground at his feet, arose a form, shadowy and spectral, reaching one arm toward the head of his steed, the other brandished back. Startled, his self-

possession most sternly attacked, almost stunned by this ghostly apparition, his hand bore hard on the leathern thong of his bridle, and a twitch of the wrist sought to turn the horse to one side. But, though the nerves of the rider were steel, not so with the animal he bestrode; and, though coming to a halt so suddenly as to be thrown upon its haunches, farther than that he refused to do. So, as the hand of the warrior sought for the ready tomahawk, the phantom form gave a bound forward; the next moment, with a sweeping, hissing sound, the knife of Archer went hilt-home to the heart of the red-man.

Only an arm of iron could have controlled the wild boundings of the frightened horse, as the rider fell from him; but Waving Plume, cool and self-possessed, clung to him, and, with gentle words and firm hand, at length somewhat quieted him. The rifle of the dead brave was an unexpected treasure, and it, with corresponding ammunition, was speedily transferred to the keeping of the white man. Possessed, then, of steed and fire-arm, with foes behind and friends before, careless—reckless—of pursuers and pickets, straightforward through the gloom dashed the escaped prisoner. Somewhat tired was the steed, but the clouds rifted, the wailing winds sighed more softly, the moon again beamed out bright; and as hours sped on, and were thrown backward by the flying hoofs, the bright auroras tinged the eastern clouds, and John Howell, from his look-out by the foot of a thickly wooded hill, keeping sharp guard while his companions slept, caught a glimpse of a strange figure, mounted on a foam-flecked and weary steed, bearing down full and hard upon him. So too, with Antonio, the half-breed, who, with the Crows following in his footsteps, had pushed on, and had, on the previous day, overtaken the trappers. He and Howell, together watching, descried the unknown figure, and, at first, were somewhat ruffled in their minds, but at length, with a joyous clap of the hand upon his thigh, Howell shouted: "Waving Plume, by mighty!"

CHAPTER XI.

ATTACK ON THE BLACKFOOT VILLAGE—RESCUE OF THE PRISONERS.

SOMEWHAT cleared was the weather, and morning dawned with a great red flame in the east, spreading broad and wide, and looking glorious enough; yet speaking somewhat illy for the chance of a clear day. The old trappers, weather-wise from oft repeated summer bronzing and winter freezing, studied the morning sky with anxious eyes, and at length, turned their heads eastward with ominous shakes, for, rain-hardened as they were, they did not at all fancy camping out through rain, fog, and chilly wind, with no fire or exercise to keep warm their numbing limbs. Yet, this was what they at first proposed.

Waving Plume, had, after a few minutes of rest, revealed to them the greater part of the renegade's conversation with the Major and himself, and then asked their opinion as to what had best be done. There followed, then, somewhat of a difference of opinion; some being for immediate action, some being for a night attack, while one or two others thought it would be best to approach to the very outskirts of the town, during that night, and then, when day had fairly dawned, to rush in. These being so much in the minority, with that stubbornness so common to mankind, held their opinions so stoutly, that they won over to their side, first one and then another of their opposers, until, of the white men, Waving Plume was the only man apparently unconvinced.

But to him, there arose some strange fear; and doubting whether his comrades were not making a mistake, he proposed that Antonio, who had hitherto held his peace with most masterly reticence, should give his views on the subject. The half-breed accordingly expressed his opinions at full length, and somewhat after this manner.

The white men were all right and all wrong. They might do as they choose; but he was afraid that if they

waited until the next day, they would never catch another glimpse of either Major Robison or their friend, the trapper, Jake Parsons; that, of course, Tom Rutter *might* have been telling the truth, but that it was doubtful, and his opinion was, that in case the afternoon should become clear—the clouds disappearing the rain ceasing, the sun shining out in any degree clearer and warmer—the Major and friend would probably go the way of all flesh, yielding up their mortal lives in obedience to the decision of the great council, being made a bonfire of for the especial gratification of the men, women, and children of the “Charred Stick” section of the Blackfoot tribe. In case, however, the rain began again, and kept descending at any great rate, they might then remain where they were, resting assured that the captives were safe for the time being.

Taking this view of the case, it appeared to be a delicate matter, indeed, for them to remain under cover during the day; for, were Robison and the trapper sacrificed, no matter what vengeance they might afterward take, the success of the expedition would be not complete. Though it *might* do for them to defer their attack until the next morning, still, with even a bare possibility of every thing amiss, was it safe, was it politic to do so?

Again. Though altogether they were a formidable band, yet, unless taking the Blackfeet by surprise, would they be able to overcome them? And could they lie *perdu* during the whole of the day, unseen by Indian scouts? Were not the chances of detection as imminent to them standing still, as to them moving? In close consultation, this seemed to be the opinion.

A glance at the situation of all parties, showing the position to be favorable to those advancing to the rescue, were the explanations of Antonio and several of the Crow scouts, who had, in time past, ventured to penetrate into this region. The distance to the village was some eight or ten miles, in a direct line; the village lay right under the

foot of the mountains, and could be approached under cover, from the south side, to within a few hundred rods. In case they could only get to the village unperceived, they might charge in upon the enemy unexpectedly, and by a suddenness of onslaught, joined by fierceness of attack, utterly route them. What remained for them, then, was to decide whether or no they could, in broad daylight, traverse these eight or nine miles without their approach being detected. Antonio thought they could. At least, he was for trying it, inasmuch as, should the night be clear, they would have then almost as much difficulty in progressing, perhaps, even more, for then the Blackfeet, half suspecting that some such effort might be made, would be doubly on the alert, with sentinels posted and ears half open, even in sleep, to catch any suspicious sound. In the daytime there was less danger. The Indians did not probably know of the strong force of Crows who were on the war-trail, and the half dozen trappers who had struggled so bravely at the Marias crossing, would not be likely to make any serious open demonstration, in the face of such overwhelming numbers. For this reason, vigilance would be relaxed. Then, if they had immediate and furious designs against the lives of the prisoners, that would fill their minds to a great extent, and keeping them from hunting or scouting expeditions, gathering them about the council-chamber and the great black stake in front of it, more than ever conduce to the success of a day attack. Some shook their heads thoughtfully, some considered long, yet, finally, all admitted the force of Antonio's argument, and as their hasty morning meal was eaten, and the sun well up, it appeared, if they intended to go on at all, that it was time to start.

With caution, skirting the hills, climbing over rocks and boulders, keeping well in the shade of the friendly cottonwood, for the most part following the course of a little stream of water, which, almost dry a week ago, was now nearly a river, in silence the little army advanced.

At length, Providence seemed to smile on their efforts. Several hours flitted by, and, though they were compelled, from the necessities of the case, to travel slowly, at least one third of the distance had been traversed. Not once, so far, had the shadow of danger lowered across their path; no sound of crushing footsteps, no noise of echoing voices, had fallen on their ear.

Once, indeed, the band stopped—the scouts upon the right flank have uttered a low warning hiss, and, almost instantly, men and horses had crouched low to the ground. It was no immediate danger though—only two mounted men, as many miles away, scouting southward upon the trail of Waving Plume. At sight of this, the face of Antonio became suddenly grave; here was a something he had forgotten. Though the trail of the Crows had been concealed as carefully as possible, and there was but little danger of their last night's camping-ground being otherwise, except by accident, lit upon, yet here was the trail of Waving Plume, a plain finger-board to lead them to it! An hour or so would pass, these two men would act vigilantly, but quickly, they would reach the deserted spot, they would reconnoiter, and then, at racing speed gallop home, alarming the village before they, in their slow and cautious march, could reach it.

Something must evidently be done to avert this catastrophe; and accordingly he singled out four of his best men, and hastily gave them their directions. Two were to hasten back to the place of their last night's rest, with all the speed they could command, and endeavor, while the Blackfeet might be approaching them on the traces of Archer, to pick them off. The other two were to remain where they were until the scouts might have either passed out of sight, or at least reached such distance, as that they would be unable, at that distance, and under unsuspecting circumstances, to recognize as Crows the men in the rear of them. Should, then, the enemy escape the ambush, they

were to try and bring them down, even risking their lives in a close and hand-to-hand encounter. These dispositions being made, and a little wished-for rest having been gained by the halt, they again pressed onward, more cautiously than ever, keeping under cover.

At length, to the advanced guard, Antonio, Biting Fox and a Crow brave, the wished-for spot came into sight. Then, under the hill-side almost, with its bark-roofed wigwams, brown and sultry under the summer sun, with its inhabitants glorying in the approaching sacrifice, and all unconscious of any interruption, the village of the "Charred Stick" shone up as a welcome mark to the approaching party.

When the main body came up, it was halted, while the three went forward to thoroughly reconnoiter the woods. Nothing suspicious appeared for a time. When, at length, they had almost arrived at that spot from which they designed to debouch in their coming assault, they found marks of recently-present men. Among the green trees and underbrush were bare spots, and the old trapper shuddered while the half-breed gave him a significant glance—preparations had been made for the sacrifice. A strong party had been there that morning, gathering wood, and it took no prophet to tell what *that* was for.

Silence reigned here now; the woods were empty; evidently all the supplies needed had been obtained, and it was little likely that an invading footstep from the village would then be met with during the remainder of the day. Two of them remained to watch, while the third, the Crow brave, was sent back to state what had been seen, and to bring up the rest.

This duty of his was hastily performed, and in an hour, silently, and with hearts perhaps a little wildly beating, near half a hundred stern, grim men, were but a rifle-shot's distance from the village, waiting but the signal for attack.

Once more Antonio offered to attempt an unseen approach

to the enemy, to find out their position and employment; and though now the endeavor was one of more difficulty than when he undertook it under cover of darkness, at the camp of the hollow log, yet, with the same fierce self-reliance he proceeded on his way.

The inequalities of the ground and the advantages of occasional bushes and trees, served a good purpose for the time, and he safely arrived almost within earshot of the town. Pausing at the top of a little knoll, he peered through, as well as was sheltered by a thorn bush.

Through an opening in the wigwams, he caught sight of the clear space in front of the council-chamber. He saw, too, a crowd there—the old and young, men, women, and children loudly shouting, while from their prison-house were led the two white men—Major Robison and Parsons.

Instantly all doubts were, in his mind, resolved; the time for the sacrifice had arrived, and prompt and decisive action was necessary. With some caution, to be sure, yet in haste, and more than once exposing himself to sight, had there been any prying eyes peering from the village, in the direction of the mountain, Antonio sought the presence of the trapper and his braves. They, anxiously watching, with beating hearts awaited his reappearance.

When he was once more in their midst, it did not take long for him to explain the commotion in the village, or to give them a full understanding of its cause.

“To horse!” whisperingly shouted Waving Plume. “To horse, and forward! No time to lose now in idle calculation. We have already weighed the cost of this our undertaking. There is no one here, I take it, who could hang behind; so forward.”

Through the bushes, and out upon the plain, filed the half hundred strong army. Fierce yells and savage songs of exultation spurred on their footsteps, though they proceeded cautiously enough. The wigwams between them and the council square concealed them from view. Scarce

a hundred yards off strong arms sought their weapons, brave hearts made their resolves, a low voice shouted "forward!" and, like an arrow of death, the whole body swept on into the narrow street.

Far off upon the plain a faint rifle-crack echoed; it was the death-note of the Blackfoot scouts, sounded by the arms of the men whom Antonio had left behind to watch. A light puff of smoke went up from the centre of the lodges. A stalwart Indian was applying the torch to the funeral pyre of the two captives. Another long-drawn yell went quivering up from the throats of the assemblage, and then—how the answering note went fiercely humming up, and how the blood went surging back into suddenly terror-stricken breasts, and how the cry of triumph changed to the wail of terror! The surprise was complete; Waving Plume and his followers came fiercely charging home upon them.

A thunder-clap, coming from a clear sky, breaks not more astonishingly upon the ear than to the wholly-occupied Blackfeet came the wild war-whoop of the Crows, and the eager shouts of the white trappers. But time to recover, or even time for astonishment to reach its highest pitch, was not granted to them. In a moment the air was black with hurtling arrows and blue, curling, sulphurous smoke. A blast of death, sudden, blinding, and fatal, swept over the doomed Indians.

"Press them home—forward—no halting," was the cry, and no breathing spell was given, for, following the discharge of missiles came crashing blows with the war-club, and quick home-strokes with the tomahawk or knife. Defenceless heads were cloven, unarmed braves stricken down in their tracks—even flight from such a sudden and fiery onset, was, for the moment, unthought of. A score of corpses strewed the ground; as many wounded men poured out their life's blood; a score fled.

Though in the attack the Crows under Antonio confined their attention exclusively to the extermination of their foes,

the whites, after the first fire, were content to bend their energies more to the effecting of that for which the expedition, by them at least, was more particularly undertaken—the rescue of the three prisoners. While Antonio and his men swept on past the stake without heeding what was there transpiring, Waving Plume and his friends there halted.

And it was well they did so. A gigantic Indian, the master of the ceremonies—a great brave, and, as one might say, the chief executioner of that section of the tribe—stood, with hatchet upraised, just as Charles Archer rushed to the rescue. To send a pistol-ball humming through his brain was the work of but an instant; then, as the great corpse settled, with a noiseless quiver, to the ground, half a dozen hands dashed aside the already burning faggots, and cut the tight-binding cords which encircled the limbs of the captives.

Parsons gave a great whoop as he felt the blood once more freely circling through his veins, and the prospect of sudden and horrible death no longer so unwinkingly staring him in the face; but the Major grasped his son's hand in silence, then turned with anxious eye toward a group of women and children ranged in front of the council-house.

“Adele,” said he, stretching out his hand; “is she there?”

But Waving Plume's quick eye had already pierced to where Adele, pale and thoughtful, sat between two squaws, and, followed by Ned Hawkins and Howell, was, in a moment, by her side. She, throwing herself forward, stood leaning with her arms resting upon the pommel of his saddle; the next minute the strong arms of Archer had lifted her into the place in front of him; a moment more, and she was in the arms of her father.

There was much of cruelty in it, surely—a daughter thus being brought out to witness the death of her father—but, as one who was to be adopted into the tribe, as one whom they would endeavor to transform into an Indian, there was also tact in it. It might have a benumbing effect, to be

sure, but also a searing and a hardening one. After such a sight, what would the ordinary scenes of Indian life, red and bloody though they might be, amount to? Thus, placed in the circle allotted to the women and children, she saw her father led forth, saw the blue smoke commence to eurl around him, and saw, too—glorious sight—the charging on of the party coming to the rescue. Mist and dream-like it appeared, yet there was the reality of a truthful, a very truthful, dream about it; as, at last united to him, she lay sobbing on her parent's breast, with one hand clasping that of her brother Hugh.

Some resistance had been met with; here and there, dropped from his horse like a worm-eaten apple, flung by the shaking wind from the parent tree, could be seen the corpse of a Crow; but the attack was too sudden, vigorous, and vindictive to be withstood, even though the superiority of numbers was, at first, in favour of the surprised rather than the surprisers. Antonio, on his great, black steed, careered around, a very fiend of death, and the victorious war-whoop rang loud and fierce. To the trappers, now that their mission had been accomplished, but little remained to do. The present state of affairs gave little promise of any severe fighting, and, with no distinct desire for revenge burning in their bosoms, they neither wished to engage in nor to behold an indiscriminate slaughter, or the more disgusting operation of scalping the dead.

As we have already stated, some of the Crows had fallen—their horses were now riderless and unclaimed. It did not take the trappers long to catch two of them, and the party moved slowly out of, and away from the village, Jake Parsons being the only one to look back at it with something like a feeling of regret, as though he would have liked to have "raised har," and taken part in the scrimmage which had occurred.

Riding slowly, now and then looking back, waiting on the coming of their Indian allies, the afternoon wore on.

“Ef you think them ar Crows ’ll be long afore to-morrer, yer most assuredly mistook ’em,” remarked Parsons. “They’ll camp thar, in among them wigwams, sure as thunder. Them Crows hain’t an artum o’ prudence in ther constitootion, an’ is jist fool’s enough to lay around till some o’ the runaways picks up a crowd large enough to wipe ’em out. Ef yer would take *my* advice, there’d be a straightcoat-tail made out o’ these diggins, without waitin’ on anybody.”

“There is a good deal of sense in what you say, Parsons, and I think we will at least partly act upon it,” responded Robison. “We will gain a fair offing, and camp for the night at least half a dozen miles from the neighbourhood.”

Nel Hawkins now mentioned the place where they had spent the previous night, and it was agreed upon to proceed to that spot, and there, for a while, remain. Meanwhile, conversation in the little party was brisk. All had something to say, and tongues ran fast, though none ran faster than that of the hero of our story, Waving Plume. What all in a low tone he repeated to Adele, we do not intend here to rehearse; but that it was something interesting, from the way smiles and blushes chased each other over her face, we do not doubt.

As the billows of darkness surged up from the eastern shore, rolling down upon and over the few shining sands of the western coast of day, all were dismounted, and occupying the camping-place of the preceding night. Scarce, however, had he finished his share of the hasty meal, when Parsons remounted his newly-acquired horse, and turned his footsteps in the direction of the village. Not that he was anxious for plunder, but it occurred to him that, through the agency of the Blackfeet, he was minus a horse, rifle, and other necessary equipments, which he might regain by turning back.

The next morning he came dashing into camp on a fine-looking mustang, his title to which no one but a Blackfoot could dispute; while from his shoulder was again slung the

old rifle which had done him long and good service. A few miles behind came a black line of forms, which all knew to be the Crows, while in the distance rose black smoke and forked tongues of red flame, the last of the Charred Stick village.

"Cussed imprudent that," muttered Ned Hawkins. "What the deuce does the red critters mean? That's a beacon light as will bring all the Injuns within a hundred mile o' here right down to inquire what it's all about, and I rayther guess thar's nigh onto enough to wipe out the hull on us, and not have a grease spot left, ef they once had the show of a fair chance. Nothin' left us but a clean run out o' the inemy's country."

"And that is, I suppose, what Antonio expects us to make," responded Hugh, who had heard the remark. "He is not the sort of a man to lead a foray of this kind, without leaving behind some plain traces of his progress. Parsons seems to be little inclined to say much of what was going on at the village, and we may infer from that that it has gone hard with whoever was found there."

"Purty condemned hard. The hull town is jist pulled up, root an' branch. Not a durned copper-skin left; skulps is thicker than huckleberries. Things went wild."

The sun was well up by the time Antonio and his men arrived opposite to the camp, and, for a few minutes, halted. A short conversation was held, and some few matters pertaining to the march were settled; then, in affable humor, and with light hearts, they struck the back trail.

All danger was not as yet obliterated. Some few of the foe, whom the chances of war had spared, rallied, and hung close on the heels of the retiring invaders. Arrows, fired by invisible arms, bullets, aimed by unseen hands, would now and then hurtle along their path. Only one man, and he an Indian, was struck, but the wound did not even disqualify him for travelling. To be sure it was unpleasant to hear those missiles of death, urged from no unwilling

hand, whistle in close proximity ; but the Yellowstone River was reached, and Bill Stevens, now almost recovered from his wound, rejoined them, and still no breach was made in their numbers. Here, too, the pursuit seemed to cease.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REALIZATION OF THE DREAM.

WE have followed Major Robison and his daughter through some of the stormy scenes in their history, and now are fast approaching the completion of our work.

Though the story told to him by the renegade, on the night when he was urging escape, had much of probability in it, yet, from having had his hopes so often dashed, he feared to place too much confidence in it, or to allow too high expectations to be raised in his breast. For all that, he felt a lingering belief that now, perhaps, his wishes would be realized, and a stern determination to test, to the fullest extent, the truth of the revelation. As under the circumstances—the late battles with the Blackfeet, and the troubles and terrors she had undergone—he did not think it advisable to take with him his daughter, or, indeed, to leave her immediately, he determined leaving the region of the Crows, where he was hospitably entertained, to proceed to the nearest fort, and leave her, with her brother, under its protecting guns. Then, with Waving Plume and Stevens, and the rest of the trappers, he would journey in search of the since much quoted Pike's Peak.

A journey of a week and they were safely at the fort; a stay of another week, and then Robison and Archer were travelling back to the hunting-ground of the Crows, there to meet with the remainder of the formidable little band of *voyageurs*, who were to accompany them on their exploring tour.

Days and weeks passed before Adele and her brother, in

safe keeping at the fort, heard from the wanderers. Then, alone, with his arm in a sling, and a deep arrow wound in his back, came Howell. He brought good intelligence, though. The rest of the party were safe, and in good spirits—more, they were successful. They had had one hard skirmish with the Indians, and had suffered not one of the attacking party to escape, even though it had required Parsons and Areher to follow the trail of two of them for nearly a week. They had discovered that for which the Major had been so long searching—gold. Not gold by the shovelful, to be sure, but gold in large quantities, thick and plenty. Robison, Areher, and the trappers were made men.

Having brought this pleasing intelligence, and having remained a week or so to recruit from the effects of his wounds and the fatigues of a long journey, Howell mounted his horse, slung on his rifle, looked well to his canteen and provision bag, and turned westward again, leaving Hugh and his sister to watch and hope. It happened, by good luck, that the Lieutenant who commanded the fort was a married man; more fortunately still, his wife resided with him. Thus Adele found an agreeable companion of her own sex, rendering her stay not only supportable, but even pleasant. As for Hugh, he went hunting, he rode, he fished, he even took a week's journey toward the east; the time rested easy on his hands.

Summer faded away, autumn came, and November's winds were fiercely humming over the plain, when the next intelligence of the absentees was received. One evening, as the sun was dropping behind the far-off mountains, a single horseman was seen approaching, along the westerly trail, to the fort. Hugh and Adele, by chance looking out, saw him coming, and both, at the same time, recognized him. A few moments later and he was clasping their hands, responding to their eager inquiries concerning the remainder of the party.

Successful beyond their highest anticipations, they might be expected on the following day. Then came an account

of toils endured and dangers passed, which thrilled the heart of Adele, and sent a pang of regret into the breast of Hugh. To have been dallying at the fort all those long months, when his father had been enduring hunger, labor, and daily danger, was most irksome to think of. So the evening wore on, and all retired with bright anticipations for the morrow.

The morrow came, and with it Major Robison and his hardy, sunbrowned, toilworn band of *attachés*. He had found the secret, and was, even now, a comparatively rich man.

The connection between Robison and Waving Plume had been essentially a financial one. Robison, at one time wealthy, had been involved in ruinous losses by a financial crisis, being left, not only broken in fortune, but heavily in debt. Impelled by various reasons, he sought the western confines of civilization, bringing with him his children, and a few thousands which, being settled on them, he did not feel himself called upon to deliver up to his creditors. Engaging in the fur trade to some extent, having intercourse with trappers, hunters, *voyageurs* and Indians, he heard much of wandering life and wandering manners. From an old trapper, who, in a not over sober moment, became loquacious, he gathered a few points which determined him to drop his business and search for gold. This was, perhaps, as much on account of his health as any thing else—his spirits, and consequently his constitution, being much broken by the tempestuous life-storms through which he had lately passed. Starting out with Ned Hawkins and another, a man well versed in all western mysteries, he had roamed far and wide, hunting and trapping, yet all the time prosecuting his search and his inquiries. Encountering danger and difficulties, and, at the same time, seeing an opportunity of deriving profit thereby, he determined to gather around him a band of experienced men, who might, while pursuing their avocation, prove also a safeguard to him. Returning to the

region of the trading-posts, he there found Charles Archer, a young man of twenty-one or two, with plenty of means, a go-ahead disposition, and who had sought the great west for the sake of life and adventure. Unfolding to him his plans and hopes, the Major had induced him to enter into the formation of a small, but carefully selected company, and to penetrate into the regions lying along the Rocky Mountains. It was this company whom the reader has found introduced in these pages, and for the past three years they had clung well together, traversing all the region thereabouts, and even scouring the Oregon territory, and the streams that flow into the Columbia. These three years of life had made Archer a perfect adventurer, while they had endeared him to all with whom he had come in contact.

One evening Adele Robison and Archer stood together looking through the dim twilight, out over the far-stretching plains. There was a smile on her face, both bright and joyous, for Waving Plume held her hand in his, and whispered into her ear both low and softly.

"Yes, Adele, I have seen much of the ruder elements of life; I have drained the cup of danger, and lived in an atmosphere of hardship; but shall I not have my reward?"

What more he said we know not, but when her answer came, he printed a kiss upon her ripe, red lips, and then, with his arm twined around her waist, the two stood in the fast-fading twilight of the deep embrasure, whispering of hope and love, and bright days to come.

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