

The Prairie

J Fenimore Cooper

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THE PRAIRIE

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BY J Fenimore Cooper

THE PRAIRIE

BY

J FENIMORE COOPER

INTRODUCTION

"The Prairie" was the third in order of Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. Its first appearance was in the year 1827. The idea of the story had suggested itself to him, we are told, before he had finished its immediate forerunner, "The Last of the Mohicans." He chose entirely new scenes for it, "resolved to cross the Mississippi and wander over the desolate wastes of the remote Western prairies." He had been taking every chance that came of making a personal acquaintance with the Indian chiefs of the western tribes who were to be encountered about this period on their way in the frequent Indian embassies to Washington. "He saw much to command his admiration," says Mrs. Cooper, "in these wild braves . . . It was a matter of course that in drawing Indian character he should dwell on the better traits of the picture, rather than on the coarser and more revolting though more common points. Like West, he could see the Apollo in the young Mohawk."

When in July, 1826, Cooper landed in England with his wife and family, he carried his Indian memories and associations with him. They crossed to France, and ascended the Seine by steamboat, and then settled for a time in Paris. Of their quarters there in the Rue St. Maur, Sarah Fenimore Cooper writes:

"It was thoroughly French in character. There was a short, narrow, gloomy lane or street, shut in between lofty dwelling houses, the lane often dark, always filthy, without sidewalks, a gutter running through the centre, over which, suspended from a rope, hung a dim oil lamp or two--such was the Rue St. Maur, in the Faubourg St. Germain. It was a gloomy approach certainly. But a tall porte cochere opened, and suddenly the whole scene changed. Within those high walls, so forbidding in aspect, there lay charming gardens, gay with parterres of flowers, and shaded by noble trees, not only those belonging to the house itself, but those of other adjoining dwellings of the same character--one looked over park-like grounds covering some acres. The hotel itself, standing on the street, was old, and built on a grand scale; it had been the home of a French ducal family in the time of Louis XIV. The rooms on the two lower floors were imposing and spacious; with ceilings of great height, gilded wainscoting and various quaint little medallion pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, and other fancies of the time of Madame de Sevigne. Those little shepherds were supposed to have looked down upon /la mere beaute/, and upon /la plus jolie fille de France/ as she danced her incomparable minuets. Those grand saloons were now devoted to the humble service of a school for young ladies. But on the third floor, to which one ascended by a fine stone stairway, broad and easy, with elaborate iron railings, there was a more simple set of rooms,

comfortably furnished, where the American family were pleasantly provided for, in a home of their own. Unwilling to separate from his children, who were placed at the school, the traveller adopted this plan that he might be near them. One of the rooms, overlooking the garden, and opening on a small terrace, became his study. He was soon at work. In his writing-desk lay some chapters of a new novel. The MS. had crossed the ocean with him, though but little had been added to its pages during the wanderings of the English and French journeys."

When, some months later, the story appeared, its effect was immediate on both sides the Atlantic. It is worth note that during his French visit Cooper met Sir Walter Scott. Cooper was born at Burlington, New Jersey, 15th Sept., 1789, and died at Cooperstown, New York (which took its name from his father), 14th Sept., 1851.

The following is his literary record:

Precaution, 1820; The Spy, 1821; The Pioneers, 1823; The Pilot, 1823; Lionel Lincoln, or the Leaguer of Boston, 1825; The Last of the Mohicans, 1826; The Prairie, 1827; The Red Rover, 1828; Notions of the Americans, 1828; The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, 1829; The Water-witch, 1830; The Bravo, 1831; The Heidenmauer, or the Benedictines, 1832; The Headsman, 1833; A Letter to his Countrymen, 1834; The Monikins, 1835; Sketches of Switzerland, 1836; Gleanings in Europe: 1837; (England) 1837; (Italy) 1838; The American Democrat, 1838; Homeward Bound, 1838; The Chronicles of Cooperstown, 1838; Home as Found (Eve Effingham), 1839; History of the U. S. Navy, 1839; The Pathfinder, or the Inland Sea, 1840; Mercedes of Castile, 1841; The Deerslayer, or the First Warpath, 1841; The Two Admirals, 1842; The Wing-and-Wing (Jack o Lantern), 1842; The Battle of Lake Erie, or Answers to Messrs. Burges, Duer and Mackenzie, 1843; The French Governess; or, The Embroidered Handkerchief, 1843; Richard Dale, 1843; Wyandotte, 1843; Ned Myers, or Life before the Mast, 1843; Afloat and Ashore (Miles Wallingford, Lucy Hardinge), two series, 1844; Proceedings of the Naval Court-Martial in the Case of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, etc., 1844; Santanstone, 1845; The Chainbearer, 1846; Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers, 1846; The Red Skins, 1846; The Crater (Marks Reef), 1847; Captain Spike, or the Islets of the Gulf, 1848; Jack Tier, or the Florida Reefs, 1848; The Oak Openings, or the Bee-Hunter, 1848; The Sea Lions, 1849; The Ways of the Hour, 1850.

Ernest Rhys 1907

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The geological formation of that portion of the American Union, which lies between the Alleghanies and the Rocky Mountains, has given rise to many ingenious theories. Virtually, the whole of this immense region is a plain. For a distance extending nearly 1500 miles east and west, and 600 north and south, there is scarcely an elevation worthy to be called a mountain. Even hills are not common; though a good deal of the face of the country has more or less of that "rolling" character, which is described in the opening pages of this work.

There is much reason to believe, that the territory which now composes Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and a large portion of the country

west of the Mississippi, lay formerly under water. The soil of all the former states has the appearance of an alluvial deposit; and isolated rocks have been found, of a nature and in situations which render it difficult to refute the opinion that they have been transferred to their present beds by floating ice. This theory assumes that the Great Lakes were the deep pools of one immense body of fresh water, which lay too low to be drained by the irruption that laid bare the land.

It will be remembered that the French, when masters of the Canadas and Louisiana, claimed the whole of the territory in question. Their hunters and advanced troops held the first communications with the savage occupants, and the earliest written accounts we possess of these vast regions, are from the pens of their missionaries. Many French words have, consequently, become of local use in this quarter of America, and not a few names given in that language have been perpetuated. When the adventurers, who first penetrated these wilds, met, in the centre of the forests, immense plains, covered with rich verdure or rank grasses, they naturally gave them the appellation of meadows. As the English succeeded the French, and found a peculiarity of nature, differing from all they had yet seen on the continent, already distinguished by a word that did not express any thing in their own language, they left these natural meadows in possession of their title of convention. In this manner has the word "Prairie" been adopted into the English tongue.

The American prairies are of two kinds. Those which lie east of the Mississippi are comparatively small, are exceedingly fertile, and are always surrounded by forests. They are susceptible of high cultivation, and are fast becoming settled. They abound in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. They labour under the disadvantages of a scarcity of wood and water,--evils of a serious character, until art has had time to supply the deficiencies of nature. As coal is said to abound in all that region, and wells are generally successful, the enterprise of the emigrants is gradually prevailing against these difficulties.

The second description of these natural meadows lies west of the Mississippi, at a distance of a few hundred miles from that river, and is called the Great Prairies. They resemble the steppes of Tartary more than any other known portion of Christendom; being, in fact, a vast country, incapable of sustaining a dense population, in the absence of the two great necessities already named. Rivers abound, it is true; but this region is nearly destitute of brooks and the smaller water courses, which tend so much to comfort and fertility.

The origin and date of the Great American Prairies form one of nature's most majestic mysteries. The general character of the United States, of the Canadas, and of Mexico, is that of luxuriant fertility. It would be difficult to find another portion of the world, of the same extent, which has so little useless land as the inhabited parts of the American Union. Most of the mountains are arable, and even the prairies, in this section of the republic, are of deep alluvion. The same is true between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific. Between the two lies the broad belt, of comparative desert, which is the scene of this tale, appearing to interpose a barrier to the progress of the American people westward.

The Great Prairies appear to be the final gathering place of the red men. The remnants of the Mohicans, and the Delawares, of the Creeks,

Choctaws, and Cherokees, are destined to fulfil their time on these vast plains. The entire number of the Indians, within the Union, is differently computed, at between one and three hundred thousand souls. Most of them inhabit the country west of the Mississippi. At the period of the tale, they dwelt in open hostility; national feuds passing from generation to generation. The power of the republic has done much to restore peace to these wild scenes, and it is now possible to travel in security, where civilised man did not dare to pass unprotected five-and-twenty years ago.

The reader, who has perused the two former works, of which this is the natural successor, will recognise an old acquaintance in the principal character of the story. We have here brought him to his end, and we trust he will be permitted to slumber in the peace of the just.

J F Cooper
Paris June 1832

THE PRAIRIE

CHAPTER I.

I pray thee, shepherd, if that love or gold,
Can in this desert place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed.
--As you like it.

Much was said and written, at the time, concerning the policy of adding the vast regions of Louisiana, to the already immense and but half-tenanted territories of the United States. As the warmth of controversy however subsided, and party considerations gave place to more liberal views, the wisdom of the measure began to be generally conceded. It soon became apparent to the meanest capacity, that, while nature had placed a barrier of desert to the extension of our population in the west, the measure had made us the masters of a belt of fertile country, which, in the revolutions of the day, might have become the property of a rival nation. It gave us the sole command of the great thoroughfare of the interior, and placed the countless tribes of savages, who lay along our borders, entirely within our control; it reconciled conflicting rights, and quieted national distrusts; it opened a thousand avenues to the inland trade, and to the waters of the Pacific; and, if ever time or necessity shall require a peaceful division of this vast empire, it assures us of a neighbour that will possess our language, our religion, our institutions, and it is also to be hoped, our sense of political justice.

Although the purchase was made in 1803, the spring of the succeeding year was permitted to open, before the official prudence of the Spaniard, who held the province for his European master, admitted the authority, or even of the entrance of its new proprietors. But the forms of the transfer were no sooner completed, and the new government acknowledged, than swarms of that restless people, which is ever found

hovering on the skirts of American society, plunged into the thickets that fringed the right bank of the Mississippi, with the same careless hardihood, as had already sustained so many of them in their toilsome progress from the Atlantic states, to the eastern shores of the "father of rivers."[*]

[*] The Mississippi is thus termed in several of the Indian languages. The reader will gain a more just idea of the importance of this stream, if he recalls to mind the fact, that the Missouri and the Mississippi are properly the same river. Their united lengths cannot be greatly short of four thousand miles.

Time was necessary to blend the numerous and affluent colonists of the lower province with their new compatriots; but the thinner and more humble population above, was almost immediately swallowed in the vortex which attended the tide of instant emigration. The inroad from the east was a new and sudden out-breaking of a people, who had endured a momentary restraint, after having been rendered nearly resistless by success. The toils and hazards of former undertakings were forgotten, as these endless and unexplored regions, with all their fancied as well as real advantages, were laid open to their enterprise. The consequences were such as might easily have been anticipated, from so tempting an offering, placed, as it was, before the eyes of a race long trained in adventure and nurtured in difficulties.

Thousands of the elders, of what were then called the New States[*], broke up from the enjoyment of their hard-earned indulgences, and were to be seen leading long files of descendants, born and reared in the forests of Ohio and Kentucky, deeper into the land, in quest of that which might be termed, without the aid of poetry, their natural and more congenial atmosphere. The distinguished and resolute forester who first penetrated the wilds of the latter state, was of the number. This adventurous and venerable patriarch was now seen making his last remove; placing the "endless river" between him and the multitude his own success had drawn around him, and seeking for the renewal of enjoyments which were rendered worthless in his eyes, when trammelled by the forms of human institutions.[+]

[*] All the states admitted to the American Union, since the revolution, are called New States, with the exception of Vermont: that had claims before the war; which were not, however, admitted until a later day.

[+] Colonel Boon, the patriarch of Kentucky. This venerable and hardy pioneer of civilisation emigrated to an estate three hundred miles west of the Mississippi, in his ninety-second year, because he found a population of ten to the square mile, inconveniently crowded!

In the pursuit of adventures such as these, men are ordinarily governed by their habits or deluded by their wishes. A few, led by the phantoms of hope, and ambitious of sudden affluence, sought the mines of the virgin territory; but by far the greater portion of the emigrants were satisfied to establish themselves along the margins of the larger water-courses, content with the rich returns that the generous, alluvial, bottoms of the rivers never fail to bestow on the most desultory industry. In this manner were communities formed with magical rapidity; and most of those who witnessed the purchase of the

empty empire, have lived to see already a populous and sovereign state, parcelled from its inhabitants, and received into the bosom of the national Union, on terms of political equality.

The incidents and scenes which are connected with this legend, occurred in the earliest periods of the enterprises which have led to so great and so speedy a result.

The harvest of the first year of our possession had long been passed, and the fading foliage of a few scattered trees was already beginning to exhibit the hues and tints of autumn, when a train of wagons issued from the bed of a dry rivulet, to pursue its course across the undulating surface, of what, in the language of the country of which we write, is called a "rolling prairie." The vehicles, loaded with household goods and implements of husbandry, the few straggling sheep and cattle that were herded in the rear, and the rugged appearance and careless mien of the sturdy men who loitered at the sides of the lingering teams, united to announce a band of emigrants seeking for the Eldorado of the West. Contrary to the usual practice of the men of their caste, this party had left the fertile bottoms of the low country, and had found its way, by means only known to such adventurers, across glen and torrent, over deep morasses and arid wastes, to a point far beyond the usual limits of civilised habitations. In their front were stretched those broad plains, which extend, with so little diversity of character, to the bases of the Rocky Mountains; and many long and dreary miles in their rear, foamed the swift and turbid waters of La Platte.

The appearance of such a train, in that bleak and solitary place, was rendered the more remarkable by the fact, that the surrounding country offered so little, that was tempting to the cupidity of speculation, and, if possible, still less that was flattering to the hopes of an ordinary settler of new lands.

The meagre herbage of the prairie, promised nothing, in favour of a hard and unyielding soil, over which the wheels of the vehicles rattled as lightly as if they travelled on a beaten road; neither wagons nor beasts making any deeper impression, than to mark that bruised and withered grass, which the cattle plucked, from time to time, and as often rejected, as food too sour, for even hunger to render palatable.

Whatever might be the final destination of these adventurers, or the secret causes of their apparent security in so remote and unprotected a situation, there was no visible sign of uneasiness, uncertainty, or alarm, among them. Including both sexes, and every age, the number of the party exceeded twenty.

At some little distance in front of the whole, marched the individual, who, by his position and air, appeared to be the leader of the band. He was a tall, sun-burnt, man, past the middle age, of a dull countenance and listless manner. His frame appeared loose and flexible; but it was vast, and in reality of prodigious power. It was, only at moments, however, as some slight impediment opposed itself to his loitering progress, that his person, which, in its ordinary gait seemed so lounging and nerveless, displayed any of those energies, which lay latent in his system, like the slumbering and unwieldy, but terrible, strength of the elephant. The inferior lineaments of his countenance were coarse, extended and vacant; while the superior, or

those nobler parts which are thought to affect the intellectual being, were low, receding and mean.

The dress of this individual was a mixture of the coarsest vestments of a husbandman with the leathern garments, that fashion as well as use, had in some degree rendered necessary to one engaged in his present pursuits. There was, however, a singular and wild display of prodigal and ill judged ornaments, blended with his motley attire. In place of the usual deer-skin belt, he wore around his body a tarnished silken sash of the most gaudy colours; the buck-horn haft of his knife was profusely decorated with plates of silver; the marten's fur of his cap was of a fineness and shadowing that a queen might covet; the buttons of his rude and soiled blanket-coat were of the glittering coinage of Mexico; the stock of his rifle was of beautiful mahogany, riveted and banded with the same precious metal, and the trinkets of no less than three worthless watches dangled from different parts of his person. In addition to the pack and the rifle which were slung at his back, together with the well filled, and carefully guarded pouch and horn, he had carelessly cast a keen and bright wood-axe across his shoulder, sustaining the weight of the whole with as much apparent ease, as if he moved, unfettered in limb, and free from incumbrance.

A short distance in the rear of this man, came a group of youths very similarly attired, and bearing sufficient resemblance to each other, and to their leader, to distinguish them as the children of one family. Though the youngest of their number could not much have passed the period, that, in the nicer judgment of the law, is called the age of discretion, he had proved himself so far worthy of his progenitors as to have reared already his aspiring person to the standard height of his race. There were one or two others, of different mould, whose descriptions must however be referred to the regular course of the narrative.

Of the females, there were but two who had arrived at womanhood; though several white-headed, olive-skinned faces were peering out of the foremost wagon of the train, with eyes of lively curiosity and characteristic animation. The elder of the two adults, was the sallow and wrinkled mother of most of the party, and the younger was a sprightly, active, girl, of eighteen, who in figure, dress, and mien, seemed to belong to a station in society several gradations above that of any one of her visible associates. The second vehicle was covered with a top of cloth so tightly drawn, as to conceal its contents, with the nicest care. The remaining wagons were loaded with such rude furniture and other personal effects, as might be supposed to belong to one, ready at any moment to change his abode, without reference to season or distance.

Perhaps there was little in this train, or in the appearance of its proprietors, that is not daily to be encountered on the highways of this changeable and moving country. But the solitary and peculiar scenery, in which it was so unexpectedly exhibited, gave to the party a marked character of wildness and adventure.

In the little valleys, which, in the regular formation of the land, occurred at every mile of their progress, the view was bounded, on two of the sides, by the gradual and low elevations, which gave name to the description of prairie we have mentioned; while on the others, the meagre prospect ran off in long, narrow, barren perspectives, but slightly relieved by a pitiful show of coarse, though somewhat

luxuriant vegetation. From the summits of the swells, the eye became fatigued with the sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape. The earth was not unlike the Ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to the view. Indeed so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt, that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other. Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching its naked branches abroad, like some solitary vessel; and, to strengthen the delusion, far in the distance, appeared two or three rounded thickets, looming in the misty horizon like islands resting on the waters. It is unnecessary to warn the practised reader, that the sameness of the surface, and the low stands of the spectators, exaggerated the distances; but, as swell appeared after swell, and island succeeded island, there was a disheartening assurance that long, and seemingly interminable, tracts of territory must be passed, before the wishes of the humblest agriculturist could be realised.

Still, the leader of the emigrants steadily pursued his way, with no other guide than the sun, turning his back resolutely on the abodes of civilisation, and plunging, at each step, more deeply if not irretrievably, into the haunts of the barbarous and savage occupants of the country. As the day drew nigher to a close, however, his mind, which was, perhaps, incapable of maturing any connected system of forethought, beyond that which related to the interests of the present moment, became, in some slight degree, troubled with the care of providing for the wants of the hours of darkness.

On reaching the crest of a swell that was a little higher than the usual elevations, he lingered a minute, and cast a half curious eye, on either hand, in quest of those well known signs, which might indicate a place, where the three grand requisites of water, fuel and fodder were to be obtained in conjunction.

It would seem that his search was fruitless; for after a few moments of indolent and listless examination, he suffered his huge frame to descend the gentle declivity, in the same sluggish manner that an overfatted beast would have yielded to the downward pressure.

His example was silently followed by those who succeeded him, though not until the young men had manifested much more of interest, if not of concern in the brief enquiry, which each, in his turn, made on gaining the same look-out. It was now evident, by the tardy movements both of beasts and men, that the time of necessary rest was not far distant. The matted grass of the lower land, presented obstacles which fatigue began to render formidable, and the whip was becoming necessary to urge the lingering teams to their labour. At this moment, when, with the exception of the principal individual, a general lassitude was getting the mastery of the travellers, and every eye was cast, by a sort of common impulse, wistfully forward, the whole party was brought to a halt, by a spectacle, as sudden as it was unexpected.

The sun had fallen below the crest of the nearest wave of the prairie, leaving the usual rich and glowing train on its track. In the centre of this flood of fiery light, a human form appeared, drawn against the

gilded background, as distinctly, and seemingly as palpable, as though it would come within the grasp of any extended hand. The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy, and the situation directly in the route of the travellers. But imbedded, as it was, in its setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character.

The effect of such a spectacle was instantaneous and powerful. The man in front of the emigrants came to a stand, and remained gazing at the mysterious object, with a dull interest, that soon quickened into superstitious awe. His sons, so soon as the first emotions of surprise had a little abated, drew slowly around him, and, as they who governed the teams gradually followed their example, the whole party was soon condensed in one, silent, and wondering group. Notwithstanding the impression of a supernatural agency was very general among the travellers, the ticking of gun-locks was heard, and one or two of the bolder youths cast their rifles forward, in readiness for service.

"Send the boys off to the right," exclaimed the resolute wife and mother, in a sharp, dissonant voice; "I warrant me, Asa, or Abner will give some account of the creature!"

"It may be well enough, to try the rifle," muttered a dull looking man, whose features, both in outline and expression, bore no small resemblance to the first speaker, and who loosened the stock of his piece and brought it dexterously to the front, while delivering this opinion; "the Pawnee Loups are said to be hunting by hundreds in the plains; if so, they'll never miss a single man from their tribe."

"Stay!" exclaimed a soft toned, but alarmed female voice, which was easily to be traced to the trembling lips of the younger of the two women; "we are not altogether; it may be a friend!"

"Who is scouting, now?" demanded the father, scanning, at the same time, the cluster of his stout sons, with a displeased and sullen eye. "Put by the piece, put by the piece;" he continued, diverting the other's aim, with the finger of a giant, and with the air of one it might be dangerous to deny. "My job is not yet ended; let us finish the little that remains, in peace."

The man, who had manifested so hostile an intention, appeared to understand the other's allusion, and suffered himself to be diverted from his object. The sons turned their inquiring looks on the girl, who had so eagerly spoken, to require an explanation; but, as if content with the respite she had obtained for the stranger, she sunk back, in her seat, and chose to affect a maidenly silence.

In the mean time, the hues of the heavens had often changed. In place of the brightness, which had dazzled the eye, a gray and more sober light had succeeded, and as the setting lost its brilliancy, the proportions of the fanciful form became less exaggerated, and finally distinct. Ashamed to hesitate, now that the truth was no longer doubtful, the leader of the party resumed his journey, using the precaution, as he ascended the slight acclivity, to release his own rifle from the strap, and to cast it into a situation more convenient for sudden use.

There was little apparent necessity, however, for such watchfulness. From the moment when it had thus unaccountably appeared, as it were,

between the heavens and the earth, the stranger's figure had neither moved nor given the smallest evidence of hostility. Had he harboured any such evil intention, the individual who now came plainly into view, seemed but little qualified to execute them.

A frame that had endured the hardships of more than eighty seasons, was not qualified to awaken apprehension, in the breast of one as powerful as the emigrant. Notwithstanding his years, and his look of emaciation, if not of suffering, there was that about this solitary being, however, which said that time, and not disease, had laid his hand heavily on him. His form had withered, but it was not wasted. The sinews and muscles, which had once denoted great strength, though shrunken, were still visible; and his whole figure had attained an appearance of induration, which, if it were not for the well known frailty of humanity, would have seemed to bid defiance to the further approaches of decay. His dress was chiefly of skins, worn with the hair to the weather; a pouch and horn were suspended from his shoulders; and he leaned on a rifle of uncommon length, but which, like its owner, exhibited the wear of long and hard service.

As the party drew nigher to this solitary being, and came within a distance to be heard, a low growl issued from the grass at his feet, and then, a tall, gaunt, toothless, hound, arose lazily from his lair, and shaking himself, made some show of resisting the nearer approach of the travellers.

"Down, Hector, down," said his master, in a voice, that was a little tremulous and hollow with age. "What have ye to do, pup, with men who journey on their lawful callings?"

"Stranger, if you ar' much acquainted in this country," said the leader of the emigrants, "can you tell a traveller where he may find necessaries for the night?"

"Is the land filled on the other side of the Big River?" demanded the old man, solemnly, and without appearing to hearken to the other's question; "or why do I see a sight, I had never thought to behold again?"

"Why, there is country left, it is true, for such as have money, and ar' not particular in the choice," returned the emigrant; "but to my taste, it is getting crowdy. What may a man call the distance, from this place to the nighest point on the main river?"

"A hunted deer could not cool his sides, in the Mississippi, without travelling a weary five hundred miles."

"And what may you name the district, hereaway?"

"By what name," returned the old man, pointing significantly upward, "would you call the spot, where you see yonder cloud?"

The emigrant looked at the other, like one who did not comprehend his meaning, and who half suspected he was trifled with, but he contented himself by saying--

"You ar' but a new inhabitant, like myself, I reckon, stranger, otherwise you would not be backward in helping a traveller to some advice; words cost but little, and sometimes lead to friendships."

"Advice is not a gift, but a debt that the old owe to the young. What would you wish to know?"

"Where I may camp for the night. I'm no great difficulty maker, as to bed and board; but, all old journeyers, like myself, know the virtue of sweet water, and a good browse for the cattle."

"Come then with me, and you shall be master of both; and little more is it that I can offer on this hungry prairie."

As the old man was speaking, he raised his heavy rifle to his shoulder, with a facility a little remarkable for his years and appearance, and without further words led the way over the acclivity to the adjacent bottom.

CHAPTER II

Up with my tent: here will I lie to-night,
But where, to-morrow?--Well, all's one for that
--Richard the Third.

The travellers soon discovered the usual and unerring evidences that the several articles necessary to their situation were not far distant. A clear and gurgling spring burst out of the side of the declivity, and joining its waters to those of other similar little fountains in its vicinity, their united contributions formed a run, which was easily to be traced, for miles along the prairie, by the scattering foliage and verdure which occasionally grew within the influence of its moisture. Hither, then, the stranger held his way, eagerly followed by the willing teams, whose instinct gave them a prescience of refreshment and rest.

On reaching what he deemed a suitable spot, the old man halted, and with an enquiring look, he seemed to demand if it possessed the needed conveniences. The leader of the emigrants cast his eyes, understandingly, about him, and examined the place with the keenness of one competent to judge of so nice a question, though in that dilatory and heavy manner, which rarely permitted him to betray precipitation.

"Ay, this may do," he said, satisfied with his scrutiny; "boys, you have seen the last of the sun; be stirring."

The young men manifested a characteristic obedience. The order, for such in tone and manner it was, in truth, was received with respect; but the utmost movement was the falling of an axe or two from the shoulder to the ground, while their owners continued to regard the place with listless and incurious eyes. In the mean time, the elder traveller, as if familiar with the nature of the impulses by which his children were governed, disencumbered himself of his pack and rifle, and, assisted by the man already mentioned as disposed to appeal so promptly to the rifle, he quietly proceeded to release the cattle from the gears.

At length the eldest of the sons stepped heavily forward, and, without any apparent effort, he buried his axe to the eye, in the soft body of

a cotton-wood tree. He stood, a moment, regarding the effect of the blow, with that sort of contempt with which a giant might be supposed to contemplate the puny resistance of a dwarf, and then flourishing the implement above his head, with the grace and dexterity with which a master of the art of offence would wield his nobler though less useful weapon, he quickly severed the trunk of the tree, bringing its tall top crashing to the earth in submission to his prowess. His companions regarded the operation with indolent curiosity, until they saw the prostrate trunk stretched on the ground, when, as if a signal for a general attack had been given, they advanced in a body to the work, and in a space of time, and with a neatness of execution that would have astonished an ignorant spectator, they stripped a small but suitable spot of its burden of forest, as effectually, and almost as promptly, as if a whirlwind had passed along the place.

The stranger had been a silent but attentive observer of their progress. As tree after tree came whistling down, he cast his eyes upward at the vacancies they left in the heavens, with a melancholy gaze, and finally turned away, muttering to himself with a bitter smile, like one who disdained giving a more audible utterance to his discontent. Pressing through the group of active and busy children, who had already lighted a cheerful fire, the attention of the old man became next fixed on the movements of the leader of the emigrants and of his savage looking assistant.

These two had, already, liberated the cattle, which were eagerly browsing the grateful and nutritious extremities of the fallen trees, and were now employed about the wagon, which has been described as having its contents concealed with so much apparent care. Notwithstanding this particular conveyance appeared to be as silent, and as tenantless as the rest of the vehicles, the men applied their strength to its wheels, and rolled it apart from the others, to a dry and elevated spot, near the edge of the thicket. Here they brought certain poles, which had, seemingly, been long employed in such a service, and fastening their larger ends firmly in the ground, the smaller were attached to the hoops that supported the covering of the wagon. Large folds of cloth were next drawn out of the vehicle, and after being spread around the whole, were pegged to the earth in such a manner as to form a tolerably capacious and an exceedingly convenient tent. After surveying their work with inquisitive, and perhaps jealous eyes, arranging a fold here, and driving a peg more firmly there, the men once more applied their strength to the wagon, pulling it, by its projecting tongue, from the centre of the canopy, until it appeared in the open air, deprived of its covering, and destitute of any other freight, than a few light articles of furniture. The latter were immediately removed, by the traveller, into the tent with his own hands, as though to enter it, were a privilege, to which even his bosom companion was not entitled.

Curiosity is a passion that is rather quickened than destroyed by seclusion, and the old inhabitant of the prairies did not view these precautionary and mysterious movements, without experiencing some of its impulses. He approached the tent, and was about to sever two of its folds, with the very obvious intention of examining, more closely, into the nature of its contents, when the man who had once already placed his life in jeopardy, seized him by the arm, and with a rude exercise of his strength threw him from the spot he had selected as the one most convenient for his object.

"It's an honest regulation, friend," the fellow, drily observed, though with an eye that threatened volumes, "and sometimes it is a safe one, which says, mind your own business."

"Men seldom bring any thing to be concealed into these deserts," returned the old man, as if willing, and yet a little ignorant how to apologize for the liberty he had been about to take, "and I had hoped no offence, in examining your comforts."

"They seldom bring themselves, I reckon; though this has the look of an old country, to my eye it seems not to be overly peopled."

"The land is as aged as the rest of the works of the Lord, I believe; but you say true, concerning its inhabitants. Many months have passed since I have laid eyes on a face of my own colour, before your own. I say again, friend, I meant no harm; I did not know, but there was something behind the cloth, that might bring former days to my mind."

As the stranger ended his simple explanation, he walked meekly away, like one who felt the deepest sense of the right which every man has to the quiet enjoyment of his own, without any troublesome interference on the part of his neighbour; a wholesome and just principle that he had, also, most probably imbibed from the habits of his secluded life. As he passed towards the little encampment of the emigrants, for such the place had now become, he heard the voice of the leader calling aloud, in its hoarse tones, the name of--

"Ellen Wade."

The girl who has been already introduced to the reader, and who was occupied with the others of her sex around the fires, sprang willingly forward at this summons; and, passing the stranger with the activity of a young antelope, she was instantly lost behind the forbidden folds of the tent. Neither her sudden disappearance, nor any of the arrangements we have mentioned, seemed, however, to excite the smallest surprise among the remainder of the party. The young men, who had already completed their tasks with the axe, were all engaged after their lounging and listless manner; some in bestowing equitable portions of the fodder among the different animals; others in plying the heavy pestle of a moveable homminy-mortar[*]; and one or two in wheeling the remainder of the wagons aside, and arranging them in such a manner as to form a sort of outwork for their otherwise defenceless bivouac.

[*] Homminy, is a dish composed chiefly of cracked corn, or maize.

These several duties were soon performed, and, as darkness now began to conceal the objects on the surrounding prairie, the shrill-toned termagant, whose voice since the halt had been diligently exercised among her idle and drowsy offspring, announced, in tones that might have been heard at a dangerous distance, that the evening meal waited only for the approach of those who were to consume it. Whatever may be the other qualities of a border man, he is seldom deficient in the virtue of hospitality. The emigrant no sooner heard the sharp call of his wife, than he cast his eyes about him in quest of the stranger, in order to offer him the place of distinction, in the rude entertainment to which they were so unceremoniously summoned.

"I thank you, friend," the old man replied to the rough invitation to

take a seat nigh the smoking kettle; "you have my hearty thanks; but I have eaten for the day, and am not one of them, who dig their graves with their teeth. Well; as you wish it, I will take a place, for it is long sin' I have seen people of my colour, eating their daily bread."

"You ar' an old settler, in these districts, then?" the emigrant rather remarked than enquired, with a mouth filled nearly to overflowing with the delicious homminy, prepared by his skilful, though repulsive spouse. "They told us below, we should find settlers something thinnish, hereaway, and I must say, the report was mainly true; for, unless, we count the Canada traders on the big river, you ar' the first white face I have met, in a good five hundred miles; that is calculating according to your own reckoning."

"Though I have spent some years, in this quarter, I can hardly be called a settler, seeing that I have no regular abode, and seldom pass more than a month, at a time, on the same range."

"A hunter, I reckon?" the other continued, glancing his eyes aside, as if to examine the equipments of his new acquaintance; "your fixen seem none of the best, for such a calling."

"They are old, and nearly ready to be laid aside, like their master," said the old man, regarding his rifle, with a look in which affection and regret were singularly blended; "and I may say they are but little needed, too. You are mistaken, friend, in calling me a hunter; I am nothing better than a trapper."[*]

[*] It is scarcely necessary to say, that this American word means one who takes his game in a trap. It is of general use on the frontiers. The beaver, an animal too sagacious to be easily killed, is oftener taken in this way than in any other.

"If you ar' much of the one, I'm bold to say you ar' something of the other; for the two callings, go mainly together, in these districts."

"To the shame of the man who is able to follow the first be it so said!" returned the trapper, whom in future we shall choose to designate by his pursuit; "for more than fifty years did I carry my rifle in the wilderness, without so much as setting a snare for even a bird that flies the heavens;--much less, a beast that has nothing but legs, for its gifts."

"I see but little difference whether a man gets his peltry by the rifle or by the trap," said the ill-looking companion of the emigrant, in his rough manner. "The 'arth was made for our comfort; and, for that matter, so ar' its creatur's."

"You seem to have but little plunder,[*] stranger, for one who is far abroad," bluntly interrupted the emigrant, as if he had a reason for wishing to change the conversation. "I hope you ar' better off for skins."

[*] The cant word for luggage in the western states of America is "plunder." The term might easily mislead one as to the character of the people, who, notwithstanding their pleasant use of so expressive a word, are, like the inhabitants of all new settlements, hospitable and honest. Knavery of the description conveyed by "plunder," is chiefly found in regions more civilised.

"I make but little use of either," the trapper quietly replied. "At my time of life, food and clothing be all that is needed; and I have little occasion for what you call plunder, unless it may be, now and then, to barter for a horn of powder, or a bar of lead."

"You ar' not, then, of these parts by natur', friend," the emigrant continued, having in his mind the exception which the other had taken to the very equivocal word, which he himself, according to the custom of the country, had used for "baggage," or "effects."

"I was born on the sea-shore, though most of my life has been passed in the woods."

The whole party now looked up at him, as men are apt to turn their eyes on some unexpected object of general interest. One or two of the young men repeated the words "sea-shore" and the woman tendered him one of those civilities with which, uncouth as they were, she was little accustomed to grace her hospitality, as if in deference to the travelled dignity of her guest. After a long, and, seemingly, a meditating silence, the emigrant, who had, however, seen no apparent necessity to suspend the functions of his masticating powers, resumed the discourse.

"It is a long road, as I have heard, from the waters of the west to the shores of the main sea?"

"It is a weary path, indeed, friend; and much have I seen, and something have I suffered, in journeying over it."

"A man would see a good deal of hard travel in going its length!"

"Seventy and five years have I been upon the road; and there are not half that number of leagues in the whole distance, after you leave the Hudson, on which I have not tasted venison of my own killing. But this is vain boasting. Of what use are former deeds, when time draws to an end?"

"I once met a man that had boated on the river he names," observed the eldest son, speaking in a low tone of voice, like one who distrusted his knowledge, and deemed it prudent to assume a becoming diffidence in the presence of a man who had seen so much: "from his tell, it must be a considerable stream, and deep enough for a keel-boat, from top to bottom."

"It is a wide and deep water-course, and many sightly towns are there growing on its banks," returned the trapper; "and yet it is but a brook to the waters of the endless river."

"I call nothing a stream that a man can travel round," exclaimed the ill-looking associate of the emigrant: "a real river must be crossed; not headed, like a bear in a county hunt."[*]

[*] There is a practice, in the new countries, to assemble the men of a large district, sometimes of an entire county, to exterminate the beasts of prey. They form themselves into a circle of several miles in extent, and gradually draw nearer, killing all before them. The allusion is to this custom, in which the hunted beast is turned from one to another.

"Have you been far towards the sun-down, friend?" interrupted the emigrant, as if he desired to keep his rough companion as much as possible out of the discourse. "I find it is a wide tract of clearing, this, into which I have fallen."

"You may travel weeks, and you will see it the same. I often think the Lord has placed this barren belt of prairie behind the States, to warn men to what their folly may yet bring the land! Ay, weeks, if not months, may you journey in these open fields, in which there is neither dwelling nor habitation for man or beast. Even the savage animals travel miles on miles to seek their dens; and yet the wind seldom blows from the east, but I conceit the sound of axes, and the crash of falling trees, are in my ears."

As the old man spoke with the seriousness and dignity that age seldom fails to communicate even to less striking sentiments, his auditors were deeply attentive, and as silent as the grave. Indeed, the trapper was left to renew the dialogue himself, which he soon did by asking a question, in the indirect manner so much in use by the border inhabitants.

"You found it no easy matter to ford the water-courses, and to make your way so deep into the prairies, friend, with teams of horses and herds of horned beasts?"

"I kept the left bank of the main river," the emigrant replied, "until I found the stream leading too much to the north, when we rafted ourselves across without any great suffering. The women lost a fleece or two from the next year's shearing, and the girls have one cow less to their dairy. Since then, we have done bravely, by bridging a creek every day or two."

"It is likely you will continue west, until you come to land more suitable for a settlement?"

"Until I see reason to stop, or to turn ag'in," the emigrant bluntly answered, rising at the same time, and cutting short the dialogue by the suddenness of the movement. His example was followed by the trapper, as well as the rest of the party; and then, without much deference to the presence of their guest, the travellers proceeded to make their dispositions to pass the night. Several little bowers, or rather huts, had already been formed of the tops of trees, blankets of coarse country manufacture, and the skins of buffaloes, united without much reference to any other object than temporary comfort. Into these covers the children, with their mother, soon drew themselves, and where, it is more than possible, they were all speedily lost in the oblivion of sleep. Before the men, however, could seek their rest, they had sundry little duties to perform; such as completing their works of defence, carefully concealing the fires, replenishing the fodder of their cattle, and setting the watch that was to protect the party, in the approaching hours of night.

The former was effected by dragging the trunks of a few trees into the intervals left by the wagons, and along the open space between the vehicles and the thicket, on which, in military language, the encampment would be said to have rested; thus forming a sort of chevaux-de-frise on three sides of the position. Within these narrow limits (with the exception of what the tent contained), both man and

beast were now collected; the latter being far too happy in resting their weary limbs, to give any undue annoyance to their scarcely more intelligent associates. Two of the young men took their rifles; and, first renewing the priming, and examining the flints with the utmost care, they proceeded, the one to the extreme right, and the other to the left, of the encampment, where they posted themselves within the shadows of the thicket; but in such positions as enabled each to overlook a portion of the prairie.

The trapper loitered about the place, declining to share the straw of the emigrant, until the whole arrangement was completed; and then, without the ceremony of an adieu, he slowly retired from the spot.

It was now in the first watch of the night; and the pale, quivering, and deceptive light, from a new moon, was playing over the endless waves of the prairie, tipping the swells with gleams of brightness, and leaving the interval land in deep shadow. Accustomed to scenes of solitude like the present, the old man, as he left the encampment, proceeded alone into the waste, like a bold vessel leaving its haven to enter on the trackless field of the ocean. He appeared to move for some time without object, or, indeed, without any apparent consciousness, whither his limbs were carrying him. At length, on reaching the rise of one of the undulations, he came to a stand; and, for the first time since leaving the band, who had caused such a flood of reflections and recollections to crowd upon his mind, the old man became aware of his present situation. Throwing one end of his rifle to the earth, he stood leaning on the other, again lost in deep contemplation for several minutes, during which time his hound came and crouched at his feet. A deep, menacing growl, from the faithful animal, first aroused him from his musing.

"What now, dog?" he said, looking down at his companion, as if he addressed a being of an intelligence equal to his own, and speaking in a voice of great affection. "What is it, pup? ha! Hector; what is it nosing, now? It won't do, dog; it won't do; the very fa'ns play in open view of us, without minding so worn out curs, as you and I. Instinct is their gift, Hector and, they have found out how little we are to be feared, they have!"

The dog stretched his head upward, and responded to the words of his master by a long and plaintive whine, which he even continued after he had again buried his head in the grass, as if he held an intelligent communication with one who so well knew how to interpret dumb discourse.

"This is a manifest warning, Hector!" the trapper continued, dropping his voice, to the tones of caution and looking warily about him. "What is it, pup; speak plainer, dog; what is it?"

The hound had, however, already laid his nose to the earth, and was silent; appearing to slumber. But the keen quick glances of his master, soon caught a glimpse of a distant figure, which seemed, through the deceptive light, floating along the very elevation on which he had placed himself. Presently its proportions became more distinct, and then an airy, female form appeared to hesitate, as if considering whether it would be prudent to advance. Though the eyes of the dog were now to be seen glancing in the rays of the moon, opening and shutting lazily, he gave no further signs of displeasure.

"Come nigher; we are friends," said the trapper, associating himself with his companion by long use, and, probably, through the strength of the secret tie that connected them together; "we are your friends; none will harm you."

Encouraged by the mild tones of his voice, and perhaps led on by the earnestness of her purpose, the female approached, until she stood at his side; when the old man perceived his visitor to be the young woman, with whom the reader, has already become acquainted by the name of "Ellen Wade."

"I had thought you were gone," she said, looking timidly and anxiously around. "They said you were gone; and that we should never see you again. I did not think it was you!"

"Men are no common objects in these empty fields," returned the trapper, "and I humbly hope, though I have so long consorted with the beasts of the wilderness, that I have not yet lost the look of my kind."

"Oh! I knew you to be a man, and I thought I knew the whine of the hound, too," she answered hastily, as if willing to explain she knew not what, and then checking herself, like one fearful of having already said too much.

"I saw no dogs, among the teams of your father," the trapper remarked.

"Father!" exclaimed the girl, feelingly, "I have no father! I had nearly said no friend."

The old man turned towards her, with a look of kindness and interest, that was even more conciliating than the ordinary, upright, and benevolent expression of his weather-beaten countenance.

"Why then do you venture in a place where none but the strong should come?" he demanded. "Did you not know that, when you crossed the big river, you left a friend behind you that is always bound to look to the young and feeble, like yourself."

"Of whom do you speak?"

"The law--'tis bad to have it, but, I sometimes think, it is worse to be entirely without it. Age and weakness have brought me to feel such weakness, at times. Yes--yes, the law is needed, when such as have not the gifts of strength and wisdom are to be taken care of. I hope, young woman, if you have no father, you have at least a brother."

The maiden felt the tacit reproach conveyed in this covert question, and for a moment she remained in an embarrassed silence. But catching a glimpse of the mild and serious features of her companion, as he continued to gaze on her with a look of interest, she replied, firmly, and in a manner that left no doubt she comprehended his meaning:

"Heaven forbid that any such as you have seen, should be a brother of mine, or any thing else near or dear to me! But, tell me, do you then actually live alone, in this desert district, old man; is there really none here besides yourself?"

"There are hundreds, nay, thousands of the rightful owners of the

country, roving about the plains; but few of our own colour."

"And have you then met none who are white, but us?" interrupted the girl, like one too impatient to await the tardy explanations of age and deliberation.

"Not in many days--Hush, Hector, hush," he added in reply to a low, and nearly inaudible, growl from his hound. "The dog scents mischief in the wind! The black bears from the mountains sometimes make their way, even lower than this. The pup is not apt to complain of the harmless game. I am not so ready and true with the piece as I used-to-could-be, yet I have struck even the fiercest animals of the prairie in my time; so, you have little reason for fear, young woman."

The girl raised her eyes, in that peculiar manner which is so often practised by her sex, when they commence their glances, by examining the earth at their feet, and terminate them by noting every thing within the power of human vision; but she rather manifested the quality of impatience, than any feeling of alarm.

A short bark from the dog, however, soon gave a new direction to the looks of both, and then the real object of his second warning became dimly visible.

CHAPTER III

Come, come, thou art as hot a Jack in thy mood, as any in Italy;
and as soon mov'd to be moody, and as soon moody to be moved.
--Romeo and Juliet.

Though the trapper manifested some surprise when he perceived that another human figure was approaching him, and that, too, from a direction opposite to the place where the emigrant had made his encampment, it was with the steadiness of one long accustomed to scenes of danger.

"This is a man," he said; "and one who has white blood in his veins, or his step would be lighter. It will be well to be ready for the worst, as the half-and-halves,[*] that one meets, in these distant districts, are altogether more barbarous than the real savage."

[*] Half-breeds; men born of Indian women by white fathers. This race has much of the depravity of civilisation without the virtues of the savage.

He raised his rifle while he spoke, and assured himself of the state of its flint, as well as of the priming by manual examination. But his arm was arrested, while in the act of throwing forward the muzzle of the piece, by the eager and trembling hands of his companion.

"For God's sake, be not too hasty," she said; "it may be a friend--an acquaintance--a neighbour!"

"A friend!" the old man repeated, deliberately releasing himself, at the same time, from her grasp. "Friends are rare in any land, and less in this, perhaps, than in another; and the neighbourhood is too thinly settled to make it likely that he who comes towards us is even an

acquaintance."

"But though a stranger, you would not seek his blood!"

The trapper earnestly regarded her anxious and frightened features, and then he dropped the butt of his rifle on the ground, like one whose purpose had undergone a sudden change.

"No," he said, speaking rather to himself, than to his companion, "she is right; blood is not to be spilt, to save the life of one so useless, and so near his time. Let him come on; my skins, my traps, and even my rifle shall be his, if he sees fit to demand them."

"He will ask for neither:--he wants neither," returned the girl; "if he be an honest man, he will surely be content with his own, and ask for nothing that is the property of another."

The trapper had not time to express the surprise he felt at this incoherent and contradictory language, for the man who was advancing, was, already, within fifty feet of the place where they stood.--In the mean time, Hector had not been an indifferent witness of what was passing. At the sound of the distant footsteps, he had arisen, from his warm bed at the feet of his master; and now, as the stranger appeared in open view, he stalked slowly towards him, crouching to the earth like a panther about to take his leap.

"Call in your dog," said a firm, deep, manly voice, in tones of friendship, rather than of menace; "I love a hound, and should be sorry to do an injury to the animal."

"You hear what is said about you, pup?" the trapper answered; "come hither, fool. His growl and his bark are all that is left him now; you may come on, friend; the hound is toothless."

The stranger profited by the intelligence. He sprang eagerly forward, and at the next instant stood at the side of Ellen Wade. After assuring himself of the identity of the latter, by a hasty but keen glance, he turned his attention, with a quickness and impatience, that proved the interest he took in the result, to a similar examination of her companion.

"From what cloud have you fallen, my good old man?" he said in a careless, off-hand, heedless manner that seemed too natural to be assumed: "or do you actually live, hereaway, in the prairies?"

"I have been long on earth, and never I hope nigher to heaven, than I am at this moment," returned the trapper; "my dwelling, if dwelling I may be said to have, is not far distant. Now may I take the liberty with you, that you are so willing to take with others? Whence do you come, and where is your home?"

"Softly, softly; when I have done with my catechism, it will be time to begin with yours. What sport is this, you follow by moonlight? You are not dodging the buffaloes at such an hour!"

"I am, as you see, going from an encampment of travellers, which lies over yonder swell in the land, to my own wigwam; in doing so, I wrong no man."

"All fair and true. And you got this young woman to show you the way, because she knows it so well and you know so little about it yourself!"

"I met her, as I have met you, by accident. For ten tiresome years have I dwelt on these open fields, and never, before to-night, have I found human beings with white skins on them, at this hour. If my presence here gives offence, I am sorry; and will go my way. It is more than likely that when your young friend has told her story, you will be better given to believe mine.

"Friend!" said the youth, lifting a cap of skins from his head, and running his fingers leisurely through a dense mass of black and shaggy locks, "if I have ever laid eyes on the girl before to-night, may I--"

"You've said enough, Paul," interrupted the female, laying her hand on his mouth, with a familiarity that gave something very like the lie direct, to his intended asseveration. "Our secret will be safe, with this honest old man. I know it by his looks, and kind words."

"Our secret! Ellen, have you forgot--"

"Nothing. I have not forgotten any thing I should remember. But still I say we are safe with this honest trapper."

"Trapper! is he then a trapper? Give me your hand, father; our trades should bring us acquainted."

"There is little call for handicrafts in this region," returned the other, examining the athletic and active form of the youth, as he leaned carelessly and not ungracefully, on his rifle; "the art of taking the creatur's of God, in traps and nets, is one that needs more cunning than manhood; and yet am I brought to practise it, in my age! But it would be quite as seemly, in one like you, to follow a pursuit better becoming your years and courage."

"! I never took even a slinking mink or a paddling musk-rat in a cage; though I admit having peppered a few of the dark-skin'd devils, when I had much better have kept my powder in the horn and the lead in its pouch. Not I, old man; nothing that crawls the earth is for my sport."

"What then may you do for a living, friend? for little profit is to be made in these districts, if a man denies himself his lawful right in the beasts of the fields."

"I deny myself nothing. If a bear crosses my path, he is soon the mere ghost of Bruin. The deer begin to nose me; and as for the buffaloe, I have kill'd more beef, old stranger, than the largest butcher in all Kentuck."

"You can shoot, then!" demanded the trapper, with a glow of latent fire, glimmering about his eyes; "is your hand true, and your look quick?"

"The first is like a steel trap, and the last nimbler than a buck-shot. I wish it was hot noon, now, grand'ther; and that there was an acre or two of your white swans or of black feathered ducks going south, over our heads; you or Ellen, here, might set your heart on the

finest in the flock, and my character against a horn of powder, that the bird would be hanging head downwards, in five minutes, and that too, with a single ball. I scorn a shot-gun! No man can say, he ever knew me carry one, a rod."

"The lad has good in him! I see it plainly by his manner;" said the trapper, turning to Ellen with an encouraging air; "I will take it on myself to say, that you are not unwise in meeting him, as you do. Tell me, lad; did you ever strike a leaping buck atwixt the antlers? Hector; quiet, pup; quiet. The very name of venison quickens the blood of the cur;--did you ever take an animal in that fashion, on the long leap?"

"You might just as well ask me, did you ever eat? There is no fashion, old stranger, that a deer has not been touched by my hand, unless it was when asleep."

"Ay, ay; you have a long and a happy-ay, and an honest life afore you! I am old, and I suppose I might also say, worn out and useless; but, if it was given me to choose my time, and place, again,--as such things are not and ought not ever to be given to the will of man--though if such a gift was to be given me, I would say, twenty and the wilderness! But, tell me; how do you part with the peltry?"

"With my pelts! I never took a skin from a buck, nor a quill from a goose, in my life! I knock them over, now and then, for a meal, and sometimes to keep my finger true to the touch; but when hunger is satisfied, the prairie wolves get the remainder. No--no--I keep to my calling; which pays me better, than all the fur I could sell on the other side of the big river."

The old man appeared to ponder a little; but shaking his head he soon continued--

"I know of but one business that can be followed here with profit--"

He was interrupted by the youth, who raised a small cup of tin, which dangled at his neck before the other's eyes, and springing its lid, the delicious odour of the finest flavoured honey, diffused itself over the organs of the trapper.

"A bee hunter!" observed the latter, with a readiness that proved he understood the nature of the occupation, though not without some little surprise at discovering one of the other's spirited mien engaged in so humble a pursuit. "It pays well in the skirts of the settlements, but I should call it a doubtful trade, in the more open districts."

"You think a tree is wanting for a swarm to settle in! But I know differently; and so I have stretched out a few hundred miles farther west than common, to taste your honey. And, now, I have bated your curiosity, stranger, you will just move aside, while I tell the remainder of my story to this young woman."

"It is not necessary, I'm sure it is not necessary, that he should leave us," said Ellen, with a haste that implied some little consciousness of the singularity if not of the impropriety of the request. "You can have nothing to say that the whole world might not hear."

"No! well, may I be stung to death by drones, if I understand the buzzings of a woman's mind! For my part, Ellen, I care for nothing nor any body; and am just as ready to go down to the place where your uncle, if uncle you can call one, who I'll swear is no relation, has hopped his teams, and tell the old man my mind now, as I shall be a year hence. You have only to say a single word, and the thing is done; let him like it or not."

"You are ever so hasty and so rash, Paul Hover, that I seldom know when I am safe with you. How can you, who know the danger of our being seen together, speak of going before my uncle and his sons?"

"Has he done that of which he has reason to be ashamed?" demanded the trapper, who had not moved an inch from the place he first occupied.

"Heaven forbid! But there are reasons, why he should not be seen, just now, that could do him no harm if known; but which may not yet be told. And, so, if you will wait, father, near yonder willow bush, until I have heard what Paul can possibly have to say, I shall be sure to come and wish you a good night, before I return to the camp."

The trapper drew slowly aside, as if satisfied with the somewhat incoherent reason Ellen had given why he should retire. When completely out of ear shot of the earnest and hurried dialogue, that instantly commenced between the two he had left, the old man again paused, and patiently awaited the moment when he might renew his conversation with beings in whom he felt a growing interest, no less from the mysterious character of their intercourse, than from a natural sympathy in the welfare of a pair so young, and who, as in the simplicity of his heart he was also fain to believe, were also so deserving. He was accompanied by his indolent, but attached dog, who once more made his bed at the feet of his master, and soon lay slumbering as usual, with his head nearly buried in the dense fog of the prairie grass.

It was a spectacle so unusual to see the human form amid the solitude in which he dwelt, that the trapper bent his eyes on the dim figures of his new acquaintances, with sensations to which he had long been a stranger. Their presence awakened recollections and emotions, to which his sturdy but honest nature had latterly paid but little homage, and his thoughts began to wander over the varied scenes of a life of hardships, that had been strangely blended with scenes of wild and peculiar enjoyment. The train taken by his thoughts had, already, conducted him, in imagination, far into an ideal world, when he was, once more suddenly, recalled to the reality of his situation, by the movements of the faithful hound.

The dog, who, in submission to his years and infirmities, had manifested such a decided propensity to sleep, now arose, and stalked from out the shadow cast by the tall person of his master, and looked abroad into the prairie, as if his instinct apprised him of the presence of still another visitor. Then, seemingly content with his examination, he returned to his comfortable post and disposed of his weary limbs, with the deliberation and care of one who was no novice in the art of self-preservation.

"What; again, Hector!" said the trapper in a soothing voice, which he had the caution, however, to utter in an under tone; "what is it, dog?"

tell it all to his master, pup; what is it?"

Hector answered with another growl, but was content to continue in his lair. These were evidences of intelligence and distrust, to which one as practised as the trapper could not turn an inattentive ear. He again spoke to the dog, encouraging him to watchfulness, by a low guarded whistle. The animal however, as if conscious of having, already, discharged his duty, obstinately refused to raise his head from the grass.

"A hint from such a friend is far better than man's advice!" muttered the trapper, as he slowly moved towards the couple who were yet, too earnestly and abstractedly, engaged in their own discourse, to notice his approach; "and none but a conceited settler would hear it and not respect it, as he ought. Children," he added, when nigh enough to address his companions, "we are not alone in these dreary fields; there are others stirring, and, therefore, to the shame of our kind, be it said, danger is nigh."

"If one of the lazy sons of Skirting Ishmael is prowling out of his camp to-night," said the young bee-hunter, with great vivacity, and in tones that might easily have been excited to a menace, "he may have an end put to his journey sooner than either he or his father is dreaming!"

"My life on it, they are all with the teams," hurriedly answered the girl. "I saw the whole of them asleep, myself, except the two on watch; and their natures have greatly changed, if they, too, are not both dreaming of a turkey hunt, or a court-house fight, at this very moment."

"Some beast, with a strong scent, has passed between the wind and the hound, father, and it makes him uneasy; or, perhaps, he too is dreaming. I had a pup of my own, in Kentuck, that would start upon a long chase from a deep sleep; and all upon the fancy of some dream. Go to him, and pinch his ear, that the beast may feel the life within him."

"Not so--not so," returned the trapper, shaking his head as one who better understood the qualities of his dog.--"Youth sleeps, ay, and dreams too; but age is awake and watchful. The pup is never false with his nose, and long experience tells me to heed his warnings."

"Did you ever run him upon the trail of carrion?"

"Why, I must say, that the ravenous beasts have sometimes tempted me to let him loose, for they are as greedy as men, after the venison, in its season; but then I knew the reason of the dog, would tell him the object!--No--no, Hector is an animal known in the ways of man, and will never strike a false trail when a true one is to be followed!"

"Ay, ay, the secret is out! you have run the hound on the track of a wolf, and his nose has a better memory than his master!" said the bee-hunter, laughing.

"I have seen the creatur' sleep for hours, with pack after pack, in open view. A wolf might eat out of his tray without a snarl, unless there was a scarcity; then, indeed, Hector would be apt to claim his own."

"There are panthers down from the mountains; I saw one make a leap at a sick deer, as the sun was setting. Go; go you back to the dog, and tell him the truth, father; in a minute, I--"

He was interrupted by a long, loud, and piteous howl from the hound, which rose on the air of the evening, like the wailing of some spirit of the place, and passed off into the prairie, in cadences that rose and fell, like its own undulating surface. The trapper was impressively silent, listening intently. Even the reckless bee-hunter, was struck with the wailing wildness of the sounds. After a short pause the former whistled the dog to his side, and turning to his companions he said with the seriousness, which, in his opinion, the occasion demanded--

"They who think man enjoys all the knowledge of the creature's of God, will live to be disappointed, if they reach, as I have done, the age of fourscore years. I will not take upon myself to say what mischief is brewing, nor will I vouch that, even, the hound himself knows so much; but that evil is nigh, and that wisdom invites us to avoid it, I have heard from the mouth of one who never lies. I did think, the pup had become unused to the footsteps of man, and that your presence made him uneasy; but his nose has been on a long scent the whole evening, and what I mistook as a notice of your coming, has been intended for something more serious. If the advice of an old man is, then, worth hearkening to, children, you will quickly go different ways to your places of shelter and safety."

"If I quit Ellen, at such a moment," exclaimed the youth, "may I--"

"You've said enough!" the girl interrupted, by again interposing a band that might, both by its delicacy and colour, have graced a far more elevated station in life; "my time is out; and we must part, at all events--so good night, Paul--father--good night."

"Hist!" said the youth, seizing her arm, as she was in the very act of tripping from his side--"Hist! do you hear nothing? There are buffaloes playing their pranks, at no great distance--That sound beats the earth like a herd of the mad scampering devils!"

His two companions listened, as people in their situation would be apt to lend their faculties to discover the meaning of any doubtful noises, especially, when heard after so many and such startling warnings. The unusual sounds were unequivocally though still faintly audible. The youth and his female companion had made several hurried, and vacillating conjectures concerning their nature, when a current of the night air brought the rush of trampling footsteps, too sensibly, to their ears, to render mistake any longer possible.

"I am right!" said the bee-hunter; "a panther is driving a herd before him; or may be, there is a battle among the beasts."

"Your ears are cheats," returned the old man, who, from the moment his own organs had been able to catch the distant sounds, stood like a statue made to represent deep attention:--"the leaps are too long for the buffalo, and too regular for terror. Hist! now they are in a bottom where the grass is high, and the sound is deadened! Ay, there they go on the hard earth! And now they come up the swell, dead upon us; they will be here afore you can find a cover!"

"Come, Ellen," cried the youth, seizing his companion by the hand, "let us make a trial for the encampment."

"Too late! too late!" exclaimed the trapper, "for the creatur's are in open view; and a bloody band of accursed Siouxes they are, by their thieving look, and the random fashion in which they ride!"

"Siouxes or devils, they shall find us men!" said the bee-hunter, with a mien as fierce as if he led a party of superior strength, and of a courage equal to his own.--"You have a piece, old man, and will pull a trigger in behalf of a helpless, Christian girl!"

"Down, down into the grass--down with ye both," whispered the trapper, intimating to them to turn aside to the tall weeds, which grew, in a denser body than common, near the place where they stood. "You've not the time to fly, nor the numbers to fight, foolish boy. Down into the grass, if you prize the young woman, or value the gift of life!"

His remonstrance, seconded, as it was, by a prompt and energetic action, did not fail to produce the submission to his order, which the occasion seemed, indeed, imperiously to require. The moon had fallen behind a sheet of thin, fleecy, clouds, which skirted the horizon, leaving just enough of its faint and fluctuating light, to render objects visible, dimly revealing their forms and proportions. The trapper, by exercising that species of influence, over his companions, which experience and decision usually assert, in cases of emergency, had effectually succeeded in concealing them in the grass, and by the aid of the feeble rays of the luminary, he was enabled to scan the disorderly party which was riding, like so many madmen, directly upon them.

A band of beings, who resembled demons rather than men, sporting in their nightly revels across the bleak plain, was in truth approaching, at a fearful rate, and in a direction to leave little hope that some one among them, at least, would not pass over the spot where the trapper and his companions lay. At intervals, the clattering of hoofs was borne along by the night wind, quite audibly in their front, and then, again, their progress through the fog of the autumnal grass, was swift and silent; adding to the unearthly appearance of the spectacle. The trapper, who had called in his hound, and bidden him crouch at his side, now kneeled in the cover also, and kept a keen and watchful eye on the route of the band, soothing the fears of the girl, and restraining the impatience of the youth, in the same breath.

"If there's one, there's thirty of the miscreants!" he said, in a sort of episode to his whispered comments. "Ay, ay; they are edging towards the river--Peace, pup--peace--no, here they come this way again--the thieves don't seem to know their own errand! If there were just six of us, lad, what a beautiful ambushment we might make upon them, from this very spot--it won't do, it won't do, boy; keep yourself closer, or your head will be seen--besides, I'm not altogether strong in the opinion it would be lawful, as they have done us no harm.--There they bend again to the river--no; here they come up the swell--now is the moment to be as still, as if the breath had done its duty and departed the body."

The old man sunk into the grass while he was speaking, as if the final separation to which he alluded, had, in his own case, actually

occurred, and, at the next instant, a band of wild horsemen whirled by them, with the noiseless rapidity in which it might be imagined a troop of spectres would pass. The dark and fleeting forms were already vanished, when the trapper ventured again to raise his head to a level with the tops of the bending herbage, motioning at the same time, to his companions to maintain their positions and their silence.

"They are going down the swell, towards the encampment," he continued, in his former guarded tones; "no, they halt in the bottom, and are clustering together like deer, in council. By the Lord, they are turning again, and we are not yet done with the reptiles!"

Once more he sought his friendly cover, and at the next instant the dark troop were to be seen riding, in a disorderly manner, on the very summit of the little elevation on which the trapper and his companions lay. It was now soon apparent that they had returned to avail themselves of the height of the ground, in order to examine the dim horizon.

Some dismounted, while others rode to and fro, like men engaged in a local enquiry of much interest. Happily, for the hidden party, the grass in which they were concealed, not only served to screen them from the eyes of the savages, but opposed an obstacle to prevent their horses, which were no less rude and untrained than their riders, from trampling on them, in their irregular and wild paces.

At length an athletic and dark looking Indian, who, by his air of authority, would seem to be the leader, summoned his chiefs about him, to a consultation, which was held mounted. This body was collected on the very margin of that mass of herbage in which the trapper and his companions were hid. As the young man looked up and saw the fierce aspect of the group, which was increasing at each instant by the accession of some countenance and figure, apparently more forbidding than any which had preceded it, he drew his rifle, by a very natural impulse, from beneath him, and commenced putting it in a state for service. The female, at his side, buried her face in the grass, by a feeling that was, possibly, quite as natural to her sex and habits, leaving him to follow the impulses of his hot blood; but his aged and more prudent adviser, whispered, sternly, in his ear--

"The tick of the lock is as well known to the knaves, as the blast of a trumpet to a soldier! lay down the piece--lay down the piece--should the moon touch the barrel, it could not fail to be seen by the devils, whose eyes are keener than the blackest snake's! The smallest motion, now, would be sure to bring an arrow among us."

The bee-hunter so far obeyed as to continue immovable and silent. But there was still sufficient light to convince his companion, by the contracted brow and threatening eye of the young man, that a discovery would not bestow a bloodless victory on the savages. Finding his advice disregarded, the trapper took his measures accordingly, and awaited the result with a resignation and calmness that were characteristic of the individual.

In the mean time, the Siouzes (for the sagacity of the old man was not deceived in the character of his dangerous neighbours) had terminated their council, and were again dispersed along the ridge of land as if they sought some hidden object.

"The imps have heard the hound!" whispered the trapper, "and their ears are too true to be cheated in the distance. Keep close, lad, keep close; down with your head to the very earth, like a dog that sleeps."

"Let us rather take to our feet, and trust to manhood," returned his impatient companion.

He would have proceeded; but feeling a hand laid rudely on his shoulder, he turned his eyes upward, and beheld the dark and savage countenance of an Indian gleaming full upon him. Notwithstanding the surprise and the disadvantage of his attitude, the youth was not disposed to become a captive so easily. Quicker than the flash of his own gun he sprang upon his feet, and was throttling his opponent with a power that would soon have terminated the contest, when he felt the arms of the trapper thrown round his body, confining his exertions by a strength very little inferior to his own. Before he had time to reproach his comrade for this apparent treachery, a dozen Siouzes were around them, and the whole party were compelled to yield themselves as prisoners.

CHAPTER IV

--With much more dismay,
I view the fight, than those that make the fray.
--Merchant of Venice.

The unfortunate bee-hunter and his companions had become the captives of a people, who might, without exaggeration, be called the Ishmaelites of the American deserts. From time immemorial, the hands of the Siouzes had been turned against their neighbours of the prairies, and even at this day, when the influence and authority of a civilised government are beginning to be felt around them, they are considered a treacherous and dangerous race. At the period of our tale, the case was far worse; few white men trusting themselves in the remote and unprotected regions where so false a tribe was known to dwell.

Notwithstanding the peaceable submission of the trapper, he was quite aware of the character of the band into whose hands he had fallen. It would have been difficult, however, for the nicest judge to have determined whether fear, policy, or resignation formed the secret motive of the old man, in permitting himself to be plundered as he did, without a murmur. So far from opposing any remonstrance to the rude and violent manner in which his conquerors performed the customary office, he even anticipated their cupidity, by tendering to the chiefs such articles as he thought might prove the most acceptable. On the other hand Paul Hover, who had been literally a conquered man, manifested the strongest repugnance to submit to the violent liberties that were taken with his person and property. He even gave several exceedingly unequivocal demonstrations of his displeasure during the summary process, and would, more than once, have broken out in open and desperate resistance, but for the admonitions and entreaties of the trembling girl, who clung to his side, in a manner so dependent, as to show the youth, that her hopes were now placed, no less on his discretion, than on his disposition to serve her.

The Indians had, however, no sooner deprived the captives of their arms and ammunition, and stripped them of a few articles of dress of little use, and perhaps of less value, than they appeared disposed to grant them a respite. Business of greater moment pressed on their hands, and required their attention. Another consultation of the chiefs was convened, and it was apparent, by the earnest and vehement manner of the few who spoke, that the warriors conceived their success as yet to be far from complete.

"It will be well," whispered the trapper, who knew enough of the language he heard to comprehend perfectly the subject of the discussion, "if the travellers who lie near the willow brake are not awoken out of their sleep by a visit from these miscreants. They are too cunning to believe that a woman of the 'pale-faces' is to be found so far from the settlements, without having a white man's inventions and comforts at hand."

"If they will carry the tribe of wandering Ishmael to the Rocky Mountains," said the young bee-hunter, laughing in his vexation with a sort of bitter merriment, "I may forgive the rascals."

"Paul! Paul!" exclaimed his companion in a tone of reproach, "you forget all! Think of the dreadful consequences!"

"Ay, it was thinking of what you call consequences, Ellen, that prevented me from putting the matter, at once, to yonder red-devil, and making it a real knock-down and drag-out! Old trapper, the sin of this cowardly business lies on your shoulders! But it is no more than your daily calling, I reckon, to take men, as well as beasts, in snares."

"I implore you, Paul, to be calm--to be patient."

"Well, since it is your wish, Ellen," returned the youth, endeavouring to swallow his spleen, "I will make the trial; though, as you ought to know, it is part of the religion of a Kentuckian to fret himself a little at a mischance."

"I fear your friends in the other bottom will not escape the eyes of the imps!" continued the trapper, as coolly as though he had not heard a syllable of the intervening discourse. "They scent plunder; and it would be as hard to drive a hound from his game, as to throw the varmints from its trail."

"Is there nothing to be done?" asked Ellen, in an imploring manner, which proved the sincerity of her concern.

"It would be an easy matter to call out, in so loud a voice as to make old Ishmael dream that the wolves were among his flock," Paul replied; "I can make myself heard a mile in these open fields, and his camp is but a short quarter from us."

"And get knocked on the head for your pains," returned the trapper. "No, no; cunning must match cunning, or the hounds will murder the whole family."

"Murder! no--no murder. Ishmael loves travel so well, there would be no harm in his having a look at the other sea, but the old fellow is in a bad condition to take the long journey! I would try a lock myself

before he should be quite murdered."

"His party is strong in number, and well armed; do you think it will fight?"

"Look here, old trapper: few men love Ishmael Bush and his seven sledge-hammer sons less than one Paul Hover; but I scorn to slander even a Tennessee shotgun. There is as much of the true stand-up courage among them, as there is in any family that was ever raised in Kentuck, itself. They are a long-sided and a double-jointed breed; and let me tell you, that he who takes the measure of one of them on the ground, must be a workman at a hug."

"Hist! The savages have done their talk, and are about to set their accursed devices in motion. Let us be patient; something may yet offer in favour of your friends."

"Friends! call none of the race a friend of mine, trapper, if you have the smallest regard for my affection! What I say in their favour is less from love than honesty."

"I did not know but the young woman was of the kin," returned the other, a little drily--"but no offence should be taken, where none was intended."

The mouth of Paul was again stopped by the hand of Ellen, who took on herself to reply, in her conciliating tones: "we should be all of a family, when it is in our power to serve each other. We depend entirely on your experience, honest old man, to discover the means to apprise our friends of their danger."

"There will be a real time of it," muttered the bee-hunter, laughing, "if the boys get at work, in good earnest, with these red skins!"

He was interrupted by a general movement which took place among the band. The Indians dismounted to a man, giving their horses in charge to three or four of the party, who were also intrusted with the safe keeping of the prisoners. They then formed themselves in a circle around a warrior, who appeared to possess the chief authority; and at a given signal the whole array moved slowly and cautiously from the centre in straight and consequently in diverging lines. Most of their dark forms were soon blended with the brown covering of the prairie; though the captives, who watched the slightest movement of their enemies with vigilant eyes, were now and then enabled to discern a human figure, drawn against the horizon, as some one, more eager than the rest, rose to his greatest height in order to extend the limits of his view. But it was not long before even these fugitive glimpses of the moving, and constantly increasing circle, were lost, and uncertainty and conjecture were added to apprehension. In this manner passed many anxious and weary minutes, during the close of which the listeners expected at each moment to hear the whoop of the assailants and the shrieks of the assailed, rising together on the stillness of the night. But it would seem, that the search which was so evidently making, was without a sufficient object; for at the expiration of half an hour the different individuals of the band began to return singly, gloomy and sullen, like men who were disappointed.

"Our time is at hand," observed the trapper, who noted the smallest incident, or the slightest indication of hostility among the savages:

"we are now to be questioned; and if I know any thing of the policy of our case, I should say it would be wise to choose one among us to hold the discourse, in order that our testimony may agree. And furthermore, if an opinion from one as old and as worthless as a hunter of fourscore, is to be regarded, I would just venture to say, that man should be the one most skilled in the natur' of an Indian, and that he should also know something of their language.--Are you acquainted with the tongue of the Siouxes, friend?"

"Swarm your own hive," returned the discontented bee-hunter. "You are good at buzzing, old trapper, if you are good at nothing else."

"'Tis the gift of youth to be rash and heady," the trapper calmly retorted. "The day has been, boy, when my blood was like your own, too swift and too hot to run quietly in my veins. But what will it profit to talk of silly risks and foolish acts at this time of life! A grey head should cover a brain of reason, and not the tongue of a boaster."

"True, true," whispered Ellen; "and we have other things to attend to now! Here comes the Indian to put his questions."

The girl, whose apprehensions had quickened her senses, was not deceived. She was yet speaking when a tall, half naked savage, approached the spot where they stood, and after examining the whole party as closely as the dim light permitted, for more than a minute in perfect stillness, he gave the usual salutation in the harsh and guttural tones of his own language. The trapper replied as well as he could, which it seems was sufficiently well to be understood. In order to escape the imputation of pedantry we shall render the substance, and, so far as it is possible, the form of the dialogue that succeeded, into the English tongue.

"Have the pale-faces eaten their own buffaloes, and taken the skins from all their own beavers," continued the savage, allowing the usual moment of decorum to elapse, after the words of greeting, before he again spoke, "that they come to count how many are left among the Pawnees?"

"Some of us are here to buy, and some to sell," returned the trapper; "but none will follow, if they hear it is not safe to come nigh the lodge of a Sioux."

"The Siouxes are thieves, and they live among the snow; why do we talk of a people who are so far, when we are in the country of the Pawnees?"

"If the Pawnees are the owners of this land, then white and red are here by equal right."

"Have not the pale-faces stolen enough from the red men, that you come so far to carry a lie? I have said that this is a hunting-ground of my tribe."

"My right to be here is equal to your own," the trapper rejoined, with undisturbed coolness; "I do not speak as I might--it is better to be silent. The Pawnees and the white men are brothers, but a Sioux dare not show his face in the village of the Loups."

"The Dahcotahs are men!" exclaimed the savage, fiercely; forgetting in

his anger to maintain the character he had assumed, and using the appellation of which his nation was most proud; "the Dahcotahs have no fear! Speak; what brings you so far from the villages of the pale-faces?"

"I have seen the sun rise and set on many councils, and have heard the words of wise men. Let your chiefs come, and my mouth shall not be shut."

"I am a great chief!" said the savage, affecting an air of offended dignity. "Do you take me for an Assiniboine? Weucha is a warrior often named, and much believed!"

"Am I a fool not to know a burnt-wood Teton?" demanded the trapper, with a steadiness that did great credit to his nerves. "Go; it is dark, and you do not see that my head is grey!"

The Indian now appeared convinced that he had adopted too shallow an artifice to deceive one so practised as the man he addressed, and he was deliberating what fiction he should next invent, in order to obtain his real object, when a slight commotion among the band put an end at once to all his schemes. Casting his eyes behind him, as if fearful of a speedy interruption, he said, in tones much less pretending than those he had first resorted to--

"Give Weucha the milk of the Long-knives, and he will sing your name in the ears of the great men of his tribe."

"Go," repeated the trapper, motioning him away, with strong disgust. "Your young men are speaking of Mahtoree. My words are for the ears of a chief."

The savage cast a look at the other, which, notwithstanding the dim light, was sufficiently indicative of implacable hostility. He then stole away among his fellows, anxious to conceal the counterfeit he had attempted to practise, no less than the treachery he had contemplated against a fair division of the spoils, from the man named by the trapper, whom he now also knew to be approaching, by the manner in which his name passed from one to another, in the band. He had hardly disappeared before a warrior of powerful frame advanced out of the dark circle, and placed himself before the captives, with that high and proud bearing for which a distinguished Indian chief is ever so remarkable. He was followed by all the party, who arranged themselves around his person, in a deep and respectful silence.

"The earth is very large," the chief commenced, after a pause of that true dignity which his counterfeit had so miserably affected; "why can the children of my great white father never find room on it?"

"Some among them have heard that their friends in the prairies are in want of many things," returned the trapper; "and they have come to see if it be true. Some want, in their turns, what the red men are willing to sell, and they come to make their friends rich, with powder and blankets."

"Do traders cross the big river with empty hands?"

"Our hands are empty because your young men thought we were tired, and

they have lightened us of our load. They were mistaken; I am old, but I am still strong."

"It cannot be. Your load has fallen in the prairies. Show my young men the place, that they may pick it up before the Pawnees find it."

"The path to the spot is crooked, and it is night. The hour is come for sleep," said the trapper, with perfect composure. "Bid your warriors go over yonder hill; there is water and there is wood; let them light their fires and sleep with warm feet. When the sun comes again I will speak to you."

A low murmur, but one that was clearly indicative of dissatisfaction, passed among the attentive listeners, and served to inform the old man that he had not been sufficiently wary in proposing a measure that he intended should notify the travellers in the brake of the presence of their dangerous neighbours. Mahtoree, however, without betraying, in the slightest degree, the excitement which was so strongly exhibited by his companions, continued the discourse in the same lofty manner as before.

"I know that my friend is rich," he said; "that he has many warriors not far off, and that horses are plentier with him, than dogs among the red-skins."

"You see my warriors, and my horses."

"What! has the woman the feet of a Dahcotah, that she can walk for thirty nights in the prairies, and not fall! I know the red men of the woods make long marches on foot, but we, who live where the eye cannot see from one lodge to another, love our horses."

The trapper now hesitated, in his turn. He was perfectly aware that deception, if detected, might prove dangerous; and, for one of his pursuits and character, he was strongly troubled with an unaccommodating regard for the truth. But, recollecting that he controlled the fate of others as well as of himself, he determined to let things take their course, and to permit the Dahcotah chief to deceive himself if he would.

"The women of the Siouzes and of the white men are not of the same wigwam," he answered evasively. "Would a Teton warrior make his wife greater than himself? I know he would not; and yet my ears have heard that there are lands where the councils are held by squaws."

Another slight movement in the dark circle apprised the trapper that his declaration was not received without surprise, if entirely without distrust. The chief alone seemed unmoved; nor was he disposed to relax from the loftiness and high dignity of his air.

"My white fathers who live on the great lakes have declared," he said, "that their brothers towards the rising sun are not men; and now I know they did not lie! Go--what is a nation whose chief is a squaw! Are you the dog and not the husband of this woman?"

"I am neither. Never did I see her face before this day. She came into the prairies because they had told her a great and generous nation called the Dahcotahs lived there, and she wished to look on men. The women of the pale-faces, like the women of the Siouzes, open their

eyes to see things that are new; but she is poor, like myself, and she will want corn and buffaloes, if you take away the little that she and her friend still have."

"My ears listen to many wicked lies!" exclaimed the Teton warrior, in a voice so stern that it startled even his red auditors. "Am I a woman? Has not a Dahcotah eyes? Tell me, white hunter; who are the men of your colour, that sleep near the fallen trees?"

As he spoke, the indignant chief pointed in the direction of Ishmael's encampment, leaving the trapper no reason to doubt, that the superior industry and sagacity of this man had effected a discovery, which had eluded the search of the rest of his party. Notwithstanding his regret at an event that might prove fatal to the sleepers, and some little vexation at having been so completely outwitted, in the dialogue just related, the old man continued to maintain his air of inflexible composure.

"It may be true," he answered, "that white men are sleeping in the prairie. If my brother says it, it is true; but what men thus trust to the generosity of the Tetons, I cannot tell. If there be strangers asleep, send your young men to wake them up, and let them say why they are here; every pale-face has a tongue." The chief shook his head with a wild and fierce smile, answering abruptly, as he turned away to put an end to the conference--

"The Dahcotahs are a wise race, and Mahtoree is their chief! He will not call to the strangers, that they may rise and speak to him with their carbines. He will whisper softly in their ears. When this is done, let the men of their own colour come and awake them!"

As he uttered these words, and turned on his heel, a low and approving laugh passed around the dark circle, which instantly broke its order and followed him to a little distance from the stand of the captives, where those who might presume to mingle opinions with so great a warrior again gathered about him in consultation. Weucha profited by the occasion to renew his importunities; but the trapper, who had discovered how great a counterfeit he was, shook him off in displeasure. An end was, however, more effectually put to the annoyance of this malignant savage, by a mandate for the whole party, including men and beasts, to change their positions. The movement was made in dead silence, and with an order that would have done credit to more enlightened beings. A halt, however, was soon made; and when the captives had time to look about them, they found they were in view of the low, dark outline of the copse, near which lay the slumbering party of Ishmael.

Here another short but grave and deliberative consultation was held.

The beasts, which seemed trained to such covert and silent attacks, were once more placed under the care of keepers, who, as before, were charged with the duty of watching the prisoners. The mind of the trapper was in no degree relieved from the uneasiness which was, at each instant, getting a stronger possession of him, when he found Weucha was placed nearest to his own person, and, as it appeared by the air of triumph and authority he assumed, at the head of the guard also. The savage, however, who doubtless had his secret instructions, was content, for the present, with making a significant gesture with his tomahawk, which menaced death to Ellen. After admonishing in this

expressive manner his male captives of the fate that would instantly attend their female companion, on the slightest alarm proceeding from any of the party, he was content to maintain a rigid silence. This unexpected forbearance, on the part of Weucha, enabled the trapper and his two associates to give their undivided attention to the little that might be seen of the interesting movements which were passing in their front.

Mahtoree took the entire disposition of the arrangements on himself. He pointed out the precise situation he wished each individual to occupy, like one intimately acquainted with the qualifications of his respective followers, and he was obeyed with the deference and promptitude with which an Indian warrior is wont to submit to the instructions of his chief, in moments of trial. Some he despatched to the right, and others to the left. Each man departed with the noiseless and quick step peculiar to the race, until all had assumed their allotted stations, with the exception of two chosen warriors, who remained nigh the person of their leader. When the rest had disappeared, Mahtoree turned to these select companions, and intimated by a sign that the critical moment had arrived, when the enterprise he contemplated was to be put in execution.

Each man laid aside the light fowling-piece, which, under the name of a carabine, he carried in virtue of his rank; and divesting himself of every article of exterior or heavy clothing, he stood resembling a dark and fierce looking statue, in the attitude, and nearly in the garb, of nature. Mahtoree assured himself of the right position of his tomahawk, felt that his knife was secure in its sheath of skin, tightened his girdle of wampum and saw that the lacing of his fringed and ornamental leggings was secure, and likely to offer no impediment to his exertions. Thus prepared at all points, and ready for his desperate undertaking, the Teton gave the signal to proceed.

The three advanced in a line with the encampment of the travellers, until, in the dim light by which they were seen, their dusky forms were nearly lost to the eyes of the prisoners. Here they paused, looking around them like men who deliberate and ponder long on the consequences before they take a desperate leap. Then sinking together, they became lost in the grass of the prairie.

It is not difficult to imagine the distress and anxiety of the different spectators of these threatening movements. Whatever might be the reasons of Ellen for entertaining no strong attachment to the family in which she has first been seen by the reader, the feelings of her sex, and, perhaps, some lingering seeds of kindness, predominated. More than once she felt tempted to brave the awful and instant danger that awaited such an offence, and to raise her feeble, and, in truth, impotent voice in warning. So strong, indeed, and so very natural was the inclination, that she would most probably have put it in execution, but for the often repeated though whispered remonstrances of Paul Hover. In the breast of the young bee-hunter himself, there was a singular union of emotions. His first and chiefest solicitude was certainly in behalf of his gentle and dependent companion; but the sense of her danger was mingled, in the breast of the reckless woodsman, with a consciousness of a high and wild, and by no means an unpleasant, excitement. Though united to the emigrants by ties still less binding than those of Ellen, he longed to hear the crack of their rifles, and, had occasion offered, he would gladly have been among the first to rush to their rescue. There were, in truth, moments when he

felt in his turn an impulse, that was nearly resistless, to spring forward and awake the unconscious sleepers; but a glance at Ellen would serve to recall his tottering prudence, and to admonish him of the consequences. The trapper alone remained calm and observant, as if nothing that involved his personal comfort or safety had occurred. His ever-moving, vigilant eyes, watched the smallest change, with the composure of one too long inured to scenes of danger to be easily moved, and with an expression of cool determination which denoted the intention he actually harboured, of profiting by the smallest oversight on the part of the captors.

In the mean time the Teton warriors had not been idle. Profiting by the high fog which grew in the bottoms, they had wormed their way through the matted grass, like so many treacherous serpents stealing on their prey, until the point was gained, where an extraordinary caution became necessary to their further advance. Mahtoree, alone, had occasionally elevated his dark, grim countenance above the herbage, straining his eye-balls to penetrate the gloom which skirted the border of the brake. In these momentary glances he gained sufficient knowledge, added to that he had obtained in his former search, to be the perfect master of the position of his intended victims, though he was still profoundly ignorant of their numbers, and of their means of defence.

His efforts to possess himself of the requisite knowledge concerning these two latter and essential points were, however, completely baffled by the stillness of the camp, which lay in a quiet as deep as if it were literally a place of the dead. Too wary and distrustful to rely, in circumstances of so much doubt, on the discretion of any less firm and crafty than himself, the Dahcotah bade his companions remain where they lay, and pursued the adventure alone.

The progress of Mahtoree was now slow, and to one less accustomed to such a species of exercise, it would have proved painfully laborious. But the advance of the wily snake itself is not more certain or noiseless than was his approach. He drew his form, foot by foot, through the bending grass, pausing at each movement to catch the smallest sound that might betray any knowledge, on the part of the travellers, of his proximity. He succeeded, at length, in dragging himself out of the sickly light of the moon, into the shadows of the brake, where not only his own dark person was much less liable to be seen, but where the surrounding objects became more distinctly visible to his keen and active glances.

Here the Teton paused long and warily to make his observations, before he ventured further. His position enabled him to bring the whole encampment, with its tent, wagons, and lodges, into a dark but clearly marked profile; furnishing a clue by which the practised warrior was led to a tolerably accurate estimate of the force he was about to encounter. Still an unnatural silence pervaded the spot, as if men suppressed even the quiet breathings of sleep, in order to render the appearance of their confidence more evident. The chief bent his head to the earth, and listened intently. He was about to raise it again, in disappointment, when the long drawn and trembling respiration of one who slumbered imperfectly met his ear. The Indian was too well skilled in all the means of deception to become himself the victim of any common artifice. He knew the sound to be natural, by its peculiar quivering, and he hesitated no longer.

A man of nerves less tried than those of the fierce and conquering Mahtoree would have been keenly sensible of all the hazard he incurred. The reputation of those hardy and powerful white adventurers, who so often penetrated the wilds inhabited by his people, was well known to him; but while he drew nigher, with the respect and caution that a brave enemy never fails to inspire, it was with the vindictive animosity of a red man, jealous and resentful of the inroads of the stranger.

Turning from the line of his former route, the Teton dragged himself directly towards the margin of the thicket. When this material object was effected in safety, he arose to his seat, and took a better survey of his situation. A single moment served to apprise him of the place where the unsuspecting traveller lay. The reader will readily anticipate that the savage had succeeded in gaining a dangerous proximity to one of those slothful sons of Ishmael, who were deputed to watch over the isolated encampment of the travellers.

When certain that he was undiscovered, the Dahcotah raised his person again, and bending forward, he moved his dark visage above the face of the sleeper, in that sort of wanton and subtle manner with which the reptile is seen to play about its victim before it strikes. Satisfied at length, not only of the condition but of the character of the stranger, Mahtoree was in the act of withdrawing his head, when a slight movement of the sleeper announced the symptoms of reviving consciousness. The savage seized the knife which hung at his girdle, and in an instant it was poised above the breast of the young emigrant. Then changing his purpose, with an action as rapid as his own flashing thoughts, he sunk back behind the trunk of the fallen tree against which the other reclined, and lay in its shadow, as dark, as motionless, and apparently as insensible as the wood itself.

The slothful sentinel opened his heavy eyes, and gazing upward for a moment at the hazy heavens, he made an extraordinary exertion, and raised his powerful frame from the support of the log. Then he looked about him, with an air of something like watchfulness, suffering his dull glances to run over the misty objects of the encampment until they finally settled on the distant and dim field of the open prairie. Meeting with nothing more attractive than the same faint outlines of swell and interval, which every where rose before his drowsy eyes, he changed his position so as completely to turn his back on his dangerous neighbour, and suffered his person to sink sluggishly down into its former recumbent attitude. A long, and, on the part of the Teton, an anxious and painful silence succeeded, before the deep breathing of the traveller again announced that he was indulging in his slumbers. The savage was, however, far too jealous of a counterfeit to trust to the first appearance of sleep. But the fatigues of a day of unusual toil lay too heavy on the sentinel to leave the other long in doubt. Still the motion with which Mahtoree again raised himself to his knees was so noiseless and guarded, that even a vigilant observer might have hesitated to believe he stirred. The change was, however, at length effected, and the Dahcotah chief then bent again over his enemy, without having produced a noise louder than that of the cotton-wood leaf which fluttered at his side in the currents of the passing air.

Mahtoree now felt himself master of the sleeper's fate. At the same time that he scanned the vast proportions and athletic limbs of the youth, in that sort of admiration which physical excellence seldom

fails to excite in the breast of a savage, he coolly prepared to extinguish the principle of vitality which could alone render them formidable. After making himself sure of the seat of life, by gently removing the folds of the intervening cloth, he raised his keen weapon, and was about to unite his strength and skill in the impending blow, when the young man threw his brawny arm carelessly backward, exhibiting in the action the vast volume of its muscles.

The sagacious and wary Teton paused. It struck his acute faculties that sleep was less dangerous to him, at that moment, than even death itself might prove. The smallest noise, the agony of struggling, with which such a frame would probably relinquish its hold of life, suggested themselves to his rapid thoughts, and were all present to his experienced senses. He looked back into the encampment, turned his head into the thicket, and glanced his glowing eyes abroad into the wild and silent prairies. Bending once more over the respited victim, he assured himself that he was sleeping heavily, and then abandoned his immediate purpose in obedience alone to the suggestions of a more crafty policy.

The retreat of Mahtoree was as still and guarded as had been his approach. He now took the direction of the encampment, stealing along the margin of the brake, as a cover into which he might easily plunge at the smallest alarm. The drapery of the solitary hut attracted his notice in passing. After examining the whole of its exterior, and listening with painful intensity, in order to gather counsel from his ears, the savage ventured to raise the cloth at the bottom, and to thrust his dark visage beneath. It might have been a minute before the Teton chief drew back, and seated himself with the whole of his form without the linen tenement. Here he sat, seemingly brooding over his discovery, for many moments, in rigid inaction. Then he resumed his crouching attitude, and once more projected his visage beyond the covering of the tent. His second visit to the interior was longer, and, if possible, more ominous than the first. But it had, like every thing else, its termination, and the savage again withdrew his glaring eyes from the secrets of the place.

Mahtoree had drawn his person many yards from the spot, in his slow progress towards the cluster of objects which pointed out the centre of the position, before he again stopped. He made another pause, and looked back at the solitary little dwelling he had left, as if doubtful whether he should not return. But the chevaux-de-frise of branches now lay within reach of his arm, and the very appearance of precaution it presented, as it announced the value of the effects it encircled, tempted his cupidity, and induced him to proceed.

The passage of the savage, through the tender and brittle limbs of the cotton-wood, could be likened only to the sinuous and noiseless winding of the reptiles which he imitated. When he had effected his object, and had taken an instant to become acquainted with the nature of the localities within the enclosure, the Teton used the precaution to open a way through which he might make a swift retreat. Then raising himself on his feet, he stalked through the encampment, like the master of evil, seeking whom and what he should first devote to his fell purposes. He had already ascertained the contents of the lodge in which were collected the woman and her young children, and had passed several gigantic frames, stretched on different piles of brush, which happily for him lay in unconscious helplessness, when he reached the spot occupied by Ishmael in person. It could not escape

the sagacity of one like Mahtoree, that he had now within his power the principal man among the travellers. He stood long hovering above the recumbent and Herculean form of the emigrant, keenly debating in his own mind the chances of his enterprise, and the most effectual means of reaping its richest harvest.

He sheathed the knife, which, under the hasty and burning impulse of his thoughts, he had been tempted to draw, and was passing on, when Ishmael turned in his lair, and demanded roughly who was moving before his half-opened eyes. Nothing short of the readiness and cunning of a savage could have evaded the crisis. Imitating the gruff tones and nearly unintelligible sounds he heard, Mahtoree threw his body heavily on the earth, and appeared to dispose himself to sleep. Though the whole movement was seen by Ishmael, in a sort of stupid observation, the artifice was too bold and too admirably executed to fail. The drowsy father closed his eyes, and slept heavily, with this treacherous inmate in the very bosom of his family.

It was necessary for the Teton to maintain the position he had taken, for many long and weary minutes, in order to make sure that he was no longer watched. Though his body lay so motionless, his active mind was not idle. He profited by the delay to mature a plan which he intended should put the whole encampment, including both its effects and their proprietors, entirely at his mercy. The instant he could do so with safety, the indefatigable savage was again in motion. He took his way towards the slight pen which contained the domestic animals, worming himself along the ground in his former subtle and guarded manner.

The first animal he encountered among the beasts occasioned a long and hazardous delay. The weary creature, perhaps conscious, through its secret instinct, that in the endless wastes of the prairies its surest protector was to be found in man, was so exceedingly docile as quietly to submit to the close examination it was doomed to undergo. The hand of the wandering Teton passed over the downy coat, the meek countenance, and the slender limbs of the gentle creature, with untiring curiosity; but he finally abandoned the prize, as useless in his predatory expeditions, and offering too little temptation to the appetite. As soon, however, as he found himself among the beasts of burden, his gratification was extreme, and it was with difficulty that he restrained the customary ejaculations of pleasure that were more than once on the point of bursting from his lips. Here he lost sight of the hazards by which he had gained access to his dangerous position; and the watchfulness of the wary and long practised warrior was momentarily forgotten in the exultation of the savage.

CHAPTER V

Why, worthy father, what have we to lose?

--The law

Protects us not. Then why should we be tender

To let an arrogant piece of flesh threat us!

Play judge and executioner.

--Cymbeline.

While the Teton thus enacted his subtle and characteristic part, not a sound broke the stillness of the surrounding prairie. The whole band lay at their several posts, waiting, with the well-known patience of

the natives, for the signal which was to summon them to action. To the eyes of the anxious spectators who occupied the little eminence, already described as the position of the captives, the scene presented the broad, solemn view of a waste, dimly lighted by the glimmering rays of a clouded moon. The place of the encampment was marked by a gloom deeper than that which faintly shadowed out the courses of the bottoms, and here and there a brighter streak tinged the rolling summits of the ridges. As for the rest, it was the deep, imposing quiet of a desert.

But to those who so well knew how much was brooding beneath this mantle of stillness and night, it was a scene of high and wild excitement. Their anxiety gradually increased, as minute after minute passed away, and not the smallest sound of life arose out of the calm and darkness which enveloped the brake. The breathing of Paul grew louder and deeper, and more than once Ellen trembled at she knew not what, as she felt the quivering of his active frame, while she leaned dependently on his arm for support.

The shallow honesty, as well as the besetting infirmity of Weucha, have already been exhibited. The reader, therefore, will not be surprised to learn that he was the first to forget the regulations he had himself imposed. It was at the precise moment when we left Mahtoree yielding to his nearly ungovernable delight, as he surveyed the number and quality of Ishmael's beasts of burden, that the man he had selected to watch his captives chose to indulge in the malignant pleasure of tormenting those it was his duty to protect. Bending his head nigh the ear of the trapper, the savage rather muttered than whispered--

"If the Tetons lose their great chief by the hands of the Long-knives[*], old shall die as well as young!"

[*] The whites are so called by the Indians, from their swords.

"Life is the gift of the Wahcondah," was the unmoved reply. "The burnt-wood warrior must submit to his laws, as well as his other children. Men only die when he chooses; and no Dahcotah can change the hour."

"Look!" returned the savage, thrusting the blade of his knife before the face of his captive. "Weucha is the Wahcondah of a dog."

The old man raised his eyes to the fierce visage of his keeper, and, for a moment, a gleam of honest and powerful disgust shot from their deep cells; but it instantly passed away, leaving in its place an expression of commiseration, if not of sorrow.

"Why should one made in the real image of God suffer his natur' to be provoked by a mere effigy of reason?" he said in English, and in tones much louder than those in which Weucha had chosen to pitch the conversation. The latter profited by the unintentional offence of his captive, and, seizing him by the thin, grey locks, that fell from beneath his cap, was on the point of passing the blade of his knife in malignant triumph around their roots, when a long, shrill yell rent the air, and was instantly echoed from the surrounding waste, as if a thousand demons opened their throats in common at the summons. Weucha relinquished his grasp, and uttered a cry of exultation.

"Now!" shouted Paul, unable to control his impatience any longer, "now, old Ishmael, is the time to show the native blood of Kentucky! Fire low, boys--level into the swales, for the red skins are settling to the very earth!"

His voice was, however, lost, or rather unheeded, in the midst of the shrieks, shouts, and yells that were, by this time, bursting from fifty mouths on every side of him. The guards still maintained their posts at the side of the captives, but it was with that sort of difficulty with which steeds are restrained at the starting-post, when expecting the signal to commence the trial of speed. They tossed their arms wildly in the air, leaping up and down more like exulting children than sober men, and continued to utter the most frantic cries.

In the midst of this tumultuous disorder a rushing sound was heard, similar to that which might be expected to precede the passage of a flight of buffaloes, and then came the flocks and cattle of Ishmael in one confused and frightened drove.

"They have robbed the squatter of his beasts!" said the attentive trapper. "The reptiles have left him as hoofless as a beaver!" He was yet speaking, when the whole body of the terrified animals rose the little acclivity, and swept by the place where he stood, followed by a band of dusky and demon-like looking figures, who pressed madly on their rear.

The impulse was communicated to the Teton horses, long accustomed to sympathise in the untutored passions of their owners, and it was with difficulty that the keepers were enabled to restrain their impatience. At this moment, when all eyes were directed to the passing whirlwind of men and beasts, the trapper caught the knife from the hands of his inattentive keeper, with a power that his age would have seemed to contradict, and, at a single blow, severed the thong of hide which connected the whole of the drove. The wild animals snorted with joy and terror, and tearing the earth with their heels, they dashed away into the broad prairies, in a dozen different directions.

Weucha turned upon his assailant with the ferocity and agility of a tiger. He felt for the weapon of which he had been so suddenly deprived, fumbled with impotent haste for the handle of his tomahawk, and at the same moment glanced his eyes after the flying cattle, with the longings of a Western Indian. The struggle between thirst for vengeance and cupidity was severe but short. The latter quickly predominated in the bosom of one whose passions were proverbially grovelling; and scarcely a moment intervened between the flight of the animals and the swift pursuit of the guards. The trapper had continued calmly facing his foe, during the instant of suspense that succeeded his hardy act; and now that Weucha was seen following his companions, he pointed after the dark train, saying, with his deep and nearly inaudible laugh--

"Red-natur' is red-natur', let it show itself on a prairie, or in a forest! A knock on the head would be the smallest reward to him who should take such a liberty with a Christian sentinel; but there goes the Teton after his horses as if he thought two legs as good as four in such a race! And yet the imps will have every hoof of them afore the day sets in, because it's reason ag'in instinct. Poor reason, I allow; but still there is a great deal of the man in an Indian. Ah's

me! your Delawares were the redskins of which America might boast; but few and scattered is that mighty people, now! Well! the traveller may just make his pitch where he is; he has plenty of water, though nature has cheated him of the pleasure of stripping the 'arth of its lawful trees. He has seen the last of his four-footed creatures, or I am but little skilled in Sioux cunning."

"Had we not better join the party of Ishmael?" said the bee-hunter. "There will be a regular fight about this matter, or the old fellow has suddenly grown chicken-hearted."

"No--no--no," hastily exclaimed Ellen.

She was stopped by the trapper, who laid his hand gently on her mouth, as he answered--

"Hist--hist!--the sound of voices might bring us into danger. Is your friend," he added, turning to Paul, "a man of spirit enough?"

"Don't call the squatter a friend of mine!" interrupted the youth. "I never yet harboured with one who could not show hand and zeal for the land which fed him."

"Well--well. Let it then be acquaintance. Is he a man to maintain his own, stoutly by dint of powder and lead?"

"His own! ay, and that which is not his own, too! Can you tell me, old trapper, who held the rifle that did the deed for the sheriff's deputy, that thought to rout the unlawful settlers who had gathered nigh the Buffalo lick in old Kentucky? I had lined a beautiful swarm that very day into the hollow of a dead beech, and there lay the people's officer at its roots, with a hole directly through the 'grace of God;' which he carried in his jacket pocket covering his heart, as if he thought a bit of sheepskin was a breastplate against a squatter's bullet! Now, Ellen, you needn't be troubled for it never strictly was brought home to him; and there were fifty others who had pitched in that neighbourhood with just the same authority from the law."

The poor girl shuddered, struggling powerfully to suppress the sigh which arose in spite of her efforts, as if from the very bottom of her heart.

Thoroughly satisfied that he understood the character of the emigrants, by the short but comprehensive description conveyed in Paul's reply, the old man raised no further question concerning the readiness of Ishmael to revenge his wrongs, but rather followed the train of thought which was suggested to his experience, by the occasion.

"Each one knows the ties which bind him to his fellow-creatures best," he answered. "Though it is greatly to be mourned that colour, and property, and tongue, and l'arning should make so wide a difference in those who, after all, are but the children of one father! Howsomever," he continued, by a transition not a little characteristic of the pursuits and feelings of the man, "as this is a business in which there is much more likelihood of a fight than need for a sermon, it is best to be prepared for what may follow.--Hush! there is a movement below; it is an equal chance that we are seen."

"The family is stirring," cried Ellen, with a tremor that announced nearly as much terror at the approach of her friends, as she had before manifested at the presence of her enemies. "Go, Paul, leave me. You, at least, must not be seen!"

"If I leave you, Ellen, in this desert before I see you safe in the care of old Ishmael, at least, may I never hear the hum of another bee, or, what is worse, fail in sight to line him to his hive!"

"You forget this good old man. He will not leave me. Though I am sure, Paul, we have parted before, where there has been more of a desert than this."

"Never! These Indians may come whooping back, and then where are you! Half way to the Rocky Mountains before a man can fairly strike the line of your flight. What think you, old trapper? How long may it be before these Tetons, as you call them, will be coming for the rest of old Ishmael's goods and chattels?"

"No fear of them," returned the old man, laughing in his own peculiar and silent manner; "I warrant me the devils will be scampering after their beasts these six hours yet! Listen! you may hear them in the willow bottoms at this very moment; ay, your real Sioux cattle will run like so many long-legged elks. Hist! crouch again into the grass, down with ye both; as I'm a miserable piece of clay, I heard the ticking of a gunlock!"

The trapper did not allow his companions time to hesitate, but dragging them both after him, he nearly buried his own person in the fog of the prairie, while he was speaking. It was fortunate that the senses of the aged hunter remained so acute, and that he had lost none of his readiness of action. The three were scarcely bowed to the ground, when their ears were saluted with the well-known, sharp, short, reports of the western rifle, and instantly, the whizzing of the ragged lead was heard, buzzing within dangerous proximity of their heads.

"Well done, young chips! well done, old block!" whispered Paul, whose spirits no danger nor situation could entirely depress. "As pretty a volley, as one would wish to bear on the wrong end of a rifle! What d'ye say, trapper! here is likely to be a three-cornered war. Shall I give 'em as good as they send?"

"Give them nothing but fair words," returned the other, hastily, "or you are both lost."

"I'm not certain it would much mend the matter, if I were to speak with my tongue instead of the piece," said Paul, in a tone half jocular half bitter.

"For the sake of heaven, do not let them hear you!" cried Ellen. "Go, Paul, go; you can easily quit us now!"

Several shots in quick succession, each sending its dangerous messenger, still nearer than the preceding discharge, cut short her speech, no less in prudence than in terror.

"This must end," said the trapper, rising with the dignity of one bent

only on the importance of his object. "I know not what need ye may have, children, to fear those you should both love and honour, but something must be done to save your lives. A few hours more or less can never be missed from the time of one who has already numbered so many days; therefore I will advance. Here is a clear space around you. Profit by it as you need, and may God bless and prosper each of you, as ye deserve!"

Without waiting for any reply, the trapper walked boldly down the declivity in his front, taking the direction of the encampment, neither quickening his pace in trepidation, nor suffering it to be retarded by fear. The light of the moon fell brighter for a moment on his tall, gaunt, form, and served to warn the emigrants of his approach. Indifferent, however to this unfavourable circumstance, he held his way, silently and steadily towards the copse, until a threatening voice met him with a challenge of--

"Who comes; friend or foe?"

"Friend," was the reply; "one who has lived too long to disturb the close of life with quarrels."

"But not so long as to forget the tricks of his youth," said Ishmael, rearing his huge frame from beneath the slight covering of a low bush, and meeting the trapper, face to face; "old man, you have brought this tribe of red devils upon us, and to-morrow you will be sharing the booty."

"What have you lost?" calmly demanded the trapper.

"Eight as good mares as ever travelled in gears, besides a foal that is worth thirty of the brightest Mexicans that bear the face of the King of Spain. Then the woman has not a cloven hoof for her dairy, or her loom, and I believe even the grunners, foot sore as they be, are ploughing the prairie. And now, stranger," he added, dropping the butt of his rifle on the hard earth, with a violence and clatter that would have intimidated one less firm than the man he addressed, "how many of these creatures may fall to your lot?"

"Horses have I never craved, nor even used; though few have journeyed over more of the wide lands of America than myself, old and feeble as I seem. But little use is there for a horse among the hills and woods of York--that is, as York was, but as I greatly fear York is no longer --as for woollen covering and cow's milk, I covet no such womanly fashions! The beasts of the field give me food and raiment. No, I crave no cloth better than the skin of a deer, nor any meat richer than his flesh."

The sincere manner of the trapper, as he uttered this simple vindication, was not entirely thrown away on the emigrant, whose dull nature was gradually quickening into a flame, that might speedily have burst forth with dangerous violence. He listened like one who doubted, not entirely convinced: and he muttered between his teeth the denunciation, with which a moment before he intended to precede the summary vengeance he had certainly meditated.

"This is brave talking," he at length grumbled; "but to my judgment, too lawyer-like, for a straight forward, fair-weather, and foul-weather hunter."

"I claim to be no better than a trapper," the other meekly answered.

"Hunter or trapper--there is little difference. I have come, old man, into these districts because I found the law sitting too tight upon me, and am not over fond of neighbours who can't settle a dispute without troubling a justice and twelve men; but I didn't come to be robb'd of my plunder, and then to say thank'ee to the man who did it!"

"He, who ventures far into the prairies, must abide by the ways of its owners."

"Owners!" echoed the squatter, "I am as rightful an owner of the land I stand on, as any governor in the States! Can you tell me, stranger, where the law or the reason, is to be found, which says that one man shall have a section, or a town, or perhaps a county to his use, and another have to beg for earth to make his grave in? This is not nature, and I deny that it is law. That is, your legal law."

"I cannot say that you are wrong," returned the trapper, whose opinions on this important topic, though drawn from very different premises, were in singular accordance with those of his companion, "and I have often thought and said as much, when and where I have believed my voice could be heard. But your beasts are stolen by them who claim to be masters of all they find in the deserts."

"They had better not dispute that matter with a man who knows better," said the other in a portentous voice, though it seemed deep and sluggish as he who spoke.

"I call myself a fair trader, and one who gives to his chaps as good as he receives. You saw the Indians?"

"I did--they held me a prisoner, while they stole into your camp."

"It would have been more like a white man and a Christian, to have let me known as much in better season," retorted Ishmael, casting another ominous sidelong glance at the trapper, as if still meditating evil. "I am not much given to call every man, I fall in with, cousin, but colour should be something, when Christians meet in such a place as this. But what is done, is done, and cannot be mended, by words. Come out of your ambush, boys; here is no one but the old man: he has eaten of my bread, and should be our friend; though there is such good reason to suspect him of harbouring with our enemies."

The trapper made no reply to the harsh suspicion which the other did not scruple to utter without the smallest delicacy, notwithstanding the explanations and denials to which he had just listened. The summons of the unnurtured squatter brought an immediate accession to their party. Four or five of his sons made their appearance from beneath as many covers, where they had been posted under the impression that the figures they had seen, on the swell of the prairie, were a part of the Sioux band. As each man approached, and dropped his rifle into the hollow of his arm, he cast an indolent but enquiring glance at the stranger, though neither of them expressed the least curiosity to know whence he had come or why he was there. This forbearance, however, proceeded only in part, from the sluggishness of their common temper; for long and frequent experience in scenes of a similar character, had taught them the virtue of discretion. The

trapper endured their sullen scrutiny with the steadiness of one as practised as themselves, and with the entire composure of innocence. Content with the momentary examination he had made, the eldest of the group, who was in truth the delinquent sentinel by whose remissness the wily Mahtoree had so well profited, turned towards his father and said bluntly--

"If this man is all that is left of the party I saw on the upland, yonder, we haven't altogether thrown away our ammunition."

"Asa, you are right," said the father, turning suddenly on the

trapper, a lost idea being recalled by the hint of his son. "How is it, stranger; there were three of you, just now, or there is no virtue in moonlight?"

"If you had seen the Tetons racing across the prairies, like so many black-looking evil ones, on the heels of your cattle, my friend, it would have been an easy matter to have fancied them a thousand."

"Ay, for a town bred boy, or a skeary woman; though for that matter, there is old Esther; she has no more fear of a red-skin than of a suckling cub, or of a wolf pup. I'll warrant ye, had your thievish devils made their push by the light of the sun, the good woman would have been smartly at work among them, and the Siouzes would have found she was not given to part with her cheese and her butter without a price. But there'll come a time, stranger, right soon, when justice will have its dues, and that too, without the help of what is called the law. We ar' of a slow breed, it may be said, and it is often said, of us; but slow is sure; and there ar' few men living, who can say they ever struck a blow, that they did not get one as hard in return, from Ishmael Bush."

"Then has Ishmael Bush followed the instinct of the beasts rather than the principle which ought to belong to his kind," returned the stubborn trapper. "I have struck many a blow myself, but never have I felt the same ease of mind that of right belongs to a man who follows his reason, after slaying even a fawn when there was no call for his meat or hide, as I have felt at leaving a Mingo unburied in the woods, when following the trade of open and honest warfare."

"What, you have been a soldier, have you, trapper! I made a forage or two among the Cherokees, when I was a lad myself; and I followed mad Anthony,[*] one season, through the beeches; but there was altogether too much tating and regulating among his troops for me; so I left him without calling on the paymaster to settle my arrearages. Though, as Esther afterwards boasted, she had made such use of the pay-ticket, that the States gained no great sum, by the oversight. You have heard of such a man as mad Anthony, if you tarried long among the soldiers."

[*] Anthony Wayne, a Pennsylvanian distinguished in the war of the revolution, and subsequently against the Indians of the west, for his daring as a general, by which he gained from his followers the title of Mad Anthony. General Wayne was the son of the person mentioned in the life of West as commanding the regiment which excited his military ardour.

"I fou't my last battle, as I hope, under his orders," returned the trapper, a gleam of sunshine shooting from his dim eyes, as if the

event was recollected with pleasure, and then a sudden shade of sorrow succeeding, as though he felt a secret admonition against dwelling on the violent scenes in which he had so often been an actor. "I was passing from the States on the sea-shore into these far regions, when I cross'd the trail of his army, and I fell in, on his rear, just as a looker-on; but when they got to blows, the crack of my rifle was heard among the rest, though to my shame it may be said, I never knew the right of the quarrel as well as a man of threescore and ten should know the reason of his acts afore he takes mortal life, which is a gift he never can return!"

"Come, stranger," said the emigrant, his rugged nature a good deal softened when he found that they had fought on the same side in the wild warfare of the west, "it is of small account, what may be the ground-work of the disturbance, when it's a Christian ag'in a savage. We shall hear more of this horse-stealing to-morrow; to-night we can do no wiser or safer thing than to sleep."

So saying, Ishmael deliberately led the way back towards his rifled encampment, and ushered the man, whose life a few minutes before had been in real jeopardy from his resentment, into the presence of his family. Here, with a very few words of explanation, mingled with scarce but ominous denunciations against the plunderers, he made his wife acquainted with the state of things on the prairie, and announced his own determination to compensate himself for his broken rest, by devoting the remainder of the night to sleep.

The trapper gave his ready assent to the measure, and adjusted his gaunt form on the pile of brush that was offered him, with as much composure as a sovereign could resign himself to sleep, in the security of his capital and surrounded by his armed protectors. The old man did not close his eyes, however, until he had assured himself that Ellen Wade was among the females of the family, and that her relation, or lover, whichever he might be, had observed the caution of keeping himself out of view: after which he slept, though with the peculiar watchfulness of one long accustomed to vigilance, even in the hours of deepest night.

CHAPTER VI

He is too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd,
As it were too peregrinate, as I may call it.
--Shakspeare.

The Anglo-American is apt to boast, and not without reason, that his nation may claim a descent more truly honourable than that of any other people whose history is to be credited. Whatever might have been the weaknesses of the original colonists, their virtues have rarely been disputed. If they were superstitious, they were sincerely pious, and, consequently, honest. The descendants of these simple and single-minded provincials have been content to reject the ordinary and artificial means by which honours have been perpetuated in families, and have substituted a standard which brings the individual himself to the ordeal of the public estimation, paying as little deference as may be to those who have gone before him. This forbearance, self-denial, or common sense, or by whatever term it may be thought proper to distinguish the measure, has subjected the nation to the imputation of

having an ignoble origin. Were it worth the enquiry, it would be found that more than a just proportion of the renowned names of the mother-country are, at this hour, to be found in her ci-devant colonies; and it is a fact well known to the few who have wasted sufficient time to become the masters of so unimportant a subject, that the direct descendants of many a failing line, which the policy of England has seen fit to sustain by collateral supporters, are now discharging the simple duties of citizens in the bosom of this republic. The hive has remained stationary, and they who flutter around the venerable straw are wont to claim the empty distinction of antiquity, regardless alike of the frailty of their tenement and of the enjoyments of the numerous and vigorous swarms that are culling the fresher sweets of a virgin world. But as this is a subject which belongs rather to the politician and historian than to the humble narrator of the homebred incidents we are about to reveal, we must confine our reflections to such matters as have an immediate relation to the subject of the tale.

Although the citizen of the United States may claim so just an ancestry, he is far from being exempt from the penalties of his fallen race. Like causes are well known to produce like effects. That tribute, which it would seem nations must ever pay, by way of a weary probation, around the shrine of Ceres, before they can be indulged in her fullest favours, is in some measure exacted in America, from the descendant instead of the ancestor. The march of civilisation with us, has a strong analogy to that of all coming events, which are known "to cast their shadows before." The gradations of society, from that state which is called refined to that which approaches as near barbarity as connection with an intelligent people will readily allow, are to be traced from the bosom of the States, where wealth, luxury and the arts are beginning to seat themselves, to those distant, and ever-receding borders which mark the skirts, and announce the approach, of the nation, as moving mists precede the signs of day.

Here, and here only, is to be found that widely spread, though far from numerous class, which may be at all likened to those who have paved the way for the intellectual progress of nations, in the old world. The resemblance between the American borderer and his European prototype is singular, though not always uniform. Both might be called without restraint; the one being above, the other beyond the reach of the law--brave, because they were inured to dangers--proud, because they were independent, and vindictive, because each was the avenger of his own wrongs. It would be unjust to the borderer to pursue the parallel much farther. He is irreligious, because he has inherited the knowledge that religion does not exist in forms, and his reason rejects mockery. He is not a knight, because he has not the power to bestow distinctions; and he has not the power, because he is the offspring and not the parent of a system. In what manner these several qualities are exhibited, in some of the most strongly marked of the latter class, will be seen in the course of the ensuing narrative.

Ishmael Bush had passed the whole of a life of more than fifty years on the skirts of society. He boasted that he had never dwelt where he might not safely fell every tree he could view from his own threshold; that the law had rarely been known to enter his clearing, and that his ears had never willingly admitted the sound of a church bell. His exertions seldom exceeded his wants, which were peculiar to his class, and rarely failed of being supplied. He had no respect for any learning except that of the leech; because he was ignorant of the application of any other intelligence than such as met the senses. His

deference to this particular branch of science had induced him to listen to the application of a medical man, whose thirst for natural history had led him to the desire of profiting by the migratory propensities of the squatter. This gentleman he had cordially received into his family, or rather under his protection, and they had journeyed together, thus far through the prairies, in perfect harmony: Ishmael often felicitating his wife on the possession of a companion, who would be so serviceable in their new abode, wherever it might chance to be, until the family were thoroughly "acclimated." The pursuits of the naturalist frequently led him, however, for days at a time, from the direct line of the route of the squatter, who rarely seemed to have any other guide than the sun. Most men would have deemed themselves fortunate to have been absent on the perilous occasion of the Sioux inroad, as was Obed Bat, (or as he was fond of hearing himself called, Battius,) M.D. and fellow of several cis-Atlantic learned societies--the adventurous gentleman in question.

Although the sluggish nature of Ishmael was not actually awakened, it was sorely pricked by the liberties which had just been taken with his property. He slept, however, for it was the hour he had allotted to that refreshment, and because he knew how impotent any exertions to recover his effects must prove in the darkness of midnight. He also knew the danger of his present situation too well to hazard what was left in pursuit of that which was lost. Much as the inhabitants of the prairies were known to love horses, their attachment to many other articles, still in the possession of the travellers, was equally well understood. It was a common artifice to scatter the herds, and to profit by the confusion. But Mahtoree had, as it would seem in this particular undervalued the acuteness of the man he had assailed. The phlegm with which the squatter learned his loss, has already been seen, and it now remains to exhibit the results of his more matured determinations.

Though the encampment contained many an eye that was long unclosed, and many an ear that listened greedily to catch the faintest evidence of any new alarm, it lay in deep quiet during the remainder of the night. Silence and fatigue finally performed their accustomed offices, and before the morning all but the sentinels were again buried in sleep. How well these indolent watchers discharged their duties, after the assault, has never been known, inasmuch as nothing occurred to confirm or to disprove their subsequent vigilance.

Just as day, however, began to dawn, and a grey light was falling from the heavens, on the dusky objects of the plain, the half startled, anxious, and yet blooming countenance of Ellen Wade was reared above the confused mass of children, among whom she had clustered on her stolen return to the camp. Arising warily she stepped lightly across the recumbent bodies, and proceeded with the same caution to the utmost limits of the defences of Ishmael. Here she listened, as if she doubted the propriety of venturing further. The pause was only momentary, however; and long before the drowsy eyes of the sentinel, who overlooked the spot where she stood, had time to catch a glimpse of her active form, it had glided along the bottom, and stood on the summit of the nearest eminence.

Ellen now listened intently anxious to catch some other sound, than the breathing of the morning air, which faintly rustled the herbage at her feet. She was about to turn in disappointment from the enquiry, when the tread of human feet making their way through the matted grass

met her ear. Springing eagerly forward, she soon beheld the outlines of a figure advancing up the eminence, on the side opposite to the camp. She had already uttered the name of Paul, and was beginning to speak in the hurried and eager voice with which female affection is apt to greet a friend, when, drawing back, the disappointed girl closed her salutation by coldly adding--"I did not expect, Doctor, to meet you at this unusual hour."

"All hours and all seasons are alike, my good Ellen, to the genuine lover of nature,"--returned a small, slightly made, but exceedingly active man, dressed in an odd mixture of cloth and skins, a little past the middle age, and who advanced directly to her side, with the familiarity of an old acquaintance; "and he who does not know how to find things to admire by this grey light, is ignorant of a large portion of the blessings he enjoys."

"Very true," said Ellen, suddenly recollecting the necessity of accounting for her own appearance abroad at that unseasonable hour; "I know many who think the earth has a pleasanter look in the night, than when seen by the brightest sunshine."

"Ah! Their organs of sight must be too convex! But the man who wishes to study the active habits of the feline race, or the variety, albinos, must, indeed, be stirring at this hour. I dare say, there are men who prefer even looking at objects by twilight, for the simple reason, that they see better at that time of the day."

"And is this the cause why you are so much abroad in the night?"

"I am abroad at night, my good girl, because the earth in its diurnal revolutions leaves the light of the sun but half the time on any given meridian, and because what I have to do cannot be performed in twelve or fifteen consecutive hours. Now have I been off two days from the family, in search of a plant, that is known to exist on the tributaries of La Platte, without seeing even a blade of grass that is not already enumerated and classed."

"You have been unfortunate, Doctor, but--"

"Unfortunate!" echoed the little man, sideling nigher to his companion, and producing his tablets with an air in which exultation struggled, strangely, with an affectation of self-abasement. "No, no, Ellen, I am any thing but unfortunate. Unless, indeed, a man may be so called, whose fortune is made, whose fame may be said to be established for ever, whose name will go down to posterity with that of Buffon--Buffon! a mere compiler: one who flourishes on the foundation of other men's labours. No; *pari passu* with Solander, who bought his knowledge with pain and privations!"

"Have you discovered a mine, Doctor Bat?"

"More than a mine; a treasure coined, and fit for instant use, girl.-- Listen! I was making the angle necessary to intersect the line of your uncle's march, after my fruitless search, when I heard sounds like the explosion produced by fire arms--"

"Yes," exclaimed Ellen, eagerly, "we had an alarm--"

"And thought I was lost," continued the man of science too much bent

on his own ideas, to understand her interruption. "Little danger of that! I made my own base, knew the length of the perpendicular by calculation, and to draw the hypothenuse had nothing to do but to work my angle. I supposed the guns were fired for my benefit, and changed my course for the sounds--not that I think the sense more accurate, or even as accurate as a mathematical calculation, but I feared that some of the children might need my services."

"They are all happily--"

"Listen," interrupted the other, already forgetting his affected anxiety for his patients, in the greater importance of the present subject. "I had crossed a large tract of prairie--for sound is conveyed far where there is little obstruction--when I heard the trampling of feet, as if bisons were beating the earth. Then I caught a distant view of a herd of quadrupeds, rushing up and down the swells--animals, which would have still remained unknown and undescribed, had it not been for a most felicitous accident! One, and he a noble specimen of the whole! was running a little apart from the rest. The herd made an inclination in my direction, in which the solitary animal coincided, and this brought him within fifty yards of the spot where I stood. I profited by the opportunity, and by the aid of steel and taper, I wrote his description on the spot. I would have given a thousand dollars, Ellen, for a single shot from the rifle of one of the boys!"

"You carry a pistol, Doctor, why didn't you use it?" said the half inattentive girl, anxiously examining the prairie, but still lingering where she stood, quite willing to be detained.

"Ay, but it carries nothing but the most minute particles of lead, adapted to the destruction of the larger insects and reptiles. No, I did better than to attempt waging a war, in which I could not be the victor. I recorded the event; noting each particular with the precision necessary to science. You shall hear, Ellen; for you are a good and improving girl, and by retaining what you learn in this way, may yet be of great service to learning, should any accident occur to me. Indeed, my worthy Ellen, mine is a pursuit, which has its dangers as well as that of the warrior. This very night," he continued, glancing his eye behind him, "this awful night, has the principle of life, itself, been in great danger of extinction!"

"By what?"

"By the monster I have discovered. It approached me often, and ever as I receded, it continued to advance. I believe nothing but the little lamp, I carried, was my protector. I kept it between us, whilst I wrote, making it serve the double purpose of luminary and shield. But you shall hear the character of the beast, and you may then judge of the risks we promoters of science run in behalf of mankind."

The naturalist raised his tablets to the heavens, and disposed himself to read as well as he could, by the dim light they yet shed upon the plain; premising with saying--

"Listen, girl, and you shall hear, with what a treasure it has been my happy lot to enrich the pages of natural history!"

"Is it then a creature of your forming?" said Ellen, turning away from

her fruitless examination, with a sudden lighting of her sprightly blue eyes, that showed she knew how to play with the foible of her learned companion.

"Is the power to give life to inanimate matter the gift of man? I would it were! You should speedily see a *Historia Naturalis Americana*, that would put the sneering imitators of the Frenchman, De Buffon, to shame! A great improvement might be made in the formation of all quadrupeds; especially those in which velocity is a virtue. Two of the inferior limbs should be on the principle of the lever; wheels, perhaps, as they are now formed; though I have not yet determined whether the improvement might be better applied to the anterior or posterior members, inasmuch as I am yet to learn whether dragging or shoving requires the greatest muscular exertion. A natural exudation of the animal might assist in overcoming the friction, and a powerful momentum be obtained. But all this is hopeless--at least for the present!"--he added, raising his tablets again to the light, and reading aloud; "Oct. 6, 1805. that's merely the date, which I dare say you know better than I--mem. Quadruped; seen by star-light, and by the aid of a pocket-lamp, in the prairies of North America--see Journal for Latitude and Meridian. Genus--unknown; therefore named after the discoverer, and from the happy coincidence of being seen in the evening--*Vespertilio Horribilis, Americanus*. Dimensions (by estimation)--Greatest length, eleven feet; height, six feet; head, erect; nostrils, expansive; eyes, expressive and fierce; teeth, serrated and abundant; tail, horizontal, waving, and slightly feline; feet, large and hairy; talons, long, curved, dangerous; ears, inconspicuous; horns, elongated, diverging, and formidable; colour, plumbeous-ashy, with fiery spots; voice, sonorous, martial, and appalling; habits, gregarious, carnivorous, fierce, and fearless. There," exclaimed Obed, when he had ended this sententious but comprehensive description, "there is an animal, which will be likely to dispute with the lion his title to be called the king of the beasts!"

"I know not the meaning of all you have said, Doctor Battius," returned the quick-witted girl, who understood the weakness of the philosopher, and often indulged him with a title he loved so well to hear; "but I shall think it dangerous to venture far from the camp, if such monsters are prowling over the prairies."

"You may well call it prowling," returned the naturalist, nestling still closer to her side, and dropping his voice to such low and undignified tones of confidence, as conveyed a meaning still more pointed than he had intended. "I have never before experienced such a trial of the nervous system; there was a moment, I acknowledge, when the fortiter in re faltered before so terrible an enemy; but the love of natural science bore me up, and brought me off in triumph!"

"You speak a language so different from that we use in Tennessee," said Ellen, struggling to conceal her laughter, "that I hardly know whether I understand your meaning. If I am right, you wish to say you were chicken-hearted."

"An absurd simile drawn from an ignorance of the formation of the biped. The heart of a chicken has a just proportion to its other organs, and the domestic fowl is, in a state of nature, a gallant bird. Ellen," he added, with a countenance so solemn as to produce an impression on the attentive girl, "I was pursued, hunted, and in a

danger that I scorn to dwell on--what's that?"

Ellen started; for the earnestness and simple sincerity of her companion's manner had produced a certain degree of credulity, even on her buoyant mind. Looking in the direction indicated by the Doctor, she beheld, in fact, a beast coursing over the prairie, and making a straight and rapid approach to the very spot they occupied. The day was not yet sufficiently advanced to enable her to distinguish its form and character, though enough was discernible to induce her to imagine it a fierce and savage animal.

"It comes! it comes!" exclaimed the Doctor, fumbling, by a sort of instinct, for his tablets, while he fairly tottered on his feet under the powerful efforts he made to maintain his ground. "Now, Ellen, has fortune given me an opportunity to correct the errors made by star-light,--hold,--ashy-plumbeous,--no ears,--horns, excessive." His voice and hand were both arrested by a roar, or rather a shriek from the beast, that was sufficiently terrific to appal even a stouter heart than that of the naturalist. The cries of the animal passed over the prairie in strange cadences, and then succeeded a deep and solemn silence, that was only broken by an uncontrolled fit of merriment from the more musical voice of Ellen Wade. In the mean time the naturalist stood like a statue of amazement, permitting a well-grown ass, against whose approach he no longer offered his boasted shield of light, to smell about his person, without comment or hinderance.

"It is your own ass," cried Ellen, the instant she found breath for words; "your own patient, hard working, hack!"

The Doctor rolled his eyes from the beast to the speaker, and from the speaker to the beast; but gave no audible expression of his wonder.

"Do you refuse to know an animal that has laboured so long in your service?" continued the laughing girl. "A beast, that I have heard you say a thousand times, has served you well, and whom you loved like a brother!"

"Asinus Domesticus!" ejaculated the Doctor, drawing his breath like one who had been near suffocation. "There is no doubt of the genus; and I will always maintain that the animal is not of the species, equus. This is undeniably Asinus himself, Ellen Wade; but this is not the Vespertilio Horribilis of the prairies! Very different animals, I can assure you, young woman, and differently characterized in every important particular. That, carnivorous," he continued, glancing his eye at the open page of his tablets; "this, granivorous; habits, fierce, dangerous; habits, patient, abstemious; ears, inconspicuous; ears, elongated; horns, diverging, &c., horns, none!"

He was interrupted by another burst of merriment from Ellen, which served, in some measure, to recall him to his recollection.

"The image of the Vespertilio was on the retina," the astounded enquirer into the secrets of nature observed, in a manner that seemed a little apologetic, "and I was silly enough to mistake my own faithful beast for the monster. Though even now I greatly marvel to see this animal running at large!"

Ellen then proceeded to explain the history of the attack and its results. She described, with an accuracy that might have raised

suspensions of her own movements in the mind of one less simple than her auditor, the manner in which the beasts burst out of the encampment, and the headlong speed with which they had dispersed themselves over the open plain. Although she forebore to say as much in terms, she so managed as to present before the eyes of her listener the strong probability of his having mistaken the frightened drove for savage beasts, and then terminated her account by a lamentation for their loss, and some very natural remarks on the helpless condition in which it had left the family. The naturalist listened in silent wonder, neither interrupting her narrative nor suffering a single exclamation of surprise to escape him. The keen-eyed girl, however, saw that as she proceeded, the important leaf was torn from the tablets, in a manner which showed that their owner had got rid of his delusion at the same instant. From that moment the world has heard no more of the *Vespertilio Horribilis Americanus*, and the natural sciences have irretrievably lost an important link in that great animated chain which is said to connect earth and heaven, and in which man is thought to be so familiarly complicated with the monkey.

When Dr. Bat was put in full possession of all the circumstances of the inroad, his concern immediately took a different direction. He had left sundry folios, and certain boxes well stored with botanical specimens and defunct animals, under the good keeping of Ishmael, and it immediately struck his acute mind, that marauders as subtle as the Siouzes would never neglect the opportunity to despoil him of these treasures. Nothing that Ellen could say to the contrary served to appease his apprehensions, and, consequently, they separated; he to relieve his doubts and fears together, and she to glide, as swiftly and silently as she had just before passed it, into the still and solitary tent.

CHAPTER VII

What! fifty of my followers, at a clap!
--Lear.

The day had now fairly opened on the seemingly interminable waste of the prairie. The entrance of Obed at such a moment into the camp, accompanied as it was by vociferous lamentations over his anticipated loss, did not fail to rouse the drowsy family of the squatter. Ishmael and his sons, together with the forbidding looking brother of his wife, were all speedily afoot; and then, as the sun began to shed his light on the place, they became gradually apprised of the extent of their loss.

Ishmael looked round upon the motionless and heavily loaded vehicles with his teeth firmly compressed, cast a glance at the amazed and helpless group of children, which clustered around their sullen but desponding mother, and walked out upon the open land, as if he found the air of the encampment too confined. He was followed by several of the men, who were attentive observers, watching the dark expression of his eye as the index of their own future movements. The whole proceeded in profound and moody silence to the summit of the nearest swell, whence they could command an almost boundless view of the naked plains. Here nothing was visible but a solitary buffaloe, that gleaned a meagre subsistence from the decaying herbage, at no great distance, and the ass of the physician, who profited by his freedom to enjoy a

meal richer than common.

"Yonder is one of the creatures left by the villains to mock us," said Ishmael, glancing his eye towards the latter, "and that the meanest of the stock. This is a hard country to make a crop in, boys; and yet food must be found to fill many hungry mouths!"

"The rifle is better than the hoe, in such a place as this," returned the eldest of his sons, kicking the hard and thirsty soil on which he stood, with an air of contempt. "It is good for such as they who make their dinner better on beggars' beans than on homminy. A crow would shed tears if obliged by its errand to fly across the district."

"What say you, trapper?" returned the father, showing the slight impression his powerful heel had made on the compact earth, and laughing with frightful ferocity. "Is this the quality of land a man would choose who never troubles the county clerk with title deeds?"

"There is richer soil in the bottoms," returned the old man calmly, "and you have passed millions of acres to get to this dreary spot, where he who loves to till the 'arth might have received bushels in return for pints, and that too at the cost of no very grievous labour. If you have come in search of land, you have journeyed hundreds of miles too far, or as many leagues too little."

"There is then a better choice towards the other Ocean?" demanded the squatter, pointing in the direction of the Pacific.

"There is, and I have seen it all," was the answer of the other, who dropped his rifle to the earth, and stood leaning on its barrel, like one who recalled the scenes he had witnessed with melancholy pleasure. "I have seen the waters of the two seas! On one of them was I born, and raised to be a lad like yonder tumbling boy. America has grown, my men, since the days of my youth, to be a country larger than I once had thought the world itself to be. Near seventy years I dwelt in York, province and state together:--you've been in York, 'tis like?"

"Not I--not I; I never visited the towns; but often have heard the place you speak of named. 'Tis a wide clearing there, I reckon."

"Too wide! too wide! They scourge the very 'arth with their axes. Such hills and hunting-grounds as I have seen stripped of the gifts of the Lord, without remorse or shame! I tarried till the mouths of my hounds were deafened by the blows of the chopper, and then I came west in search of quiet. It was a grievous journey that I made; a grievous toil to pass through falling timber and to breathe the thick air of smoky clearings, week after week, as I did! 'Tis a far country too, that state of York from this!"

"It lies ag'in the outer edge of old Kentuck, I reckon; though what the distance may be I never knew."

"A gull would have to fan a thousand miles of air to find the eastern sea. And yet it is no mighty reach to hunt across, when shade and game are plenty! The time has been when I followed the deer in the mountains of the Delaware and Hudson, and took the beaver on the streams of the upper lakes in the same season, but my eye was quick and certain at that day, and my limbs were like the legs of a moose! The dam of Hector," dropping his look kindly to the aged hound that

crouched at his feet, "was then a pup, and apt to open on the game the moment she struck the scent. She gave me a deal of trouble, that slut, she did!"

"Your hound is old, stranger, and a rap on the head would prove a mercy to the beast."

"The dog is like his master," returned the trapper, without appearing to heed the brutal advice the other gave, "and will number his days, when his work amongst the game is over, and not before. To my eye things seem ordered to meet each other in this creation. 'Tis not the swiftest running deer that always throws off the hounds, nor the biggest arm that holds the truest rifle. Look around you, men; what will the Yankee Choppers say, when they have cut their path from the eastern to the western waters, and find that a hand, which can lay the 'arth bare at a blow, has been here and swept the country, in very mockery of their wickedness. They will turn on their tracks like a fox that doubles, and then the rank smell of their own footsteps will show them the madness of their waste. Howsomever, these are thoughts that are more likely to rise in him who has seen the folly of eighty seasons, than to teach wisdom to men still bent on the pleasures of their kind! You have need, yet, of a stirring time, if you think to escape the craft and hatred of the burnt-wood Indians. They claim to be the lawful owners of this country, and seldom leave a white more than the skin he boasts of, when once they get the power, as they always have the will, to do him harm."

"Old man," said Ishmael sternly, "to which people do you belong? You have the colour and speech of a Christian, while it seems that your heart is with the redskins."

"To me there is little difference in nations. The people I loved most are scattered as the sands of the dry river-beds fly before the fall hurricanes, and life is too short to make use and custom with strangers, as one can do with such as he has dwelt amongst for years. Still am I a man without the cross of Indian blood; and what is due from a warrior to his nation, is owing by me to the people of the States; though little need have they, with their militia and their armed boats, of help from a single arm of fourscore."

"Since you own your kin, I may ask a simple question. Where are the Siouxes who have stolen my cattle?"

"Where is the herd of buffaloes, which was chased by the panther across this plain, no later than the morning of yesterday? It is as hard--"

"Friend," said Dr. Battius, who had hitherto been an attentive listener, but who now felt a sudden impulse to mingle in the discourse, "I am grieved when I find a venator or hunter, of your experience and observation, following the current of vulgar error. The animal you describe is in truth a species of the *bos ferus*, (or *bos sylvestris*, as he has been happily called by the poets,) but, though of close affinity, it is altogether distinct from the common *bubulus*. Bison is the better word; and I would suggest the necessity of adopting it in future, when you shall have occasion to allude to the species."

"Bison or buffalo, it makes but little matter. The creatur' is the

same, call it by what name you will, and--"

"Pardon me, venerable venator; as classification is the very soul of the natural sciences, the animal or vegetable must, of necessity, be characterised by the peculiarities of its species, which is always indicated by the name--"

"Friend," said the trapper, a little positively, "would the tail of a beaver make the worse dinner for calling it a mink; or could you eat of the wolf, with relish, because some bookish man had given it the name of venison?"

As these questions were put with no little earnestness and some spirit, there was every probability that a hot discussion would have succeeded between two men, of whom one was so purely practical and the other so much given to theory, had not Ishmael seen fit to terminate the dispute, by bringing into view a subject that was much more important to his own immediate interests.

"Beavers' tails and minks' flesh may do to talk about before a maple fire and a quiet hearth," interrupted the squatter, without the smallest deference to the interested feelings of the disputants; "but something more than foreign words, or words of any sort, is now needed. Tell me, trapper, where are your Siouzes skulking?"

"It would be as easy to tell you the colours of the hawk that is floating beneath yonder white cloud! When a red-skin strikes his blow, he is not apt to wait until he is paid for the evil deed in lead."

"Will the beggarly savages believe they have enough, when they find themselves master of all the stock?"

"Natur' is much the same, let it be covered by what skin it may. Do you ever find your longings after riches less when you have made a good crop, than before you were master of a kernel of corn? If you do, you differ from what the experience of a long life tells me is the common cravings of man."

"Speak plainly, old stranger," said the squatter, striking the butt of his rifle heavily on the earth, his dull capacity finding no pleasure in a discourse that was conducted in so obscure allusions; "I have asked a simple question, and one I know well that you can answer."

"You are right, you are right. I can answer, for I have too often seen the disposition of my kind to mistake it, when evil is stirring. When the Siouzes have gathered in the beasts, and have made sure that you are not upon their heels, they will be back nibbling like hungry wolves to take the bait they have left or it may be, they'll show the temper of the great bears, that are found at the falls of the Long River, and strike at once with the paw, without stopping to nose their prey."

"You have then seen the animals you mention!" exclaimed Dr. Battius, who had now been thrown out of the conversation quite as long as his impatience could well brook, and who approached the subject with his tablets ready opened, as a book of reference. "Can you tell me if what you encountered was of the species, *ursus horribilis*--with the ears, rounded--front, arquated--eyes--destitute of the remarkable supplemental lid--with six incisores, one false, and four perfect

molaes--"

"Trapper, go on, for we are engaged in reasonable discourse," interrupted Ishmael; "you believe we shall see more of the robbers."

"Nay--nay--I do not call them robbers, for it is the usage of their people, and what may be called the prairie law."

"I have come five hundred miles to find a place where no man can ding the words of the law in my ears," said Ishmael, fiercely, "and I am not in a humour to stand quietly at a bar, while a red-skin sits in judgment. I tell you, trapper, if another Sioux is seen prowling around my camp, wherever it may be, he shall feel the contents of old Kentucky," slapping his rifle, in a manner that could not be easily misconstrued, "though he wore the medal of Washington,[*] himself. I call the man a robber who takes that which is not his own."

[*] The American government creates chiefs among the western tribes, and decorates them with silver medals bearing the impression of the different presidents. That of Washington is the most prized.

"The Teton, and the Pawnee, and the Konza, and men of a dozen other tribes, claim to own these naked fields."

"Natur' gives them the lie in their teeth. The air, the water, and the ground, are free gifts to man, and no one has the power to portion them out in parcels. Man must drink, and breathe, and walk,--and therefore each has a right to his share of 'arth. Why do not the surveyors of the States set their compasses and run their lines over our heads as well as beneath our feet? Why do they not cover their shining sheep-skins with big words, giving to the landholder, or perhaps he should be called air holder, so many rods of heaven, with the use of such a star for a boundary-mark, and such a cloud to turn a mill?"

As the squatter uttered his wild conceit, he laughed from the very bottom of his chest, in scorn. The deriding but frightful merriment passed from the mouth of one of his ponderous sons to that of the other, until it had made the circuit of the whole family.

"Come, trapper," continued Ishmael, in a tone of better humour, like a man who feels that he has triumphed, "neither of us, I reckon, has ever had much to do with title-deeds, or county clerks, or blazed trees; therefore we will not waste words on fooleries. You ar' a man that has tarried long in this clearing, and now I ask your opinion, face to face, without fear or favour, if you had the lead in my business, what would you do?"

The old man hesitated, and seemed to give the required advice with deep reluctance. As every eye, however, was fastened on him, and whichever way he turned his face, he encountered a look riveted on the lineaments of his own working countenance, he answered in a low, melancholy, tone--

"I have seen too much mortal blood poured out in empty quarrels, to wish ever to hear an angry rifle again. Ten weary years have I sojourned alone on these naked plains, waiting for my hour, and not a blow have I struck ag'in an enemy more humanised than the grizzly bear."

"Ursus horribilis," muttered the Doctor.

The speaker paused at the sound of the other's voice, but perceiving it was no more than a sort of mental ejaculation, he continued in the same strain--

"More humanised than the grizzly bear, or the panther of the Rocky Mountains; unless the beaver, which is a wise and knowing animal, may be so reckoned. What would I advise? Even the female buffalo will fight for her young!"

"It never then shall be said, that Ishmael Bush has less kindness for his children than the bear for her cubs!"

"And yet this is but a naked spot for a dozen men to make head in, against five hundred."

"Ay, it is so," returned the squatter, glancing his eye towards his humble camp; "but something might be done, with the wagons and the cotton-wood."

The trapper shook his head incredulously, and pointed across the rolling plain in the direction of the west, as he answered--

"A rifle would send a bullet from these hills into your very sleeping-cabins; nay, arrows from the thicket in your rear would keep you all burrowed, like so many prairie dogs: it wouldn't do, it wouldn't do. Three long miles from this spot is a place, where as I have often thought in passing across the desert, a stand might be made for days and weeks together, if there were hearts and hands ready to engage in the bloody work."

Another low, deriding laugh passed among the young men, announcing, in a manner sufficiently intelligible, their readiness to undertake a task even more arduous. The squatter himself eagerly seized the hint which had been so reluctantly extorted from the trapper, who by some singular process of reasoning had evidently persuaded himself that it was his duty to be strictly neutral. A few direct and pertinent enquiries served to obtain the little additional information that was necessary, in order to make the contemplated movement, and then Ishmael, who was, on emergencies, as terrifically energetic, as he was sluggish in common, set about effecting his object without delay.

Notwithstanding the industry and zeal of all engaged, the task was one of great labour and difficulty. The loaded vehicles were to be drawn by hand across a wide distance of plain without track or guide of any sort, except that which the trapper furnished by communicating his knowledge of the cardinal points of the compass. In accomplishing this object, the gigantic strength of the men was taxed to the utmost, nor were the females or the children spared a heavy proportion of the toil. While the sons distributed themselves about the heavily loaded wagons, and drew them by main strength up the neighbouring swell, their mother and Ellen, surrounded by the amazed group of little ones, followed slowly in the rear, bending under the weight of such different articles as were suited to their several strengths.

Ishmael himself superintended and directed the whole, occasionally applying his colossal shoulder to some lagging vehicle, until he saw

that the chief difficulty, that of gaining the level of their intended route, was accomplished. Then he pointed out the required course, cautioning his sons to proceed in such a manner that they should not lose the advantage they had with so much labour obtained, and beckoning to the brother of his wife, they returned together to the empty camp.

Throughout the whole of this movement, which occupied an hour of time, the trapper had stood apart, leaning on his rifle, with the aged hound slumbering at his feet, a silent but attentive observer of all that passed. Occasionally, a smile lighted his hard, muscular, but wasted features, like a gleam of sunshine flitting across a ragged ruin, and betrayed the momentary pleasure he found in witnessing from time to time the vast power the youths discovered. Then, as the train drew slowly up the ascent, a cloud of thought and sorrow threw all into the shade again, leaving the expression of his countenance in its usual state of quiet melancholy. As vehicle after vehicle left the place of the encampment, he noted the change, with increasing attention; seldom failing to cast an enquiring look at the little neglected tent, which, with its proper wagon, still remained as before, solitary and apparently forgotten. The summons of Ishmael to his gloomy associate had, however, as it would now seem, this hitherto neglected portion of his effects for its object.

First casting a cautious and suspicious glance on every side of him, the squatter and his companion advanced to the little wagon, and caused it to enter within the folds of the cloth, much in the manner that it had been extricated the preceding evening. They both then disappeared behind the drapery, and many moments of suspense succeeded, during which the old man, secretly urged by a burning desire to know the meaning of so much mystery, insensibly drew nigh to the place, until he stood within a few yards of the proscribed spot. The agitation of the cloth betrayed the nature of the occupation of those whom it concealed, though their work was conducted in rigid silence. It would appear that long practice had made each of the two acquainted with his particular duty; for neither sign nor direction of any sort was necessary from Ishmael, in order to apprise his surly associate of the manner in which he was to proceed. In less time than has been consummated in relating it, the interior portion of the arrangement was completed, when the men re-appeared without the tent. Too busy with his occupation to heed the presence of the trapper, Ishmael began to release the folds of the cloth from the ground, and to dispose of them in such a manner around the vehicle, as to form a sweeping train to the new form the little pavilion had now assumed. The arched roof trembled with the occasional movement of the light vehicle which, it was now apparent, once more supported its secret burden. Just as the work was ended the scowling eye of Ishmael's assistant caught a glimpse of the figure of the attentive observer of their movements. Dropping the shaft, which he had already lifted from the ground preparatory to occupying the place that was usually filled by an animal less reasoning and perhaps less dangerous than himself, he bluntly exclaimed--

"I am a fool, as you often say! But look for yourself: if that man is not an enemy, I will disgrace father and mother, call myself an Indian, and go hunt with the Siouzes!"

The cloud, as it is about to discharge the subtle lightning, is not more dark nor threatening, than the look with which Ishmael greeted

the intruder. He turned his head on every side of him, as if seeking some engine sufficiently terrible to annihilate the offending trapper at a blow; and then, possibly recollecting the further occasion he might have for his counsel, he forced himself to say, with an appearance of moderation that nearly choked him--

"Stranger, I did believe this prying into the concerns of others was the business of women in the towns and settlements, and not the manner in which men, who are used to live where each has room for himself, deal with the secrets of their neighbours. To what lawyer or sheriff do you calculate to sell your news?"

"I hold but little discourse except with one and then chiefly of my own affairs," returned the old man, without the least observable apprehension, and pointing imposingly upward; "a Judge; and Judge of all. Little does he need knowledge from my hands, and but little will your wish to keep any thing secret from him profit you, even in this desert."

The mounting tempers of his unnurtured listeners were rebuked by the simple, solemn manner of the trapper. Ishmael stood sullen and thoughtful; while his companion stole a furtive and involuntary glance at the placid sky, which spread so wide and blue above his head, as if he expected to see the Almighty eye itself beaming from the heavenly vault. But impressions of a serious character are seldom lasting on minds long indulged in forgetfulness. The hesitation of the squatter was consequently of short duration. The language, however, as well as the firm and collected air of the speaker, were the means of preventing much subsequent abuse, if not violence.

"It would be showing more of the kindness of a friend and comrade," Ishmael returned, in a tone sufficiently sullen to betray his humour, though it was no longer threatening, "had your shoulder been put to the wheel of one of yonder wagons, instead of edging itself in here, where none are wanted but such as are invited."

"I can put the little strength that is left me," returned the trapper, "to this, as well as to another of your loads."

"Do you take us for boys!" exclaimed Ishmael, laughing, half in ferocity and half in derision, applying his powerful strength at the same time to the little vehicle, which rolled over the grass with as much seeming facility as if it were drawn by its usual team.

The trapper paused, and followed the departing wagon with his eye, marvelling greatly as to the nature of its concealed contents, until it had also gained the summit of the eminence, and in its turn disappeared behind the swell of the land. Then he turned to gaze at the desolation of the scene around him. The absence of human forms would have scarce created a sensation in the bosom of one so long accustomed to solitude, had not the site of the deserted camp furnished such strong memorials of its recent visitors, and as the old man was quick to detect, of their waste also. He cast his eye upwards, with a shake of the head, at the vacant spot in the heavens which had so lately been filled by the branches of those trees that now lay stripped of their verdure, worthless and deserted logs, at his feet.

"Ay," he muttered to himself, "I might have know'd it--I might have know'd it! Often have I seen the same before; and yet I brought them

to the spot myself, and have now sent them to the only neighbourhood of their kind within many long leagues of the spot where I stand. This is man's wish, and pride, and waste, and sinfulness! He tames the beasts of the field to feed his idle wants; and, having robbed the brutes of their natural food, he teaches them to strip the 'arth of its trees to quiet their hunger."

A rustling in the low bushes which still grew, for some distance, along the swale that formed the thicket on which the camp of Ishmael had rested, caught his ear, at the moment, and cut short the soliloquy. The habits of so many years, spent in the wilderness, caused the old man to bring his rifle to a poise, with something like the activity and promptitude of his youth; but, suddenly recovering his recollection, he dropped it into the hollow of his arm again, and resumed his air of melancholy resignation.

"Come forth, come forth!" he said aloud: "be ye bird, or be ye beast, ye are safe from these old hands. I have eaten and I have drunk: why should I take life, when my wants call for no sacrifice? It will not be long afore the birds will peck at eyes that shall not see them, and perhaps light on my very bones; for if things like these are only made to perish, why am I to expect to live for ever? Come forth, come forth; you are safe from harm at these weak hands."

"Thank you for the good word, old trapper!" cried Paul Hover, springing actively forward from his place of concealment. "There was an air about you, when you threw forward the muzzle of the piece, that I did not like; for it seemed to say that you were master of all the rest of the motions."

"You are right, you are right!" cried the trapper, laughing with inward self-complacency at the recollection of his former skill. "The day has been when few men knew the virtues of a long rifle, like this I carry, better than myself, old and useless as I now seem. You are right, young man; and the time was, when it was dangerous to move a leaf within ear-shot of my stand; or," he added, dropping his voice, and looking serious, "for a Red Mingo to show an eyeball from his ambushment. You have heard of the Red Mingos?"

"I have heard of minks," said Paul, taking the old man by the arm, and gently urging him towards the thicket as he spoke; while, at the same time, he cast quick and uneasy glances behind him, in order to make sure he was not observed. "Of your common black minks; but none of any other colour."

"Lord! Lord!" continued the trapper, shaking his head, and still laughing, in his deep but quiet manner; "the boy mistakes a brute for a man! Though, a Mingo is little better than a beast; or, for that matter, he is worse, when rum and opportunity are placed before his eyes. There was that accursed Huron, from the upper lakes, that I knocked from his perch among the rocks in the hills, back of the Hori--"

His voice was lost in the thicket, into which he had suffered himself to be led by Paul while speaking, too much occupied by thoughts which dwelt on scenes and acts that had taken place half a century earlier in the history of the country, to offer the smallest resistance.

CHAPTER VIII

Now they are clapper-clawing one another; I'll go look on. That dissembling abominable varlet, Diomed, has got that same scurvy, doting, foolish young knave in his helm.

--Troilus and Cressida.

It is necessary, in order that the thread of the narrative should not be spun to a length which might fatigue the reader, that he should imagine a week to have intervened between the scene with which the preceding chapter closed and the events with which it is our intention to resume its relation in this. The season was on the point of changing its character; the verdure of summer giving place more rapidly to the brown and party-coloured livery of the fall. [*] The heavens were clothed in driving clouds, piled in vast masses one above the other, which whirled violently in the gusts; opening, occasionally, to admit transient glimpses of the bright and glorious sight of the heavens, dwelling in a magnificence by far too grand and durable to be disturbed by the fitful efforts of the lower world. Beneath, the wind swept across the wild and naked prairies, with a violence that is seldom witnessed in any section of the continent less open. It would have been easy to have imagined, in the ages of fable, that the god of the winds had permitted his subordinate agents to escape from their den, and that they now rioted, in wantonness, across wastes, where neither tree, nor work of man, nor mountain, nor obstacle of any sort, opposed itself to their gambols.

[*] The Americans call the autumn the "fall," from the fall of the leaf.

Though nakedness might, as usual, be given as the pervading character of the spot, whither it is now necessary to transfer the scene of the tale, it was not entirely without the signs of human life. Amid the monotonous rolling of the prairie, a single naked and ragged rock arose on the margin of a little watercourse, which found its way, after winding a vast distance through the plains, into one of the numerous tributaries of the Father of Rivers. A swale of low land lay near the base of the eminence; and as it was still fringed with a thicket of alders and sumack, it bore the signs of having once nurtured a feeble growth of wood. The trees themselves had been transferred, however, to the summit and crags of the neighbouring rocks. On this elevation the signs of man, to which the allusion just made applies, were to be found.

Seen from beneath, there were visible a breast-work of logs and stones, intermingled in such a manner as to save all unnecessary labour, a few low roofs made of bark and boughs of trees, an occasional barrier, constructed like the defences on the summit, and placed on such points of the acclivity as were easier of approach than the general face of the eminence; and a little dwelling of cloth, perched on the apex of a small pyramid, that shot up on one angle of the rock, the white covering of which glimmered from a distance like a spot of snow, or, to make the simile more suitable to the rest of the subject, like a spotless and carefully guarded standard, which was to be protected by the dearest blood of those who defended the citadel beneath. It is hardly necessary to add, that this rude and characteristic fortress was the place where Ishmael Bush had taken refuge, after the robbery of his flocks and herds.

On the day to which the narrative is advanced, the squatter was standing near the base of the rocks, leaning on his rifle, and regarding the sterile soil that supported him with a look in which contempt and disappointment were strongly blended.

"'Tis time to change our natur's," he observed to the brother of his wife, who was rarely far from his elbow; "and to become ruminators, instead of people used to the fare of Christians and free men. I reckon, Abiram, you could glean a living among the grasshoppers: you ar' an active man, and might outrun the nimblest skipper of them all."

"The country will never do," returned the other, who relished but little the forced humour of his kinsman; "and it is well to remember that a lazy traveller makes a long journey."

"Would you have me draw a cart at my heels, across this desert for weeks,—ay, months?" retorted Ishmael, who, like all of his class, could labour with incredible efforts on emergencies, but who too seldom exerted continued industry, on any occasion, to brook a proposal that offered so little repose. "It may do for your people, who live in settlements, to hasten on to their houses; but, thank Heaven! my farm is too big for its owner ever to want a resting-place."

"Since you like the plantation, then, you have only to make your crop."

"That is easier said than done, on this corner of the estate. I tell you, Abiram, there is need of moving, for more reasons than one. You know I'm a man that very seldom enters into a bargain, but who always fulfils his agreements better than your dealers in wordy contracts written on rags of paper. If there's one mile, there ar' a hundred still needed to make up the distance for which you have my honour."

As he spoke, the squatter glanced his eye upward at the little tenement of cloth which crowned the summit of his ragged fortress. The look was understood and answered by the other; and by some secret influence, which operated either through their interests or feelings, it served to re-establish that harmony between them, which had just been threatened with something like a momentary breach.

"I know it, and feel it in every bone of my body. But I remember the reason, why I have set myself on this accursed journey too well to forget the distance between me and the end. Neither you nor I will ever be the better for what we have done, unless we thoroughly finish what is so well begun. Ay, that is the doctrine of the whole world, I judge: I heard a travelling preacher, who was skirting it down the Ohio, a time since, say, if a man should live up to the faith for a hundred years, and then fall from his work a single day, he would find the settlement was to be made for the finishing blow that he had put to his job, and that all the bad, and none of the good, would come into the final account."

"And you believed the hungry hypocrite!"

"Who said that I believed it?" retorted Abiram with a bullying look, that betrayed how much his fears had dwelt on the subject he affected to despise. "Is it believing to tell what a roguish--And yet, Ishmael,

the man might have been honest after all! He told us that the world was, in truth, no better than a desert, and that there was but one hand that could lead the most learned man through all its crooked windings. Now, if this be true of the whole, it may be true of a part."

"Abiram, out with your grievances like a man," interrupted the squatter, with a hoarse laugh. "You want to pray! But of what use will it be, according to your own doctrine, to serve God five minutes and the devil an hour? Harkee, friend; I'm not much of a husband-man, but this I know to my cost; that to make a right good crop, even on the richest bottom, there must be hard labour; and your {snufflers} liken the 'arth to a field of corn, and the men, who live on it, to its yield. Now I tell you, Abiram, that you are no better than a thistle or a mullin; yea, ye ar' wood of too open a pore to be good even to burn!"

The malign glance, which shot from the scowling eye of Abiram, announced the angry character of his feelings, but as the furtive look quailed, immediately, before the unmoved, steady, countenance of the squatter, it also betrayed how much the bolder spirit of the latter had obtained the mastery over his craven nature.

Content with his ascendancy, which was too apparent, and had been too often exerted on similar occasions, to leave him in any doubt of its extent, Ishmael coolly continued the discourse, by adverting more directly to his future plans.

"You will own the justice of paying every one in kind," he said; "I have been robbed of my stock, and I have a scheme to make myself as good as before, by taking hoof for hoof; or for that matter, when a man is put to the trouble of bargaining for both sides, he is a fool if he don't pay himself something in the way of commission."

As the squatter made this declaration in a tone which was a little excited by the humour of the moment, four or five of his lounging sons, who had been leaning against the foot of the rock, came forward with the indolent step so common to the family.

"I have been calling Ellen Wade, who is on the rock keeping the look-out, to know if there is any thing to be seen," observed the eldest of the young men; "and she shakes her head, for an answer. Ellen is sparing of her words for a woman; and might be taught manners at least, without spoiling her good looks."

Ishmael cast his eye upward to the place, where the offending, but unconscious girl was holding her anxious watch. She was seated at the edge of the uppermost crag, by the side of the little tent, and at least two hundred feet above the level of the plain. Little else was to be distinguished, at that distance, but the outline of her form, her fair hair streaming in the gusts beyond her shoulders, and the steady and seemingly unchangeable look that she had riveted on some remote point of the prairie.

"What is it, Nell?" cried Ishmael, lifting his powerful voice a little above the rushing of the element. "Have you got a glimpse of any thing bigger than a burrowing barker?"

The lips of the attentive Ellen parted; she rose to the utmost height

her small stature admitted, seeming still to regard the unknown object; but her voice, if she spoke at all, was not sufficiently loud to be heard amid the wind.

"It ar' a fact that the child sees something more uncommon than a buffaloe or a prairie dog!" continued Ishmael. "Why, Nell, girl, ar' ye deaf? Nell, I say;--I hope it is an army of red-skins she has in her eye; for I should relish the chance to pay them for their kindness, under the favour of these logs and rocks!"

As the squatter accompanied his vaunt with corresponding gestures, and directed his eyes to the circle of his equally confident sons while speaking, he drew their gaze from Ellen to himself; but now, when they turned together to note the succeeding movements of their female sentinel, the place which had so lately been occupied by her form was vacant.

"As I am a sinner," exclaimed Asa, usually one of the most phlegmatic of the youths, "the girl is blown away by the wind!"

Something like a sensation was exhibited among them, which might have denoted that the influence of the laughing blue eyes, flaxen hair, and glowing cheeks of Ellen, had not been lost on the dull natures of the young men; and looks of amazement, mingled slightly with concern, passed from one to the other as they gazed, in dull wonder, at the point of the naked rock.

"It might well be!" added another; "she sat on a slivered stone, and I have been thinking of telling her she was in danger for more than an hour."

"Is that a riband of the child, dangling from the corner of the hill below?" cried Ishmael; "ha! who is moving about the tent? have I not told you all--"

"Ellen! 'tis Ellen!" interrupted the whole body of his sons in a breath; and at that instant she re-appeared to put an end to their different surmises, and to relieve more than one sluggish nature from its unwonted excitement. As Ellen issued from beneath the folds of the tent, she advanced with a light and fearless step to her former giddy stand, and pointed toward the prairie, appearing to speak in an eager and rapid voice to some invisible auditor.

"Nell is mad!" said Asa, half in contempt and yet not a little in concern. "The girl is dreaming with her eyes open; and thinks she sees some of them fierce creatur's, with hard names, with which the Doctor fills her ears."

"Can it be, the child has found a scout of the Siouxes?" said Ishmael, bending his look toward the plain; but a low, significant whisper from Abiram drew his eyes quickly upward again, where they were turned just in time to perceive that the cloth of the tent was agitated by a motion very evidently different from the quivering occasioned by the wind. "Let her, if she dare!" the squatter muttered in his teeth. "Abiram; they know my temper too well to play the prank with me!"

"Look for yourself! if the curtain is not lifted, I can see no better than the owl by daylight."

Ishmael struck the breach of his rifle violently on the earth, and shouted in a voice that might easily have been heard by Ellen, had not her attention still continued rapt on the object which so unaccountably attracted her eyes in the distance.

"Nell!" continued the squatter, "away with you, fool! will you bring down punishment on your own head? Why, Nell!--she has forgotten her native speech; let us see if she can understand another language."

Ishmael threw his rifle to his shoulder, and at the next moment it was pointed upward at the summit of the rock. Before time was given for a word of remonstrance, it had sent forth its contents, in its usual streak of bright flame. Ellen started like the frightened chamois, and uttering a piercing scream, she darted into the tent, with a swiftness that left it uncertain whether terror or actual injury had been the penalty of her offence.

The action of the squatter was too sudden and unexpected to admit of prevention, but the instant it was done, his sons manifested, in an unequivocal manner, the temper with which they witnessed the desperate measure. Angry and fierce glances were interchanged, and a murmur of disapprobation was uttered by the whole, in common.

"What has Ellen done, father," said Asa, with a degree of spirit, which was the more striking from being unusual, "that she should be shot at like a straggling deer, or a hungry wolf?"

"Mischief," deliberately returned the squatter; but with a cool expression of defiance in his eye that showed how little he was moved by the ill-concealed humour of his children. "Mischief, boy; mischief! take you heed that the disorder don't spread."

"It would need a different treatment in a man, than in yon screaming girl!"

"Asa, you ar' a man, as you have often boasted; but remember I am your father, and your better."

"I know it well; and what sort of a father?"

"Harkee, boy: I more than half believe that your drowsy head let in the Siouxes. Be modest in speech, my watchful son, or you may have to answer yet for the mischief your own bad conduct has brought upon us."

"I'll stay no longer to be hectored like a child in petticoats. You talk of law, as if you knew of none, and yet you keep me down, as though I had not life and wants of my own. I'll stay no longer to be treated like one of your meanest cattle!"

"The world is wide, my gallant boy, and there's many a noble plantation on it, without a tenant. Go; you have title deeds signed and sealed to your hand. Few fathers portion their children better than Ishmael Bush; you will say that for me, at least, when you get to be a wealthy landholder."

"Look! father, look!" exclaimed several voices at once, seizing with avidity, an opportunity to interrupt a dialogue which threatened to become more violent.

"Look!" repeated Abiram, in a voice which sounded hollow and warning; "if you have time for any thing but quarrels, Ishmael, look!"

The squatter turned slowly from his offending son, and cast an eye, that still lowered with deep resentment upward; but which, the instant it caught a view of the object that now attracted the attention of all around him, changed its expression to one of astonishment and dismay.

A female stood on the spot, from which Ellen had been so fearfully expelled. Her person was of the smallest size that is believed to comport with beauty, and which poets and artists have chosen as the beau ideal of feminine loveliness. Her dress was of a dark and glossy silk, and fluttered like gossamer around her form. Long, flowing, and curling tresses of hair, still blacker and more shining than her robe, fell at times about her shoulders, completely enveloping the whole of her delicate bust in their ringlets; or at others streaming in the wind. The elevation at which she stood prevented a close examination of the lineaments of a countenance which, however, it might be seen was youthful, and, at the moment of her unlooked-for appearance, eloquent with feeling. So young, indeed, did this fair and fragile being appear, that it might be doubted whether the age of childhood was entirely passed. One small and exquisitely moulded hand was pressed on her heart, while with the other she made an impressive gesture, which seemed to invite Ishmael, if further violence was meditated, to direct it against her bosom.

The silent wonder, with which the group of borderers gazed upward at so extraordinary a spectacle, was only interrupted as the person of Ellen was seen emerging with timidity from the tent, as if equally urged, by apprehensions in behalf of herself and the fears which she felt on account of her companion, to remain concealed and to advance. She spoke, but her words were unheard by those below, and unheeded by her to whom they were addressed. The latter, however, as if content with the offer she had made of herself as a victim to the resentment of Ishmael, now calmly retired, and the spot she had so lately occupied became vacant, leaving a sort of stupid impression on the spectators beneath, not unlike that which it might be supposed would have been created had they just been gazing at some supernatural vision.

More than a minute of profound silence succeeded, during which the sons of Ishmael still continued gazing at the naked rock in stupid wonder. Then, as eye met eye, an expression of novel intelligence passed from one to the other, indicating that to them, at least, the appearance of this extraordinary tenant of the pavilion was as unexpected as it was incomprehensible. At length Asa, in right of his years, and moved by the rankling impulse of the recent quarrel, took on himself the office of interrogator. Instead, however, of braving the resentment of his father, of whose fierce nature, when aroused, he had had too frequent evidence to excite it wantonly, he turned upon the cowering person of Abiram, observing with a sneer--

"This then is the beast you were bringing into the prairies for a decoy! I know you to be a man who seldom troubles truth, when any thing worse may answer, but I never knew you to outdo yourself so thoroughly before. The newspapers of Kentuck have called you a dealer in black flesh a hundred times, but little did they reckon that you drove the trade into white families."

"Who is a kidnapper?" demanded Abiram, with a blustering show of resentment. "Am I to be called to account for every lie they put in print throughout the States? Look to your own family, boy; look to yourselves. The very stumps of Kentucky and Tennessee cry out ag'in ye! Ay, my tonguey gentleman, I have seen father and mother and three children, yourself for one, published on the logs and stubs of the settlements, with dollars enough for reward to have made an honest man rich, for--"

He was interrupted by a back-handed but violent blow on the mouth, that caused him to totter, and which left the impression of its weight in the starting blood and swelling lips.

"Asa," said the father, advancing with a portion of that dignity with which the hand of Nature seems to have invested the parental character, "you have struck the brother of your mother!"

"I have struck the abuser of the whole family," returned the angry youth; "and, unless he teaches his tongue a wiser language, he had better part with it altogether, as the unruly member. I'm no great performer with the knife, but, on an occasion, could make out, myself, to cut off a slande--"

"Boy, twice have you forgotten yourself to-day. Be careful that it does not happen the third time. When the law of the land is weak, it is right the law of nature should be strong. You understand me, Asa; and you know me. As for you, Abiram, the child has done you wrong, and it is my place to see you righted. Remember; I tell you justice shall be done; it is enough. But you have said hard things ag'in me and my family. If the hounds of the law have put their bills on the trees and stumps of the clearings, it was for no act of dishonesty as you know, but because we maintain the rule that 'arth is common property. No, Abiram; could I wash my hands of things done by your advice, as easily as I can of the things done by the whisperings of the devil, my sleep would be quieter at night, and none who bear my name need blush to hear it mentioned. Peace, Asa, and you too, man; enough has been said. Let us all think well before any thing is added, that may make what is already so bad still more bitter."

Ishmael waved his hand with authority, as he ended, and turned away with the air of one who felt assured, that those he had addressed would not have the temerity to dispute his commands. Asa evidently struggled with himself to compel the required obedience, but his heavy nature quietly sunk into its ordinary repose, and he soon appeared again the being he really was; dangerous, only, at moments, and one whose passions were too sluggish to be long maintained at the point of ferocity. Not so with Abiram. While there was an appearance of a personal conflict, between him and his colossal nephew, his mien had expressed the infallible evidences of engrossing apprehension, but now, that the authority as well as gigantic strength of the father were interposed between him and his assailant, his countenance changed from paleness to a livid hue, that bespoke how deeply the injury he had received rankled in his breast. Like Asa, however, he acquiesced in the decision of the squatter; and the appearance, at least, of harmony was restored again among a set of beings, who were restrained by no obligations more powerful than the frail web of authority with which Ishmael had been able to envelope his children.

One effect of the quarrel had been to divert the thoughts of the young

men from their recent visiter. With the dispute, that succeeded the disappearance of the fair stranger, all recollection of her existence appeared to have vanished. A few ominous and secret conferences,

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