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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE YELLOW CHIEF ***

Captain Mayne Reid

"The Yellow Chief"

Chapter One.

The Punishment of the Pump.

"To the pump with him! And see that he has a double dose of it!"

The words were spoken in a tone of command, earnest and angry. They were addressed to the overseer of a cotton-plantation not far from Vicksburg, in the State of Mississippi, the speaker being Blount Blackadder, a youth aged eighteen, and son to Squire Blackadder, the owner of the plantation.

Who was to receive the double douche?

Near by stood a personage to whom the words evidently pointed. He was also a youth, not very different either in age or size from him who had given the order; though his tawny skin and short crisped hair bespoke him of a different race—in short, a mulatto. And the time—for it is a tale of twenty years ago—along with other attendant circumstances, proclaimed him a slave of the plantation.



THE YELLOW CHIEF.

And why ordered to be thus served? As a punishment, of course.

You may smile at the idea, and deem it a joke. But the “punishment of the pump” is one of the most severe that can be inflicted; far more so than either the bastinado, or castigation by the lash. A man may writhe while his back is being scored by the cowskin; but that continuous stream of cold water, at first only refreshing, becomes after a time almost unendurable, and the victim feels as though his skull were being split open with an axe.

What had “Blue Dick”—the plantation sobriquet of the young mulatto—what had he done to deserve such chastisement?

The overseer, hesitating to inflict it, put this question to Blount Blackadder.

“That’s my business, and not yours, Mr Snively. Enough when I say he has deserved; and darn me if he don’t have it. To the pump with him!”

“Your father won’t be pleased about it,” pursued the overseer. “When he comes home—”

“When he comes home; that’s my affair. He’s not at home now, and during his absence I’m master of this plantation, I guess. I hope, sir, you’ll recognise me as such.”

“Oh, sartinly,” grumbled the overseer.

“Well, then, I’ve only to tell you, that the nigger’s got to be punished. He’s done enough to deserve it. Let that satisfy you; and for the rest I’ll be answerable to my father.”

What Blue Dick had done the young planter did not condescend to explain. Nor was it his passion that rendered him reticent; but a secret consciousness that he was himself in the wrong, and acting from motives of the meanest revenge.

They had their origin in jealousy. There was a quadroon girl upon the plantation to whose smiles Blue Dick had aspired. But they were also coveted by his young master—the master of both.

In such a rivalry the end is easily told. The honest love of Blue Dick was doomed to a harsh disappointment; for

Sylvia, the quadroon, had yielded her heart less to the dictates of natural partiality, than to the combined influence of vanity and power. It was a tale oft told in those days of the so-styled patriarchal institution—happily now at an end.

Maddened by the discovery of his sweetheart's defection, the young mulatto could not restrain himself from recrimination. A collision had occurred between him and his master's son. There had been words and threatened blows, quickly succeeded by the scene we are describing.

Mr Snively was not the man to hold out long against the threats of authority. His place was too precious to be risked by an act of idle chivalry. What to him was the punishment of a slave: a ceremony at which he was accustomed to assist almost every day of his life? Besides, he had no particular liking for Blue Dick, who was regarded by him as a "sassy fellow." Assured against blame from Squire Blackadder, he was only too ready to cause execution of the order. He proceeded to do so.

The scene was transpiring in an inclosed court-yard to the rear of the "big house" (Negro nomenclature for the planter's dwelling), adjoining also to the stables. On one side stood the pump, a tall obelisk of oak, with its massive arm of iron, and spout five feet above the level of the pavement. Underneath traversed a trough, the hallowed trunk of a tree, designed for the watering of the horses.

In the hot summer sun of the Mississippi Valley it should have been a sight to give gladness to the eye. Not so with the slaves on Squire Blackadder's plantation. To them it was more suggestive of sadness and fear; and they were accustomed to regard it with the same feelings as one who looks upon a gallows, or a guillotine. More than one half their number had, one time or another, sat under that spout till its chilly jet seemed like a sharp spear piercing their wool-covered crania.

The punishment of the pump was too frequent on Squire Blackadder's plantation to need minute directions as to the mode of administering it. Mr Snively had only to repeat the order received, to some half-dozen stalwart slaves, who stood around ready to execute it. The more ready, that Blue Dick was now to be the victim; for, even with these, the mulatto youth was far from being a favourite. Full of conceit on account of his clearer skin, he had always shown himself too proud to associate with them, and was thus deprived of their sympathies. It was his first punishment, too; for, although he had often before offended in a different way, Squire Blackadder had refrained from chastising him.

It was thought strange by all, though none knew the reason; and this immunity of which he had been accustomed to boast, rendered his now threatened punishment a thing for his fellow-slaves to rejoice at.

They who were ordered to administer it, went about their work with a will. At a sign from the overseer, Blue Dick was seized by two of the field hands, and dragged up to the pump. With cords procured from the adjacent stable, he was lashed to the trough in such a position that his crown came directly under the spout, eighteen inches below it. By stays stretching right and left, his head was so confined that he could not turn it an inch one way or the other. To have attempted moving it, would have been to tighten the noose, by which the rope was rove around his neck.

"Now, give him his shower-bath!" vociferated young Blackadder to the huge negro who stood by the handle of the pump.

The man, a savage-looking monster, who had himself more than once been submitted to a similar ducking, obeyed the order with a gleeful grin. The iron lever, rattling harsh upon its pivot, moved rapidly up and down; the translucent jet shot forth from the spout, and fell plashing upon the skull beneath.

The by-standers laughed, and to the victim it would yet have been only pleasant play; but among those who were jeering him was Sylvia the quadroon! All were abroad—both the denizens of the negro quarter, and the domestics of the house—spectators of his suffering and his shame.

Even Clara Blackadder, the sister of his tyrant torturer—a young lady of about twenty summers, with all the seeming graces of an angel—stood on the back porch contemplating the scene with as much indifference as if, from the box of a theatre, she had been looking upon some mere spectacle of the stage!

If she felt interest in it, it arose from no sympathy with the sufferer.

On the face of her brother was an expression of interest vivid and pronounced. His features bespoke joy—the joy of a malignant soul indulging in revenge.

It was a sad picture, that presented by these two young men—the one exulting in despotic power, the other suffering torture through its exercise. It was but the old and oft repeated tableau of master and slave.

And yet were they strangely alike, both in form and feature. With the ochreous tint extracted from his skin, and the curl combed out of his hair, Blue Dick might have passed for a brother of Blount Blackadder. He would have been a little better looking, and certainly showing a countenance of less sinister cast.

Perhaps not at that moment; for as the agony of physical pain became added to the mental anguish he was enduring, his features assumed an expression truly diabolical. Even the jet of water, spreading like a veil over them, did not hide from the spectators the fiendlike glance with which he regarded his oppressor. Through the diaphanous sheet they could see white lips tightly compressed against whiter teeth, that grinned defiance and vengeance, as his eyes rested on Sylvia. He uttered no groan; neither did he sue for mercy; though the torture he was enduring caused him to writhe within his ropes, at the risk of their throttling him.

There were few present who did not know that he was suffering extreme pain, and many of them from self-experience. And it was only when one of these, stirred by vivid memories, ventured to murmur some slight words of expostulation, that the punishment was suspended.

"He's had enough, I reckon?" said Snively, turning interrogatively toward the young planter.

"No, darn him! not half enough," was the reply; "you haven't given him the double. But never mind! It'll do for the present. Next time he offends in like manner, he shall be pumped upon till his thick skull splits like a cedar rail!"

Saying this, Blount Blackadder turned carelessly upon his heel, and went off to join his sister in the porch—leaving the overseer to release the sufferer at his discretion.

The iron handle discontinued its harsh grating; the cruel spout ceased to pour; and Blue Dick, disengaged from his garotte, was carried fainting to the stable.

But he was never again subjected to the punishment of the pump. The young planter did not have the chance to carry out his threat. Three days after, Blue Dick disappeared from the plantation. And on the morning of that day, almost simultaneous with his disappearance, was found the body of the quadroon girl Sylvia, at the bottom of the peach-orchard, her head split open to the chin!

It had been done by the blade of a wood-axe. There was no mystery about the matter—no speculation as to the author of the deed. The antecedent circumstances pointed directly to Blue Dick; and he was at once sought for.

Sought for, but not found. As soon as the hue-and-cry had gone abroad, the surrounding settlers, planters as well as poor whites, sprang to their arms, and into their saddles. The blood-mastiffs were put upon Blue Dick's track; but spite their keen scent for such game, and the energetic urging of their owners, they never set fang in the flesh of the mulatto murderer.

Chapter Two.

The Blackadders.

In the time preceding the extinction of slavery, there was no part of the United States where its chain was so galling as in that region lying along the lower Mississippi, known as the "Coast." More especially was this true of the State of Mississippi itself. In the old territories, east of the Alleghany range, the "institution" was tempered with a certain touch of the patriarchal; and the same might be said of Kentucky and Tennessee. Even in parts of Louisiana the mild indolent habits of the Creole had a softening influence on the condition of the slave. But it was different on the great cotton and tobacco plantations of Mississippi, as also portions of the Louisiana coast; many of whose owners were only half the year residents, and where the management of the negro was intrusted to the overseer—an irresponsible, and, in many cases, severe taskmaster. And among the owners themselves was a large number—the majority, in fact—not born upon the soil; but colonists, from all countries, who had gone thither, often with broken fortunes, and not unfrequently characters as well.

By these men the slave was only looked upon as so much live-stock; and it was not a question either of his happiness or welfare, but the work to be got out of him.

It would be a mistake to say that Mississippian planters were all of this class; as it would be also erroneous to suppose that Southern masters in general were less humane than other men. There is no denying them a certain generosity of character; and many among them were philanthropists of the first class. It was the institution itself that cursed them; and, brought up under its influence, they thought and acted wrongly; but not worse, I fear, than you or I would have done, had we been living under the same lights.

Unfortunately, humane men were exceptions among planters of the lower Mississippi; and so bad at one time was the reputation of this section of the South, that to have threatened a Virginia negro—or even one of Kentucky or Tennessee—with sale or expulsion thither, was sufficient at any time to make him contented with his task!

The word "Coast" was the *bogey* of negro boyhood, and the terror of his manhood.

Planter Blackadder, originally from the State of Delaware, was among the men who had contributed to this evil reputation. He had migrated to Mississippi at an early period of his life, making a purchase of some cheap land on a tract ceded by the Choctaws (known as the "Choctaw Purchase"). A poor man at the period of his migration, he had never risen to a high rank among the planter aristocracy of the State. But just for this reason did he avail himself of what appeared, to a mind like his, the real privilege of the order—a despotic bearing toward the sable-skinned helots whose evil star had guided them into his hands. In the case of many of them, their own evil character had something to do in conducting them thither; for planter Blackadder was accustomed to buy his negroes *cheap*, and his "stock" was regarded as one of the worst, in the section of country in which his plantation was "located." Despite their bad repute, however, there was work in them; and no man knew better than Squire Blackadder how to take it out. If their sense of duty was not sufficient to keep them to their tasks, there was a lash to hinder them from lagging, held ever ready in the hands of a man who had no disposition to spare it. This was Snively, the overseer, who, like the Squire himself, hailed from Delaware State.

Upon the Blackadder plantation was punishment enough, and of every kind known to the skin of the negro. At times there was even mutilation—of the milder type—extending beneath his skin. If Pomp or Scip tried to escape work by shamming a toothache, the tooth was instantly extracted, though not the slightest sign of decay might be detected in the "ivory!"

Under such rigid discipline, the Blackadder plantation should have thrived, and its owner become a wealthy man. No doubt he would have done so, but for an outlet on the other side, that, dissipating the profits, kept him comparatively poor.

The "scape-pipe" was the Squire's own and only son, Blount, who had grown up what is termed a wild fellow. He was not only wild, but wicked; and what, perhaps, grieved his father far more, he had of late years become ruinously expensive. He kept low company, preferring the "white trash;" fought cocks, and played "poker" with them in the woods; and, in a patronising way, attended all the "candy pullings" and "blanket trappings" for ten miles around.

The Squire could not be otherwise than indulgent to a youth of such tastes, who was his only son and heir. In boyhood's days he had done the same himself. For this reason, his purse-strings, held tight against all others, were loosed to his hopeful son Blount, even to aiding him in his evil courses. He was less generous to his daughter Clara, a girl gifted with great beauty, as also endowed with many of those moral graces, so becoming to woman. True, it was she who had stood in the porch while Blue Dick was undergoing the punishment of the pump. And it is true, also, that she exhibited but slight sympathy with the sufferer. Still was there something to palliate this apparent hardness of heart: she was not fully aware of the terrible pain that was being inflicted; and it was her father's fault not hers, that she was accustomed to witness such scenes weekly—almost daily. Under other tutelage Clara Blackadder might have grown up a young lady, good as she was graceful; and under other circumstances been happier than she was on the day she was seen to such disadvantage.

That, at this time, a cloud overshadowed her fate, was evident from that overshadowing her face; for, on looking upon it, no one could mistake its expression to be other than sadness.

The cause was simple, as it is not uncommon. The lover of her choice was not the choice of her father. A youth, poor in purse, but rich in almost every other quality to make man esteemed—of handsome person, and mind adorned with rare cultivation—a stranger in the land—in short, a young Irishman, who had strayed into Mississippi, nobody knew wherefore or when. Such was he who had won the friendship of Clara Blackadder, and the enmity both of her brother and father.

In heart accepted by her—though her lips dared not declare it—he was rejected by them in words scornful, almost insulting.

They were sufficient to drive him away from the State; for the girl, constrained by parental authority, had not spoken plain enough to retain him. And he went, as he had come, no one knew whither; and perhaps only Clara Blackadder cared.

As she stood in the porch, she was thinking more of him than the punishment that was being inflicted on Blue Dick; and not even on the day after, when her maid Sylvia was discovered dead under the trees, did the dread spectacle drive from her thoughts the remembrance of a man lodged there for life!

As the overseer had predicted, Squire Blackadder, on his return home, was angry at the chastisement that had been inflicted on Blue Dick, and horrified on hearing of the tragedy that succeeded it.

The sins of his own earlier life seemed rising in retribution against him!

Chapter Three.

A Changed Plantation.

We pass over a period of five years succeeding the scene recorded.

During this time there was but little change on the plantation of Squire Blackadder; either in the dwellers on the estate, or the administration of its affairs. Neither castigation by the cowskin, nor the punishment of the pump, was discontinued. Both were frequent, and severe as ever; and whatever of work could by such means be extracted from human muscles, was taken out of the unhappy slaves who called Mr Snively their "obaseeah." Withal, the plantation did not prosper. Blount, plunging yet deeper into dissipation, drained it of every dollar of its profits, intrenching even on the standard value of the estate. The number of its hands had become reduced, till there were scarce enough left for its cultivation; and, despite the constant cracking of Mr Snively's whip, weeds began to show themselves in the cotton fields, and decay around the "gin" house.

At the end of these five years, however, came a change, complete as it was cheerful.

The buildings underwent repair, "big house" as well as out-offices; while the crops, once more carefully cultivated, presented a flourishing appearance. In the court-yard and negro quarters the change was still more striking. Instead of sullen faces, and skins grey with dandruff, or brown with dirt, ill-concealed under the tattered copperas-stripe, could now be seen smiling countenances, with clean white shirts covering an epidermis that shone with the hue of health. Instead of profane language and loud threats, too often followed by the lash, could be heard the twanging of the banjo, accompanied by its simple song, and the cheerful voice of Sambo excited in "chaff," or light-hearted laughter.

The change is easily explained. It was not the same Sambo, nor the same "obaseeah," nor yet the same massa. The whole *personnel* of the place was different. A planter of the patriarchal type had succeeded to the tyrant; and Squire Blackadder was gone away, few of his neighbours knew whither, and fewer cared. By his cruelty he had lost caste, as by the courses pursued by his son—the latter having almost brought him to Bankruptcy. To escape this, he had sold his plantation, though still retaining his slaves—most of them being unsaleable on account of their well-known wickedness.

Taking these along with him, he had "started west."

To one emigrating from the banks of the Mississippi this may seem an unfitting expression. But at the time a new "west" and a "far" one had just entered on the stage of colonisation. It was called California, a country at that time little known; for it had late come into the possession of the United States, and the report of its golden treasures, although on the way, had not yet reached the meridian of the Mississippi.

It was its grand agricultural wealth, worth far more than its auriferous riches, that was attracting planter Blackadder to its plains—this and the necessity of escaping from the too respectable society that had sprung up around him in the "Choctaw Purchase."

He had not taken departure alone. Three or four other families, not very dissimilar either in circumstances or character, had gone off along with him.

Let us follow upon their track. Though three months have elapsed since their leaving the eastern side of the Mississippi, we shall be in time to overtake them; for they are still wending their slow and weary way across the grand prairie.

The picture presented by an emigrating party is one long since become common; yet never can it be regarded without a degree of interest. It appeals to a pleasant sentiment, recalling the earliest, and perhaps most romantic period of our history. The huge Conestoga wagon, with its canvas tilt bleached to a snowy whiteness by many a storm of rain, not inappropriately styled the "ship of the prairies;" its miscellaneous load of tools and utensils, with house furniture and other Penates, keeping alive the remembrance of the home left behind, still more forcibly brought to mind by those dear faces half hid under the screening canvas; the sun-tanned and stalwart horsemen, with guns on shoulder, riding in advance or around it; and, if a Southern migration, the sable cohort forming its sure accompaniment, all combine to form a tableau that once seen will ever be remembered.

And just such a picture was that presented by the migrating party of Mississippi planters *en route* for far California. It was a "caravan" of the smaller kind—only six wagons in all—with eight or ten white men for its escort. The journey was full of danger, and they knew this who had undertaken it. But their characters had hindered them from increasing their number; and, in the case of more than one, the danger left behind was almost as much dreaded as any that might be before them.

They were following one of the old "trails" of the traders, at that time becoming used by the emigrants, and especially those from the South-western States. It was the route running up the Arkansas to Bent's Fort, and thence striking northward along the base of the Rocky Mountains to the pass known as "Bridger's."

At that time the pass and the trails on both sides of it were reported "safe." That is, safe by comparison. The Indians had been awed by a sight unusual to them—the passage through their territory of large bodies of United States troops—Doniphan's expedition to New Mexico, with those of Cooke and Kearney to California. For a short interval it had restrained them from their attacks upon the traders' caravan—even from the assassination of the lonely trapper.

As none of Blackadder's party was either very brave, or very reckless, they were proceeding with very great caution, keeping scouts in the advance by day, and guards around their camps by night.

And thus, watchful and wary, had they reached Bent's Fort, in safety. Thence an Indian hunter who chanced to be hanging around the fort—a Choctaw who spoke a little English—was engaged to conduct them northward to the Pass; and, resuming their journey under his guidance, they had reached Bijou Creek, a tributary of the Platte, and one of the most beautiful streams of prairie-land.

They had formed their encampment for the night, after the fashion practised upon the prairies—with the wagons locked tongue and wheel, inclosing a hollow space—the *corral*—so called after a word brought by the prairie-merchants from New Mexico. (Note 1.)

The travellers were more than usually cheerful. The great chain of the Rocky Mountains was in sight, with Long's Peak raising its snow-covered summit, like a vast beaconing star to welcome, and show them the way, into the land of promise that lay beyond it.

They expected, moreover, to reach Saint Vrain's Fort, by the evening of the next day; where, safe from Indian attack, and relieved from camp watching, they could once more rest and recruit themselves.

But in that hour of relaxation, while they were looking at Long's Peak, its snowy crown still gilded by the rays of the setting sun, there was a cloud coming from that same quarter that threatened to overwhelm them.

It was not the darkening of the night, nor mist from the mountain-sides; but a dusky shadow more to be feared than either.

They had no fear of it. They neither saw, nor knew of its existence; and, as they gathered around their camp-fire to make their evening repast, they were as gay as such men might be expected to be, under similar circumstances.

To many of them it was the last meal they were ever destined to eat; as was that night the last of their lives. Before another sun had shone upon Long's Peak, one-half their number was sleeping the sleep of death—their *corralled* wagons enclosing a space afterward to become their cemetery.

Note 1. The Spanish word for inclosure, adopted at an early period by the prairie-traders, and now become part of our language.

Chapter Four.

A Painted Party.

About five miles from the spot upon which the emigrants were encamped, and almost at the same hour, another party had pitched their tents upon the plain.

There was not the slightest resemblance between the two sets of travellers, either in personal appearance, in the language spoken, or in their camp-equipments.

The latter were all horsemen, unencumbered with wagons, and without even the impedimenta of tents.

On dismounting they had simply staked the horses on the grass, and laid down upon the buffalo robes, that were to serve them both as shelter and for couches.

There were about two score of them in all; and all without exception were men. Not a woman or child was among them. They were young men too; though to this there were several exceptions.

To have told the colour of their skins it would have been necessary to submit them to ablution: since that portion of it not covered by a breech-clout with legging continuations of leather, was so besmeared with paint that not a spot of the natural tint could be detected.

After this, it is scarce necessary to say, that they were Indians; or to add that their painted bodies, nude from neck to waist, proclaimed them "on the war-trail."

There were other evidences of this, in the manner in which they were armed. Most of them carried *guns*. On a hunting excursion they would have had bows and arrows—the prairie tribes preferring these weapons in the chase. (Note 1.) They had their spears, too, slung lance-fashion by the side of the saddle; with tomahawks stuck in their belts. All of them were furnished with the *lazo*.

Among them was one sufficiently conspicuous to be at once recognised as their chief. His superior dress and adornment told of his title to this distinction; while there was that in his bearing toward the others, that placed it beyond doubt. They seemed not only to fear, but respect him; as if something more than the accident of hereditary rank gave him a claim to command them.

And he on his side seemed to rule them; not despotically, but with a firmness of tone and bearing that brooked no disobedience. On alighting from his horse on the spot selected for their camp, the animal was unsaddled by another, and taken away to the pasturing place; while the chief himself, doffing a splendid cloak of white wolf-skins, spread it on the grass, and lay down upon it. Then taking a pipe from his embroidered pouch, and lighting it, he seemed to give himself up to silent meditation—as if he had no need to take further trouble about the affairs of the camp, and none of the others would venture to intrude upon his privacy.

None did, save his immediate attendant; who brought him his supper, after it had been prepared, and assisted also in arranging his sleeping-place.

Between him and his attendant not a word was exchanged, and only a few with one of the others. They related to setting the camp sentinels, with some instructions about a scout that might be expected to come in during the night.

After that the chief stretched himself along his robe, refilled the pipe with fresh tobacco taken from his pouch, and for some time lay smoking with his eyes fixed upon the moon. Her light, resplendent in the pure atmosphere of the upland prairies, falling full upon him, displayed a figure of fine proportions—indicating both toughness and strength.

As to the face, nothing could have been told of it, even had it been seen under sunlight. Striped with vermilion on a ground of ochreous earth, with strange devices on the forehead and cheeks, it resembled a painted escutcheon more than a human face. The features, however, showing a certain rotundity, told them to be those of a young man, who, but for the disfiguring of the paint, might have appeared handsome.

Still was there something in his eyes as they glanced under the silvery moonlight, that betrayed an evil disposition. No water could have washed out of them that cast at once sinister and sad.

It was strange that one so youthful—for he seemed certainly not over twenty-five—could have obtained such control over the turbulent spirits around him. One and all of them, though also young, were evidently of this character. He was either the son of some chief long and universally venerated, or a youthful brave who had performed feats of valour entitling him to respect.

The band, over which he exercised sway, could be only an expeditionary party belonging to some one of the large prairie tribes; and the material composing it pointed to its being one of those roving troops of young and reckless braves, often encountered upon the plains—the terror of trappers and traders.

There was something unusual in this chief of youthful mien, keeping apart from his comrades, and holding them in such control.

While they were carousing around their camp-fire, he was quietly smoking his pipe; and after they had gone to sleep, he was still seen lying wide awake upon his wolf-skins!

It was a singular place in which he and his followers had encamped; a spot romantically picturesque. It was in a gorge or glen forming a flat meadow of about six acres in extent, and covered with grass of the short grama (Note 2)

species. It was inclosed on three sides by a bluff rising sheer up from the plain, and bisected by the tiniest of streams, whose water came spout-like over the precipice, with a fall of some twenty feet. On the side open toward the east could be obtained a clear view of the prairie, undulating away to the banks of Bijou Creek. With the moon shining down on the soft grassy sward; the Indian horses grouped and grazing on it; the warriors lying asleep upon their robes; the stream glistening like a serpent as it swept silently past them; the cascade sparkling above; and around the dark framing of cliffs; you have a picture of Rocky Mountain life, that, though rare to you, is common to those who have traversed that region of romance.

It did not appear to have any charm for the young chief, who lay stretched upon the wolf-skins. Evidently thinking of something else, he took no note of the scenery around him, further than now and then to raise himself upon his elbow, and gaze for a time toward that portion of it that was least picturesque; the monotonous surface of the plain stretching eastward. That he was scanning it not for itself, but something that he expected to appear upon it, would have been made manifest to one who could have known his thoughts. Expressed in English they would have run thus:

“Waboga should have been here by this. I wonder what’s detaining him. He must have seen our signal, and should know where to find us. May be that moon hinders him from stealing a horse out of their camp. As their guide they ought to trust him to go anywhere. Well, come he or not, I shall attack them all the same—this night. Oh! what a sweet vengeance! But the sweeter, if I can only take them alive—one and all. Then, indeed, shall I have true revenge!

“What can be keeping the Choctaw? I should not have trusted him, but that he speaks the white man’s tongue. They’d have suspected any other. He’s stupid, and may spoil my plans. I want them—must have them *alive!*”

“Now, if he should turn traitor and put them on their guard? Perhaps take them on to the fort? No—no; he would not do that. He hates the white man as much as I myself, and with nearly as good reason. Besides, he dare not do it. If he did—”

The soliloquy of the recumbent chief was suddenly interrupted, and his thoughts diverted into a different channel, by a sound reaching his ear, that seemed to come from the distant prairie. It was the hoof-stroke of a horse; but so faint, that only a practised ear could have heard, much less make out what was causing it.

In an instant he had changed his attitude, and lay with cheek closely pressed to the turf. In another instant, he muttered to himself:

“A horse—a single horse—must be the Choctaw!”

He raised himself upon his knees and looked out over the plain. A low ridge ran obliquely up to the mouth of the gorge in which the Indians were reposing. There was a clump of bushes upon its crest; and over the tops of these he could perceive a small disk, darker than the foliage. He knew it had not been there before.

While he was scanning it, there came, as if out of the bushes, three short barks, followed by a prolonged lugubrious howl. It seemed the cry of the prairie-wolf. But he knew it was not this; for soon after it was repeated with a different intoning.

Simultaneously with the second utterance, a similar cry was sent back as if in answer. It was the response of the camp-guard, who was keeping watch among the horses. And in this there was an intonation different from either of the others. It was evidently understood by him who had signalled from without, and told him he might safely approach: for the instant after, the dark spot above the bushes was seen moving along behind them; and presently appeared by the side of the clump, in the shape of a man on horseback.

It was a horseman in the garb of a white hunter; but the moon falling full upon his face, showed the copper-coloured skin of an Indian.

He rode forward to the edge of the camp; exchanged some words with the horse-guard, that had answered his signal; and then came on toward the chief, who had risen to receive him. The salutation told him to be the Choctaw so impatiently expected.

“Waboga has delayed long,” said the chief, half-reproachfully. “It is now after midnight. He knows we must make our attack before morning.”

“The Yellow chief need not be troubled about the time. The sleeping-place of the white travellers is near at hand. It will take but an hour to reach it. Waboga was detained against his will.”

“Ha! how?”

“The pale faces had grown suspicious, and watched him. Some trappers, on their way to Saint Vrain’s Fort, came up with the emigrant train after sunrise, and stayed with it till the noon halt. They must have said something against the guide. All day after, Waboga could see that the white men were watching him.”

“Then they are not encamped where I wished them?”

“They are. The Yellow chief may rest sure of it. They were not so suspicious as that; but allowed the guide to conduct them to their sleeping-place. It is in the creek bend where Waboga was instructed to take them.”

“Good! And their numbers?”

“Nine white men in all—with their women and children. Of the blacks, about five times as many—men, squaws, and papooses.”

"No matter for them: they won't resist. Describe the whites."

"The chief of the caravan, a man of middle age—a planter. Waboga well knows his kind. He remembers them when a boy dwelling beyond the Big river—in the land of which his people have been despoiled."

"A planter. Any family with him?"

"A son who has seen some twenty-four summers—like the father in everything but age; a daughter, grown to a woman—not like either. She is fair as a flower of the prairie."

"It is she—it is they!" muttered the chief to himself, his eyes glistening in the moonlight with an expression at once triumphant and diabolical. "Oh! 'twill be a sweet revenge!"

"Of the other whites," continued the Choctaw, "one is a tall man, who has much to do with the management. He acts under the orders of the planter. He carries a great whip, and often uses it on the shoulders of the black slaves."

"He shall have *his* punishment, too. But not for that. They deserve it."

"The other six white men are—"

"No matter; only tell me how they are armed. Will they make resistance?"

Waboga did not think they would—not much. He believed they would let themselves be taken alive.

"Enough!" exclaimed the Cheyenne chief—for it was to this tribe the Indian belonged. "The time has come. Go wake our warriors, and hold yourself ready to guide us."

Then, turning upon his heel, he commenced gathering up his arms, that lay scattered around the robe on which he had been reposing.

His body-servant, already aroused, was soon in attendance upon him; while the slumbering warriors, one after another, startled from savage dreams, sprang to their feet, and hurried toward their horses.

The best-drilled squadron of light cavalry could not have got half so quickly into their saddles, as did this painted troop of Cheyennes.

In less than ten minutes after receiving the command to march, they were riding beyond the bounds of their bivouac—equipped for any kind of encounter!

Note 1. They have several reasons for this preference. The arrow does its death-work silently, without alarming the game; besides, powder and lead cost more than arrow-sticks, which can also be recovered.

Note 2. *Grama*, the New Mexican name for a species of grass forming the finest pastured of the prairies—the famed buffalo grass not excepted.

Chapter Five.

A Traitorous Guide.

As already known, the emigrants had *corralled* their wagons on the banks of Bijou Creek.

The spot selected, or rather to which their Indian guide had conducted them, was in a bend of the stream, that looped around the encampment in the shape of a horse's shoe. It enclosed an area of some four or five acres of grassy ground—resembling a new-mown meadow.

With an eye to security, it could not, to all appearance, have been better chosen. The creek, running sluggishly around the loop, was deep enough to foil any attempt at fording; while the narrow, isthmus-like neck could be defended with advantage. It had not been the choice of the travellers themselves, but of their Indian guide, who, as already stated, had presented himself to them at Bent's Fort, and been engaged to conduct them through Bridger's Pass. Speaking the white man's tongue, though but indifferently, and being a Choctaw, as he declared himself, they had no suspicion of his honesty, until that very day, when a band of free trappers, who chanced to pass them on the route, and who knew something of the Indian's character, had warned them to beware of him. They had obeyed the warning, so far as lay in the power of men so little acquainted with the prairies. And how could they suspect a guide who had chosen for their night's camping-place a spot that seemed the very place for their security? How could they suppose that the deep, slow stream, running silently around them, could have been designed for any other purposes than that of defence? It never entered their minds to suppose it could be intended as a trap. Why should it?

If anything could have given them this thought it would have been what they had heard from the trappers. Some of them had reflected upon the character given of their guide. But more discredited it, believing it to be only ill-will on the part of the whites towards the Indian—like themselves, a hunter. Others said it was a trapper joke—a story told to scare them.

There was something odd in the eagerness the Indian had shown in directing them to their present camping-ground. It was some distance from the travelled track, where they had seen other places that appeared sufficiently suitable.

Why should he have taken the trouble to bring them to the bend of the creek?

The man who made this reflection was Snively, the overseer. Snively didn't like the look of the "redskin," though he was a Choctaw, and spoke a little English. That he had come originally from the other side of the Mississippi was not proof of his being honest; for Mr Snively had no great faith in the integrity of men tailing from the "Choctaw Purchase"—whatever the colour of their skin—red, white, or black.

His suspicions about the guide, communicated to his fellow-travellers, were adopted by several of them, though not by their leader. Squire Blackadder scouted the idea of treason, as also did his son.

Why should the Choctaw betray them? It was not as if he had been one of the prairie Indians, and belonging to some predatory band. He was merely a wanderer from his own tribe, who, in the Reserve allotted to them west of Arkansas State, were now living as an inoffensive and half-civilised people. He could have no motive in leading them astray, but the contrary. He was not to receive his recompense for acting as their guide until after their arrival on the other side of the mountains. A good sum had been promised him. Was it likely he should do anything to forfeit it? So reasoned Squire Blackadder and several of the emigrants who accompanied him.

Snively and the others were not satisfied, and resolved to keep a sharp eye upon the Indian.

But, watchful as they were from that time forward, they failed to see him, as he slipped out of their camp, near the mid-hour of night, taking along with him one of the best horses belonging to the caravan!

He must have got away by leading the animal for some distance along the edge of the stream, concealed under the shadow of the banks. Otherwise, on the open prairie, with the moon shining down upon its treeless sward, he could not have eluded the vigilance of the camp-guards, one of whom was Snively himself.

It was only by an accident that his departure was discovered, just before daybreak. The horse he had taken chanced to be a *mare*, that some weeks before had dropped a foal. It was too fine a creature to be left behind upon the prairies, and had been therefore brought along with its dam.

The colt, after a time missing its mother, ran hinnying about, till its cries of distress startled the camp from its slumbers. Then a search on all sides resulted in the universal conviction that their guide had betrayed them—or, at all events, had stolen off, taking the mare along with him!

There was no more sleep for the eyes of the emigrants. One and all ran wildly around the wagons—the whites meeting each other with cautions and curses, alike contradictory; the blacks—men, women, and children—huddling together, and giving voice to their fears in shrieks and chattering.

And, in the midst of this confusion, a dark mass was seen moving across the prairie, upon which the white light of the moon was already becoming blended with that of the grey dawn.

At first it came slowly and silently, as though stealing toward the camp. Then, as if concealment was no longer deemed necessary, the mass broke into a scattered cloud, showing it to be composed of horsemen.

Their trampling sounded upon the turf, at the same time that a wild yell, issuing simultaneously from threescore throats, struck terror into the hearts of the emigrants. There could be no mistaking that cry. It was the war-whoop of the Cheyennes.

The travellers had no time to reflect upon it—it was the slogan of attack; and, before they could think of any plan for defending themselves, the dusky horsemen were at hand, swooping down upon them like the breath of a tornado!

The emigrants were not all cowards. Three or four were men of courage, and not the least courageous was Snively the overseer. Still was it more by a mechanical impulse, than any hope of successfully defending themselves, that they discharged their guns in the faces of the approaching foemen.

It did not stay the impetuosity of the charge. Their shots were returned by a volley from the guns of their savage assailants, followed up by a thrusting of spears; and, in less than ten minutes' time, the *corral* was captured.

When the day broke, it disclosed a scene, since then, alas! far from unfrequent on the prairies. A wagon train, with its tilts torn down, and the contents strewed around it; the cattle that had drawn it along standing near, and wondering what had befallen it; their owners in captivity, some of them bound hand and foot, others lying lifeless upon the turf!

Embracing all, a cohort of painted savages—some keeping guard over the captives, others indulging in on unchecked Saturnalia; some dead-drunk, others reeling in a state of half intoxication—each with cup in hand, filled with the fire-water taken from the captured wagons!

Such was the spectacle on Bijou Creek on that morning, when the emigrant train of the ex-Mississippi planter fell into the hands of a war-party of Cheyennes, led by the *Yellow Chief*.

Chapter Six.

Two Trappers.

The gorge in which the young Cheyenne chief and his followers had made their night bivouac, was only one of a series of similar glens, that with short intervals between, notched the foot of the *sierra* (Note 1) where it edged upon the open prairie. It was not the main chain of the Rocky Mountains, but a spur running out into the plain.

About a mile farther along, and nearer to Bijou Creek, was another gorge, not very dissimilar in size, but somewhat so in character. Instead of an embouchure open to the plain, it was shut in on all sides by bluffs, rising abruptly above it to the height of over a hundred feet.

There was an outlet nevertheless; where a tiny spring-branch, gurgling forth from the bottom of the encircling cliffs, passed out into the open country, after making its way through a *cañon* (pronounced Kenyon) which it had no doubt cut for itself in the course of countless ages.

But as it needed a cleft no wider than might admit the body of a man, not much wider was it, from top to bottom of the cliff. A traveller might have passed within a hundred yards of its outer face, looking towards the plain, without perceiving this break in the precipice or taking it only for a fissure in the *façade* of the rocks.

The enclosed space inside, in one other respect differed from the glen that had been occupied by the Indians. Its bottom was thickly timbered with cotton-wood and other trees; while along the ledges of the cliff, and wherever a crevice afforded root-accommodation grew *piñons* (Note 2) and the creeping cliff cedar.

It seemed a favourite haunt of the owls and bats, but only at night. By day the birds appeared to have full possession of it—filling it with their sweet music, and fearing only the rapacious white-headed eagle, that occasionally “whetted his saw” (Note 3) or laughed his maniac laugh, perched on the cliffs overhead.

Only from the heights above could a view be had of the “hole” (Note 4); and to get this required climbing, beyond anything curiosity was likely to encourage. No prairie traveller would have taken the trouble, unless he chanced to be a German geologist, hammer in hand, or a botanist of the same inquiring race, in search of rare plants. Led by the love of science, these simple but ardent explorers go everywhere, into every cranny and corner of the earth—even the “holes” of the Rocky Mountains, where often have their dead bodies been found, with heads stripped of their skins by the knife of the indiscriminating savage.

Ascending the cliff from the outside, and looking down into the gorge described, you might fancy that no human being had ever entered it. To do so would cost some exertion. And danger, too: for there was a hundred feet of precipitous rock to be scaled *downward*, at the risk of getting a broken neck.

Some one had taken this risk, however; for on the same night in which the Cheyenne chief had sallied out to attack the emigrant camp, only a little later and nearer morning, a fire might have been seen glimmering among the cotton-wood trees that covered the bottom of the glen.

It could only have been seen from a particular point above, where no one was likely to be straying. On all other sides it was concealed by the thick foliage of the trees, through which its smoke, scattering as it passed upward, became dissipated into thin haze before reaching the crest of the cliffs.

By this fire, far remote from the hearths of civilisation, two men were seated, bearing but slight resemblance to each other. One was characteristic of the scene; his costume and accoutrements, in short, his *tout-ensemble*, proclaiming him unmistakably a trapper. Hunting-shirt of dressed deer-hide, fringed at cape and skirt, leggings of like material, moccasins soled with *parflèche* (Note 5) and on his head, a felt hat with crown and brim showing long service. His hair, close cropped, gave little framing to his face, that was naturally dark in colour, but darker with dirt, sun-tan, and wrinkles. It looked the face of a man who had seen nearly sixty summers, and quite as many winters.

His companion was not over half his age, nor in any way like the man we have taken for a trapper, although garbed in the costume common to “mountain men” (the Rocky Mountain trappers so style themselves). He wore the hunting-shirt, leggings, and moccasins; but all were tastefully cut and elaborately embroidered.

It might have been the difference between youth and age; and both may have been trappers alike. Still there was something about the younger man—a delicacy of feature and refinement of manner—very different from those who take to this rude adventurous calling.

A thought of the kind seemed to have come uppermost in the mind of his older companion, as they sate by their camp-fire just kindled. It still wanted half an hour of sunrise; and they had issued out of their skin lodge, standing close by, to cook their morning meal. It was preparatory to starting out on a tour of inspection to their traps, set overnight in the streams near at hand. A large fitch of buffalo-meat, comprising several hump-ribs, was roasting in the blaze; and they were waiting till it should be sufficiently done.

It was the elder who spoke first; at least upon a subject foreign to the preparation of their repast.

“Durn it, Ned!” said he, “I hev been dreemin’ ‘bout ye last night.”

“Indeed! I hope that nothing promises bad luck. Bah! why should I think of luck, one way or the other? For me there can be none in the future worse than I’ve had in the past. What was your dream, ‘Lije?”

“Oh! nutin’ much. I only thort I seed ye alongside o’ a gurl; an’ she war a pullin’ at ye to get ye away from the mountings. She war tryin’ to toat you along wi’ her.”

“She didn’t succeed, I suppose?”

“Wal; I woke up afore it kim to thet. But ef’t hed been the gurl as I seed in my dreem, an’ it war all true, I reck’n she’d ‘a hed a good chance.”

“And pray what girl did you see in your dream?”

“Maybe you’d like to purnounce the name; ef ye do, I’d say Clar’ Blackedder. She war the very gurl as war a draggin’

at ye.”

At the mention of the name “Ned” heaved a deep sigh, though the sizzling of the hump-ribs hindered his companion from hearing it. But, by the brighter light caused by the fat falling among the cinders, a shadow could be seen suddenly overspreading his countenance, his features at the same assuming a cast, half-sad, half-angry.

“Not much danger of that dream coming true,” he said, with an effort at composing them. “Clara Blackadder has no doubt long ago changed her name; and forgotten mine too.”

“I don’t think she’s dud eyther one or the tother. Weemen air a kewrous kind o’ varmint; an’ cling on to thar affecshuns a deal harder’n we do. Beside; that gurl wa’n’t one o’ the changin’ sort. I knowed her since she war knee high to a duck. She war the only one o’ the hul family o’ Blackedders worth knowin’; for a bigger cuss than the brother wa’n’t nowhar to be foun’ in Massissipi, ’ceptin’ ’twar the ole squire hisself. That gurl loved you, Ned; an’ ef you’d tuk the right way wi’ her, you mout yourself ’a had the changin’ o’ her name.”

“What way?”

“Whipped her off on the crupper o’ yur saddle—jest es these hyar purairia Injuns sometimes does. Ye shed a dud thet an’ said no more about it, eyther to her father, or to anybody else. It’s the way I dud myself wi’ Sal Slocum, down thar in Tennersee bottom, nigh on thirty yeern ago, ’fore I went down to the Choctaw Purchiss. Dick, her ole dad, war all agin me havin’ his gurl, ’cause he hed a spite at me, for beatin’ him at a shootin’ match. ’Twa’n’t no use his oppersishun. I got my critter seddled up, one night when Dick war soun’ asleep in his shanty, an’ I toated Sal off, an’ took her afore a Methody preecher, who coupled us thegither in the shakin’ o’ a goat’s tail. An’ I niver hed reezun to rue it. Sal made me a good wife, as long as she lived. I hain’t hed a better ’un since.”

The young man smiled sadly at the strange ideas of his trapper companion; but the subject being a painful one to him, he made no rejoinder.

“Thet’s what you oughter dud wi’ Clar’ Blackedder,” persisted the trapper, without noticing his companion’s chagrin, “cut cl’ar away wi’ her. Ef ye’d a hed her for yur wife, it ’ud a been diff’reent for ye now. Instead o’ bein’ hyar in the mountains, mopin’ yer innards out—for I kin see ye’re doin’ thet, Ned—ye mout now been settled in the State o’ Massissipi workin’ a cotton plantashun wi’ a smart chance o’ niggers on’t. Not as I myself shed care ’bout eyther; for arter twenty yeern o’ ramblin’ over these hyar reejuns, I ain’t fit to live in the settlements. It’s diff’reent wi’ you, however, who ain’t noways shooted for a trapper’s life—though I will say thar ain’t a better shot nor hunter in all these purairias. Anybody kin see ye’re only hyar for a diff’reent purpiss; tho I reck’n ’Lije Orton air the only ’un to which ye’ve confided yur secret. Wal; you know I like ye, Ned; an’ that’s why I don’t like to see ye so down in the dumps. They’ve been on yur ever since yur left the Massissipi; and I reck’n yur’ll find no cure for ’em out hyar.”

“Admitted, ’Lije, that I still think of Miss Blackadder. As I know you are my friend, I will admit it. But what would you have me do?”

“Go back to the Choctaw Purchiss, get once more ’longside the gurl, an’ do wi’ her as I did wi’ Sal Slocum—run away wi’ her.”

“But she may be married? Or perhaps no longer cares for *me*?”

This was said with a sigh.

“Neyther one nor t’other. ’Lije Orton air willin’ to bet high thet. First place, thar wur reezuns she wudn’t git married eezy. The ole Squire her dad, wa’n’t poplar about the Purchiss; an’ I don’t think he wur over rich. The young ’un must a spent most o’ the shiners as come in for the cotton. I know *you* wudn’t a cared ’bout that; but others wud; an’ I guess Clar’ Blackadder wa’n’t like to hev her choice ’mong the sons o’ the best planters; an’ I guess too she wa’n’t the gurl to hev any o’ the second-rates. Then she liked you powerful. She told me so, time I wur back thar, jest arter you left. Yes, Ned; she liked you, an’ take this chile’s wud for it, she’ll stick to thet likin’ as death to a dead nigger.”

Quaint and queer as was the trapper’s talk, it was pleasant to the ear of Edward O’Neil: for such was the name of the young man—the same who had made suit for the hand of Clara Blackadder, and been scornfully rejected by her father.

Of his life since that time the story is easily supplied. On leaving the State of Mississippi he had gone westward into that of Arkansas; staying for some time at Little Rock. He had afterwards made his way to the Rocky Mountains, in the hope that among their deep defiles he might be enabled to bury the sorrow that was preying upon him. Chance had brought him in contact with ’Lije Orton, a noted trapper of the time; and something besides had made them trapping companions, as well as fast friends: for ’Lije, though of rude habit and exterior, was at the heart true as steel.

The young Irishman, smiling at the crude simile of his companion, made no reply. Indeed, there was no opportunity; for, while delivering it, ’Lije saw that the buffalo-ribs were sufficiently roasted; and, leaning forward over the fire, he transferred them from the spit to a large wooden platter, taken out of his “*possible sack*” (The “Trapper’s travelling bag”). Before any response could be given, he had separated the ribs with his knife; and, taking hold of one in both hands, he commenced stripping it with his teeth, as quickly and adroitly as could have been done by the hungriest *coyoté* (Pronounce, *Cohote*. The “Prairie-Wolf” (*Canis latrans*)).

Note 1. *Sierra*, The Spanish word for “saw.” It also signifies a mountain chain or ridge, the idea having no doubt come from the denticulated appearance of the Spanish mountain chains, seen *en profile*, against the sky. What we call the Rocky Mountains, are known among Mexicans as the *Sierra Madre* (mother chain). Spurs and branching ranges have

particular names, as Sierra Mogollon, Sierra Guadalupe, etc. This word is being adopted into our language, and will soon be thoroughly "naturalised" as "cañon," "ranche," and others. *Cerro* is a different word, and signifies an isolated mountain or high hill, as "Cerro dorilo."

Note 2. Pronounced *Peenyon*. It is the edible or "nut pine" (*pinus edulis*), of which there are several distinct species throughout Texas, Mexico, the Rocky Mountains, and California. They afford food to several tribes of Indians, and are also an article of consumption in many white (Mexican) settlements.

Note 3. There is a remarkable resemblance between the call-note of the bald eagle, and the sound made in sharpening a large saw. And by a little stretch of fancy, it may be likened to the shrill hysterical laughter, sometimes heard from the insane.

Note 4. "Hole." The trapper name for an enclosed gorge of the kind described.

Note 5. Sole-leather made from the hide of the buffalo bull, tanned Indian fashion. A French trapper word signifying arrow-proof, on account of its being used for shields by the prairie Indians.

Chapter Seven.

Breakfast Interrupted.

The two trappers had got about half through their Homeric meal, when a sound reached their ears, that caused them not only to stop mastication, but hold the half-polished ribs suspended, as if they would have dropped them out of their hands! It was a shot they heard—first one, and then several others following in quick succession. They were heard only indistinctly, as if fired far off upon the prairie. But even thus, the sounds were not agreeable; for the report of fire-arms in that solitary region has a significance, and not always a safe one. It might be a friend, who had discharged his gun; but it is more likely to be an enemy. Evidently so believed the two trappers, else they would not have fixed their camping-place in a spot so difficult of access—requiring them to wade waist-deep in water, and twice too, every time they went a hundred yards from their tent! The spring-branch occupying the full bed of the cañon, the only way by which they could conveniently pass out to the plain, nailed for this semi-immersion. But the same gave them protection against idle intruders.

"Speel up, Ned!" cried his companion, "an' see what you kin see."

The request was at once complied with; the young trapper, flinging down his half-picked bone, commenced climbing the steep face of the rock, assisted by the branches of the cedars. 'Lije remained below, continuing his matutinal meal.

In a few seconds time O'Neil had reached the summit of the cliff; and with a small binocular glass, which he had taken up along with him, commenced examining the country in the direction whence the shots appeared to have come.

It was yet only the earliest dawn, and the plain towards the east was still shrouded in darkness. But as the young man kept gazing through the glass, a quick flash came before its field, followed by the report of a gun. At the same instant sparks flew up, as if from a fire that had been trampled upon, and on the still morning air, he could hear the confused sounds of strife, in which human voices appeared to be intermingled with the yelling of demons!

"D'ye see anything, boy?" called his comrade from below. "I hyurd another shot out purairiaward. You must 'a seed the flash o't?"

"More than that," responded the young man, speaking with bated breath. "Come up, 'Lije! There's a fight going on not far off. Some travellers have been encamped, as I can tell by the sparkling of their fires. They appear to have been attacked, and by Indians. Come up, quick!"

The old trapper, grumbling his chagrin at being interrupted in his *déjeuner*, dropped the buffalo-rib; and taking his rifle along with him, commenced ascending the cliff.

By the time he had joined his companion on the summit, the day had almost dawned; for the morning twilight is of short duration on the head waters of the Southern Platte.

Looking eastward over the plain, they could now see something more than the gleaming of camp-fires; the white tilts of waggons set in *corralled* shape, and around dark forms, of both men and horses, swarming and moving like bees hiving upon a branch. They could hear, too, the sounds of strife still continuing, or it might be the exulting shouts succeeding a triumph.

"A camp o' whites," said the old trapper, half speaking to himself, and half to his comrade. "That's clar from their havin' waggons. And they've been attackted by Injuns; that's equally sartin from the shouts. Thar's no mistakin' them yells. They kedn't come from any other than an Injun's throat. I wonder who the whites kin be?"

His young comrade, equally wondering, but still busy with his binocular, made no rejoinder.

"A party o' emigratin' travellers, I reck'n?" pursued the old trapper. "Can't 'a be any o' Bent's or Saint Vrain's people.

They wudn't a got surprised that eezy, nor 'ud they a' gone under so quick. Sartint sure hev they gone under. Listen to them yells! Thet's the conquerin' screech o' Injuns, sure as my name's 'Lije Orton!"

His companion did not need any assurance, beyond what he himself heard and saw. There could be no doubt about its being a travelling party, either of emigrants or prairie-traders, that had succumbed to an onslaught of savages.

Neither were they long doubtful as to the character of the travellers. The sun, now peeping up over the far prairie edge, illumined the scene of strife, showing half-a-dozen waggons, with some of their canvas covers dragged off; and around them the dark forms of a savage cohort.

"It's a karryvan o' emigrants, as I tuk it for," said the trapper. "Rayther a small 'un at thet! What durned fools they must a' been to ventur' acrosst the purairias wi' sech a trifle o' strength as they 'pear to have! They're all 'rubbed out' now, I reck'n; or them as lives is captered, an' in the hands o' the Injuns.

"If them Injuns be, as I suspect they ur—Yellow Chief an' his band—the Lord pitty them poor critters! They'd better got rubbed out in the scrimmage, and thar 'ud a been an eend o't."

"Yellow Chief!" repeated the trapper's companion. "Ah! if it be he, the cruel ruffian, and he have captives, you are right, 'Lije, in pitying them. I heard some terrible tales of him last time I was over at Bent's Fort. Whoever the Indians be, they are certain to have taken some captives. An emigrant train, there should be women and children along with it? Surely the savages will not kill them! Can we do nothing towards rescuing them? Think, 'Lije!"

"I am a-thinkin', an' hev been, ever since I kim up hyur. But 'tain't no use. We mout think our heads off, 'ithout devisin' any way to be o' use to them. We'd only git ourselves into the same trap as they're in—an' maybe wuss; for them Cheyennes—'specially Yellow Chief's gang—he's late tuk a desperate anger agin' us trappers, because, as they say, some o' our fellurs carried off one o' thar squaws from the place whar they war campin' last spring in the middle Park. If it's the Cheyenne tribe, as is squeelin' out thar, the furrer we keep away from 'em, the longer we'll hev har on our heads. Hilloa! what's thet thing comin' on yonder?"

The exclamation, as the query that followed, was called forth at sight of a dark object, that seemed to be moving over the prairie, and in the direction of the cliff—from the top of which the two trappers, themselves concealed behind a cedar-tree, were scanning the outward plain. It had the appearance of a human being; but one so diminutive in size and of such dusky hue, that it might have passed for a fresh dropped buffalo calf, or one of the dark-brown wolves sometimes seen among the mountains. And it seemed to go with a crouching gait, unlike the upright attitude of man!

"It's a nigger!" cried the old trapper, as the moving object began to get near. "A nigger, an' a boy at thet! Durn me ef 'taint! What a cunnin' young darkey he be. Look how he winds about through the bushes, crawlin' from scrub to scrub! Durn me ef thet boy ain't wuth his weight in best beaver skins! Now, I kin see how it air. He's been one o' the karryvan, which by thet, I reck'n, must be from the South; one o' thar slaves sartin; an' seeing his master rubbed out, he's tuk leg bail on his own account. Wagh! he's comin' right this way! Ned, yu're soopler than I'm; skoot out, an' try ef ye kin catch him, while I stay hyur, an' look out for what's a doin' yonder. Grit your claws on the darkey, ef ye ken, an' we may larn all about it."

O'Neil sprang down the cliff; and wading through the cañon, was soon alongside the black-skinned fugitive—a negro boy, as anticipated.

There was no chase required for the catching him: the darkey was already breathless and broken down, after his long run; and submitted to being taken prisoner without any attempt at running away—the more readily no doubt on seeing that his captor was white.

The young Irishman did not question him on the spot: but at once conducting him into the cove, called to his comrade to come down.

"Wall, ye young imp o' darkness!" began the trapper, as soon as he had descended, "whar hev *you* come from, so skeeart-like?"

"From de wagins, massa—de wagins, whar da wa camp—"

"What wagons?"

"De wagins dat we're all a trabellin' wif, cross de big praira. Dar war de white folk and de collr'd people, all ob de plantash'n; an' I 'speck dey all kill'd ceptin' maseff."

"Who kilt them?"

"De Injuns, dem as war paint'd red, an white, an' ebery colour—dey come gallop up on da hosses jess as our folks wa 'bout to git breakfass; an' 'fore we know what we doin' dey fire dar gun, an' run dar long 'pears troo de people. O, massa! I'se sure ebbery body gone killed."

"Wharfor de ye think thet?"

"Kase I see ole massa fall down an' de blood 'treaming out o' him face, and den I see de obasseah fire shot from his gun, and den de young missa she holler out, an' so did all de ress ob de women an' chilren, boaf de bracks an' de whites. Gorramily! how dey did 'cream!"

"What war the name o' yur ole massa, as ye call him? Kin ye tell us that?"

"Law, boss, sartin I kin tell dat. Ebbery body know de name ob ole massa. He call de Squiah Brackettedder."

"Squire Brackettedder!"

"Squire Blackadder?" asked O'Neil, listening with intense anxiety for the answer.

"Ya, massa; dat am de name."

"Whar did ye come from? Kin ye tell thet, darkey?"

"From Massissippy 'tate—de ole plantashun ain't berry fur from de town o' Vickburg, on de big ribba."

This was about all the information the negro lad could give.

It was sufficient for the time. On obtaining it, the trapper threw up his hands, and gave utterance to a loud "Phew;" while his companion stood silent, as if suddenly struck dumb!

Chapter Eight.

Planning a Rescue.

"What's best to be dud? What d'ye say, Ned?"

"Let us go straight to the place, and see what has happened. Oh, heavens! If Clara has been killed!"

"Go straight to the place! Yur a dreamin', young 'un! Supposin' it be Yellur Chief an' his crowd o' cut-throats? We'd both o' us get sculped to a sartinty."

"But we might approach under cover near enough—"

"Near enuf for nothin'. Thar ain't no kiver in that quarter, as I kin see from hyur; an' to cut across the purairia, 'ud be to go strait sartint inter the teeth o' them squallin' skunks. Thay're boun' to be drunk jest about this time; and whether it's Yellur Chief's lot or no, we'd get sharp sass from 'em. Thet ye may swar to."

"We must do something, 'Lije. I cannot bear to think that she may be in the hands of those horrid savages, and I standing here almost within sight of her! If she be living I must rescue; and if dead, by heavens, I shall revenge her! We must do something, 'Lije! we must."

"An' who said we wa'n't a go in' to do somethin'? Not this chile, sure. Maybe I mout a said so, ef thar hed been only ole Blackedder in the scrape an' his precious son along wi' him, an' along wi' both thet scoundrel o' a overseeur, Sam Snively. But the gurl—she's diff'rent; an' I feel as desprit on doin' somethin' for her as you kin. F'r all thet it's no use our doin' what air durned foolechness. We must set 'bout this thing wi' percaushun. Hyur you, darkey! Kin you tell how many Injuns thar war in the party thet attackted ye?"

"Dar war a big lot, massa—gobs on 'em; l'se sure more'n a hunder—far more'n dat."

"Bah!" exclaimed the trapper, disappointedly. "'Tain't no use inquirin' o' him. See hyur, niggur! Did you notice any o' them as 'peered to be thar leader?"

"Wha—what, massa?"

"A leeder, durn ye! A chief!"

"A chief?"

"Yes, one that war actin' as boss, or overseer."

"Ah! de boss. Yes, thar war a bossy 'mong dem; I 'pose he muss 'a been, lease he order all de oders 'bout."

"Kin ye discribe what he war like? How war he dressed? What sort o' duds had he on him?"

"Easy 'nuf dat, massa. He drest moas like de ress ob dem—only on de top ob him head dar wa' a big spread ob feather, shinin' like de tail o' a peacock."

"The Yellur Chief!" exclaimed the questioner, on hearing the description.

"No, massa. He no yella'. He wa' painted red. Dar wa' some yella' stripe; but mos' ob him wa' a bright red colour—redder dan blood."

"Never mind that, nigger: you don't know what I'm talkin' 'bout. What did ye see him do?"

"Seed him try to 'top de shootin' and killin'."

"Stop the shootin' and killin'! You saw him tryin' to do thet? Air ye sure o't, boy?"

"No, massa, I ain't shoo'. I thort he wa' doin' so. I wa'n't shoo'. I wa' 'feard dey ud go on wif de killin', an' dat's why I 'tole 'way from de place, an' run out dis way."

"Eft be Yellur Chief, odd 'bout his tryin' to stop the killin'. 'Tain't his way." This remark was to O'Neil, who stood chafing at the delay.

"It *is* strange;" he answered. "In any case, it's no use our remaining longer here, if we're going to do anything. What can you think of, 'Lije?"

The trapper, with his right palm resting upon the stopper of his gun, stood for a while, reflecting.

"Thar's one thing," he said at length; "eft air this Cheyenne skunk, an' he ha'nt kilt the hull lot o' them outright, thar's jest a chance o' our savin' some o' 'em."

"Thank God!" exclaimed O'Neil, in a tone of relieved anxiety. "You think there's a chance, 'Lije?"

"I duz."

"In what way?"

"Wal; still concedin' the point o' its bein' Yellur Chief, I kin guess putty near what it means. He's out wi' a band o' the young braves, that ain't likely to track strait back to the town o' thar tribe; so long's they've got captive weemen among 'em."

The young Irishman started at the words. They conveyed a thought that gave pain to him; but, anxious to hear his comrade's scheme for their rescue, he did not interrupt him.

"An' ef't be them, I kin guess whar they'll go—most sartin o't. This chile chances to know one o' Yellur Chief's private campin' grouns'. I larnt thet when I war trappin' in this quarter too yeern ago—time's you war down stayin' at Bent's. They're over yonner now, a plunderin' the poor emigrants an' thar wagins, an' we mout go strait to 'em ef we wanted to git shet o' our scalps. But as we don't want thet, the question is, whar they'll be when we kum back in search o' 'em."

"Come back! You purpose going somewhere? Where to?"

"To Saint Vrain's."

"Ah! For what purpose?"

"For the only purpiss thet kin sarve *our* purpos: an' thet air to git a wheen o' mounting men as kin lend us a han' in this bisness. Without thet, we'd hev as much chance to rescuo the captives—ef thar be any sech—as for a kripple to catch a Kit-fox." (Note 1.)

"Do you think we should find any there?"

"I'm sartint we will. The darkey hez tolt us o' a party that passed the wagins on thar way. No doubt they war boun' for the Fort. Besides, I met sev'ral fellurs last seeson while I war trappin' on the Collyrado, as sayed they war goin' east, an' intended makin' stop at Saint Vrain's on thar way. I shedn't be serprised ef we foun' fifty on 'em thar now. Helf o' the number will be enuf to chestise Yellur Chief an' his gang o' freebooters. Thurfor let's go to the Fort right away, an' see what kin be done."

"I'm with you, 'Lije! We must lose no time! Think of the danger she may be in; that is, if not past all danger already. Oh, I fear to reflect on it."

"Ye're right, 'bout not losin' time," said the trapper, without noticing the last exclamatory remark. "Same time," he added, "'twon't do for us tu make too much haste, else we mout find it the wuss speed, as the spellin' book used ter say. We must keep clost in to the bottom o' the bluffs in goin' torst Saint Vrain's; else them Injuns may spy us. Ef they shood, we'll be in for a ugly scrape; an' not like to git clar o't 'ithout sheddin' the skins o' our two skulls. Wagh! thet ere wudn't be no way agreeable; an' ef't wa'n't thet thar's a gurl in the questin, whose life, an' somethin' else, ougter be saved, I'd a stayed hyur to finish my breakfust, and let Yellur Chief an' his cut-throats go straight to custrut to—darnation! But come, Ned! we're a wastin' time, an' I know you don't weesh thet. Hyur now nigger! you help wi' the saddlin' o' these hosses. Ef you've been brought up 'bout Squire Blackedder's stables I reck'n you know somethin' 'bout hosses. An' harkee, boy! we two air goin' away a bit. So you keep clost in this hyur hole, till we kum back agin'. You kin rest yur black karkidge inside that thar tent, whar ye'll find somethin' in the way o' buffler meat to keep yur ivories from chatterin'. Don't eet it all, d'ye heer. We may come back sharp-set; an' ef thar's nothin' left, may take it into our heads to eet you."

While this talk was going on, two horses were led forth from a cave in the cliff that served them for stable.

Both being quickly accoutred, the trappers sprang into their respective saddles; and spurring towards the cañon, were soon plunging between its shadowy walls, on their way to the outward plain.

Sixty seconds spent in wading, and they emerged dripping into the light of day. More of it than they wished for: since the sun was now fairly up, his disc appearing some two or three degrees above the prairie horizon.

There was need for the horsemen to show circumspection. And they did: silently skirting the cliff, and keeping behind the huge boulders, that, for long ages shed fr'm its summit, strewed the plain at its base.

"Arter all, Ned," said the old trapper, when they had ridden to a safe distance from the dreaded spot, "we needn't 'a been so partickler. I reck'n, 'bout this time, thar ain't a sober Injun upon the banks o' Bijou. I hope ole Blackedder an' his party, afore leavin' the settlements, laid in a good supply o' rot-gut—enuf to keep them skunks dead-drunk till we

kin git back agin. Ef thet be the case, thar'll be some chance o' our chestisin' 'em."

A mental "amen" was the only response made by the young Irishman; who was too much occupied in thinking of Clara Blackadder's danger, to reflect coolly on the means of rescuing her—even though it were certain she still lived.

Note 1. *Vulpes velox*. The swiftest of the foxes; called "Kit-fox," by the fur-traders, on account of the skin being taken from the carcase whole, as with rabbit-skins—not split up the abdomen, as with the larger species.

Chapter Nine.

Saint Vrain's.

One of the classical names associated with the "commerce of the prairies" is that of *Saint Vrain*. Ever since trapping became a trade, or at all events, since prairie-land, with its wonders, had grown to be a frequent, as well as interesting topic of conversation around the hearth-fires of the American people, the names of Bent, Saint Vrain, Bonneville, Robideau, Laramie, and Pierre Choteau, might often be heard upon the lips of men.

And none more frequently than Saint Vrain, by whose daring and enterprise not only were caravans carried across the almost untrodden wilderness to the Mexican settlements of Santa Fé, but forts established in the very midst of this wilderness, and garrisons maintained, with a military efficiency rivalling the body-guard of many a little European despot!

Yet there was no despotism here, supported by the sweat of a taxed people; only a simple defensive organisation for the pursuit of a valuable, as a laudable, industry.

And when the iron horse goes snorting through the midst of those distant solitudes, and cities have sprung up on his track, the spots so marked in our history will become classic ground; and many a tale will be told of them, redolent of the richest romance.

Were I to live in the not very remote future, I would rather have in my ornamental grounds the ruins of one of Bent's or Saint Vrain's Forts, than the crumbling walls of Kenilworth Castle or the Keep of Carisbrooke. More picturesquely romantic, more exalting, would be the souvenirs recalled, and the memories awakened by them.

Saint Vrain's trading-post, on the South Fork of the Platte, was one of those long noted as a favourite rendezvous of the free trappers (Note 1), as might have been told by any one chancing to make stop at it in the season when these wandering adventurers laid aside their traps to indulge in a spell of idleness and a "spree."

Just such a time was that when Squire Blackadder and his emigrant companions were approaching the post, and fell into the clutches of the Cheyennes. It was not one of their grandest gatherings, since only about twenty of them were there; but among twenty trappers, or even less, there is no lack of company. And if all, or even part of them, have returned with fat packs, and found beaver selling at three dollars the "plew" (Note 2), there will be a merry company; at times becoming dangerous—not only to strangers, but to one another—through too much drink.

An assemblage of this sort—including, we are sorry to say, both the sober and the drunk—were at Saint Vrain's Fort, on the day above specified. They had come there from all quarters—from the parks and "holes" of the Rocky Mountains, from the streams, creeks, and branches on this side running east, as well as from the head waters of the Green, Bear, and Colorado coursing west. Nearly all of them had made a good season of it, and arrived with their pack animals staggering under the spoils of the trap and the rifle.

These had become the property of the Fort, after an exchange on its side of guns, knives, powder, and lead, with five-point Mackinaw blankets, and other articles of trapper wear; including those of adornment, and not forgetting some sparkling *bijouterie* intended as gifts, or "guages d'amour" for the bronze-skinned beauties of the prairie. Rude as is the trapper's life, and solitary too, he is not insensible either to the soft charms of love, or its companionship.

In addition to the articles thus swapped or "trucked," the trappers assembled at Saint Vrain's in exchange for their peltries, had received a large quantity of coin currency, in the shape of Mexican silver dollars. With these burning the bottoms out of their pockets, it is scarce necessary to say that drink was the order of the day, with cards as its accompaniment.

We regret having to make this statement; as also that quarrels are the too frequent termination of these games of euchre and "poker."

Another source of strife among the trappers assembled at Saint Vrain's was to be found in the fact, that a friendly Indian tribe, the "Crows," were encamped near the post; and among these birds, notwithstanding the name are many that are beautiful.

No soft courtship suits an Indian belle. If you want to win her, you must show bravery; and you will not risk losing her affections if your bravery degenerate into brutalism!

Such are the moral inclinings of both men and women in the state called "savage;" but it must not be supposed that this is the state of Nature. On the contrary, the *savages*, properly so-styled, have long since passed from their pristine condition of simplicity. (Note 3.)

Several quarrels had occurred among the trappers at Saint Vrain's Fort—more than one that had ended in the shedding of blood—and one of the bloodiest was on the eve of breaking out, when a cry from the sentinel on the

azotea (Note 4) caused a suspension of the broil.

The quarrellers were below, on the level plain that stretched away from the grand gate entrance of the building, and formed a sort of general ground for assemblage—as well for athletic sports, as for games of a less recommendable kind.

The shout of the sentry caused them to look towards the plain, where they saw two horsemen going at a gallop, and evidently making for the Fort.

The rapidity with which they approached, and the way they were urging on their steeds, told a tale of haste. It could be no caper of two men trying the speed of their horses. The animals seemed too badly blown for that.

“Thar’s Injuns after them two fellers!” said Black Harris, a celebrated mountain man. “Or hez a been not far back. Boys! can any o’ ye tell me who they are? My sight ain’t so plain as ’twar twenty year ago.”

“If I ain’t mistook,” answered another of the trapper fraternity, “that ’un on the clay-bank hoss is ole ’Lije Orton, oreeginally from Tennessee. Who the other be, durn me ef I know. A young ’un, I guess; an’ don’t look at all like these hyar purairies, though he do sit that black hoss, as though he war friz to him. Don’t the feller ride spunky?”

“*Ay dios!*” exclaimed a man whose swarth skin and bespangled costume proclaimed him a Mexican. “Call that riding, do you? *Carrai!* on our side of the mountains a child of six years old would show you better!”

“In trath an’ yez are mistaken, Misther Saynyor Sanchis, as ye call yerself. I know who that gossoon is that’s comin’ up yonder, for he’s a countryman of mine; and, be the powers! he can roide to bate any Mixikan in the mountains—not like a cat stickin’ on the back av a goat, as yez do it; but like a gintleman. Him yonder beside ould ’Lije Orton, is Misther Edward Onale, ov the Onales av County Tipperary; an’, be jabbers, he *is* a gintleman be both sides av the house!”

Before this new discussion could culminate in another quarrel, the two horsemen had ridden upon the ground, and pulled up in the midst of the trappers, who, with eager, inquiring looks, gathered in a circle around them.

Note 1. The “free” or “independent trappers,” as they were also called, formed a class *sui generis*, in many respects differing from the regular *employés* of the fur-trading companies. They were different in ideas and habits, as also in the *dangers* of their calling.

Note 2. *Plew*. The trapper name for the beaver skins. They are now, I believe, only worth a dollar each. Formerly they were saleable at four. The introduction of the silk hat ruined the trapper’s trade, though it has been a great boon to the beavers.

Note 3. There is no instance on record of a tribe in the so-called pristine “savage” state, having been convicted of the crime of cannibalism. This is an “institution” that comes only after a certain degree of civilisation has been attained, or rather when the period of despotism has arrived, both priestly and monarchical. There is no court where ceremonies are more complete than that of Thakonbau, the “King of the Cannibal Islands,” of “Figi.”

Note 4. The trading fort of the fur companies in the Mexican portion of the prairie country were usually built, Mexican fashion, with the flat roof or *azotea*.

Chapter Ten.

Changed Hostilities.

The freshly arrived horsemen, instead of alighting, remained seated in their saddles.

For a time neither spoke, though their silence might be for want of breath. Both were panting, as were also the horses that bore them.

“Theer’s somethin’ wrong, ’Lije Orton,” said Black Harris, after saluting an old comrade. “I can tell that by yur looks, as well’s by the purspiration on yur anymal. ’Tain’t often as *you* put the critter in such a sweet. What is it, ole hoss? Yeller belly, or Injun? It can’t be white.”

“White’s got somethin’ to do wi’ it,” replied the old trapper, having somewhat recovered his wind. “But Injun more.”

“Thar’s a riddle, boys! Which o’ ye kin read it? ’Splain yurself, ’Lije.”

“Thar ain’t much explinashin needed; only that a party o’ emigrants hez been attackted on Bijou Crik, an’ maybe all on ’em killed, fur as this chile kin tell.”

“What emigrants? Who attacked them?”

“Yur fust question, boys, I kin answer clar enuf. They were some planters from the State o’ Massissippi.”

“That’s my State,” interpolated one of the trappers, a young fellow, inclined to take part in the talking.

"Shet up yur head!" commanded Harris, turning upon the fellow one of his blackest frowns.

"Whether it air yur State or no," continued the imperturbable 'Lije, "don't make much diff'rence. What I've got to say, boys, air this: A karryvan o' emigrant planters, boun' for Californy, wi' thar niggers along, camp'd last night on the bank o' Bijou Crik. After sun-up this mornin', they war set upon by Injuns, an' I reck'n most, ef not all on 'em, hev been rubbed out. I chance to know who them emigrants war; but thet's no bizness o' yurn. I reck'n it's enuf that they war whites, an' thet Injuns hez dud the deed."

"What Indians? Do you know what tribe?"

"That oughtn't to make any difference eyther," responded 'Lije. "Though I reck'n it will, when I've tolt ye who the attackin party war, an' who led 'em. I've alser got on the trail o' that."

"Who? 'Rapahoes?"

"No."

"Tain't the direction for Blackfeet."

"Nor Blackfeet neyther."

"Cheyennes, then? I'll stake a bale o' beaver it's them same Injuns, in my opeenyun, the most trecher-most as scours these hyar perairies."

"Ye wouldn't lose yur skins," quietly responded 'Lije. "It air Cheyennes es hez done it."

"And who do you say chiefed 'em?"

"There's no need asking that," said one, "now we know it's Cheyennes. *Who* should it be but that young devil they call Yellow Chief? He's rubbed out more o' us white trappers than the oldest brave among 'em."

"Is it he, 'Lije?" asked several in a breath. "Is it the Yellow Chief?"

"'Taint nobody else," quietly declared the trapper.

The declaration was received by a perfect tornado of cries, in which curses were mingled with threats of vengeance. All of them had heard of this Indian chieftain, whose name had become a terror to trapperdom—at least that section of it lying around the head waters of the Platte and Arkansas. It was not the first time many of them had sworn vengeance against him, if he should ever fall into their power; and the occasion appeared to have arrived for at least a chance of obtaining it. The air and attitude of 'Lije Orton led them to believe this.

All at once their mutual quarrels were forgiven, if not forgotten; and, with friendships fresh cemented by hostility to the common foe, they gathered around the old trapper and his companion—first earnestly listening to what these two had still to tell, and then as earnestly giving ear to the trapper's counsels about the course to be pursued.

There was no question of their remaining inactive. The name of the Yellow Chief had fired one and all, from head to foot, rousing within them the bitterest spirit of vengeance. To a man they were ready for an expedition, that should end either in fight or pursuit. They only hesitated to consider how they had best set about it.

"Do you think they might be still around the wagons?" asked one, addressing himself to Orton.

"Not likely," answered 'Lije; "an' for reezuns. Fust an' foremost, thar war some o' you fellers, as passed the karryvan yesterday, 'bout the hour o' noon. Ain't that so?"

"Yes; we did," responded one of the three trappers, who, standing silently in the circle, had not yet taken part in the hurried conversation. "We travelled along with them for some distance," continued the man, "and stayed a bit at their noon halting-place. We didn't know any of the party, except their guide, who was that Choctaw that used to hang about Bent's Fort. Waboga, the Indjens call him. Well; we warned them against the fellur, knowing him to be a queer 'un. Like enough it's him that has betrayed them."

"Thet's been the treetor," said 'Lije. "Him an' no other; tho' it moun't 'a made much difference. They war boun' to go under anyhow, wi' Yellur Chief lookin' arter 'em. An' now, as to the lookin' arter *him*, we won't find him at the wagons. Knowin' you've kim on hyar, an' knowin', as he's sartint ter do, thet thar's a good grist o' trappers at the Fort, he'll stay 'bout the plundered camp no longer than'll take him an' his party to settle up spoillin' the plunder. Then they'll streak it. They've goed away from thar long afore this."

"We can track them."

"No, ye can't. Leastwise, ef ye did, it woudn't be a bit o' use. This chile hev thort o' a shorter an' better way o' findin' out thar warabouts."

"You know where they are gone, 'Lije?" interrogated Black Harris.

"Putty nigh the spot, Harry. I reck'n I kin find it out, 'ithout much gropin'."

"Good for you, ole hoss! You guide us to thar swarmin'-place; an' ef we don't break up thar wasps' nest and strangle thar yellar hornet o' a chief, then call Black Harris o' the mountains a dod-rotted greenhorn!"

"Ef I don't guide ye strait custrut into thar campin'-place ye may call ole 'Lije Orton blinder than the owls o' a

purairia-dog town. So git your things ready, boys; an' kum right arter me!"

It was an invitation that needed no pressing. The hope of being revenged on the hated subchief of the Cheyennes—for deeds done either to themselves, their friends, or the comrades of their calling—beat high in every heart; and, in less than ten minutes' time, every trapper staying at Saint Vrain's Fort, with a half-score other hangers-on of the establishment, was armed to the teeth, and on horseback!

In less than five minutes more, they were hastening across the prairie with 'Lije Orton at their head, in search of the Yellow Chief.

They were only five-and-twenty of them in all; but not one of their number who did not consider himself a match for at least three Indians!

As for Black Harris, and several others of like kidney, they would not have hesitated a moment about encountering six each. More than once had these men engaged in such unequal encounters, coming out of them victorious and triumphant!

Twenty-five against fifty, or even a hundred, what signified it to them? It was but sport to these reckless men! They only wanted to be brought face to face with the enemy; and then let their long rifles tell the tale.

It was a tale to be told, before the going down of the sun.

Chapter Eleven.

Captors and Captives.

Once more in the gorge, where the young Cheyenne chief and his band had encamped, before making attack upon the emigrant caravan.

It is the day succeeding that event, an hour before mid-day, with a bright sun shining down from a cloudless sky. The stage is the same, but somewhat changed the characters who figure upon it, having received an addition of more than double the number. The Indians are there; but even they do not seem the same. From the quiet earnest attitude of an expeditionary band, they have been transformed into a crowd of shouting savages.

Foxes before the quarry was run down, they are now ravening wolves.

Some are carousing, some lying on the grass in a state of helpless inebriety; while others, restrained by the authority of their chief, have kept sober, and stand guard over their new-made captives.

Only a few are needed for this duty. Three sentinels are deemed sufficient—one to each group; for the prisoners have been separated into three distinct parties—holding places apart from one another. The negroes, men, women, and children, driven into a compact ring, occupy an angular space between two projections of the cliff. There, huddled together, they have no thought of attempting to escape.

To them their new condition of captivity is not so very different from that to which they have been all their lives accustomed; and, beyond some apprehension of danger, they have not much to make them specially discontented. The Indian who stands beside them, with the butt of his long spear resting upon the turf, seems to know that his guard duty is a sinecure.

So also the sentinel who keeps watch over the white women—five in all, with about three times as many children—boys and girls of various degrees of age.

There is one among them, to whom none of these last can belong. She is old enough to be a wife; but the light airy form and virginal grace proclaim her still inexperienced in marriage, as in the cares of maternity. It is Clara Blackadder.

Seated alongside the others, though unlike them in most respects, she seems sad as any.

If she has no anxiety about the children around her, she has grief for those of older years—for a father, whom but a few hours before she had seen lying dead upon the prairie turf, and whose grey hairs, besprinkled with blood, are still before her eyes.

It is his scalp that hangs from the point of a spear, stuck upright in the ground, not ten paces from where she sits!

There is yet another group equally easy to guard; for the individuals composing it are all securely tied, hand, neck, and foot.

There are six of them, and all white men. There had been nine in the emigrant party. Three are not among the prisoners; but besides the white scalp accounted for, two others, similarly placed on spears, tell the tale of the missing ones. They have shared the fate of the leader of the caravan, having been killed in the attack upon it.

Among the six who survive are Snively, the overseer, and Blount Blackadder, the former showing a gash across his cheek, evidently made by a spear-blade. At best it was but an ill-favoured face, but this gives to it an expression truly horrible.

A top belonging to one of the wagons has been brought away—the wagons themselves having been set on fire, out of

sheer wanton wickedness; such cumbrous things being of no value to the light cavalry of the Cheyennes.

The single tilt appears in the camping-place, set up as a tent; and inside it the chief, somnolent after a sleepless night, and wearied with the work of the morning, is reclining in *siesta*.

Waboga, with the body-servant, keeps sentry outside it. Not that they fear danger, or even intrusion; but both know there is a spectacle intended—some ceremony at which they will be wanted, and at any moment of time.

Neither can tell what it is to be—whether tragic or comic; though both surmise it is not likely to be the latter.

The white men are not so fast bound, as to hinder them from conversing. In a low tone, telling of fear, they discuss among themselves the probability of what is to be done with them.

That they will have to suffer punishment, is not the question; only what it is to be, and whether it is to be death. It may be even worse: death preceded by torture. But death of itself is sufficient to terrify them; and beyond this their conjectures do not extend.

“I don’t think they’ll kill us,” said Snively. “As for myself, they ought to be satisfied with what they’ve done already. They could only have wanted the plunder—they’ve got all that; and what good can our lives be to them?”

“Our lives, not much,” rejoins a disconsolate planter. “You forget our scalps! The Indians value them more than anything else—especially the young braves, as these appear to be.”

“There’s reason in that, I know,” answers the overseer. “But I’ve heard that scalps don’t count, if taken from the heads of prisoners; and they’ve made us that.”

“It won’t make much difference to such as them,” pursues the apprehensive planter. “Look at them! Three-fourths of them drunk, and likely at any minute to take the notion into their heads to scalp us, if only for a frolic! I feel frightened every time they turn their eyes this way.”

Of the six men, there are four more frightened when the carousing savages turn their eyes in another direction—towards the group of white women. One of these is a widow, made so that same morning, her husband at the time lying scalped upon the prairie—his scalp of luxuriant black curls hanging before her face, upon the bloody blade of a lance!

Three others have husbands among the men—the fourth a brother!

The men regarding them, and thinking of what may be their fate, relapse into silence, as if having suddenly bet speech. It is the speechlessness of despair.



Chapter Twelve.

A Novel Mode of Punishment.

The sun was already past the meridian when the young Cheyenne chief, coming out from under the wagon tilt, once more showed himself to his captives. Since last seen by them there was a change in his costume. It was no more the scant breech-cloth worn in war; but a gala dress, such as is used by savages on the occasion of their grand ceremonies. His coat was the usual tunic-like shirt of the hunter, with fringed cape and skirt; but, instead of brown buckskin, it was made of scarlet cloth, and elaborately adorned by bead embroidery. Underneath were fringed leggings, ending in moccasins, worked with the porcupine quill. A Mexican scarf of crimson China crape was around his waist, with its tasselled ends hanging behind. On his head was a checkered Madras kerchief, tied turban fashion, its corners jauntily knotted on one side; while above the other rose a "panache" of bluish plumes, taken from the wings of the "gruya," or New Mexican crane, their tips dyed scarlet.

Stuck behind his sash was a glittering bowie-knife, that might once have been the property of a Kansas regulator; and there were also pistols upon his person, concealed under the white wolf-skin robe that still hung toga-like from his shoulders. But for the emblematical painting on his face, freshly touched up, he might have appeared handsome. With this he was still picturesque, though terrible to look upon. His size—he was full six feet—gave him a commanding appearance; and his movements, easy and without agitation, told of a commanding mind. His followers seemed to acknowledge it; as, on the moment of emerging from the tent, even the most roysterous of them became quiet over their cups.

For some minutes he remained by the open end of the tent, without speaking to any one, or even showing sign that he saw any one around him. He seemed occupied with some mental plan, or problem; the solution of which he had stepped forth to seek.

It was in some way connected with the tiny waterfall, that fell like a spout from the cliff; for his eyes were upon it.

After gazing at it for some time, they turned suddenly up to the sun; and as if seeing in it something to stimulate him, his attitude became changed. All at once he appeared to arouse himself from a lethargy, like one who has discovered the necessity for speedily entering upon action.

"Waboga!" he called, addressing himself to the Choctaw.

The traitor was not one of the intoxicated, and soon stood before him.

"Take some of the young men. Cut down a tree—one of the pinons yonder. Lop off the branches, and bring it here."

Waboga went about the work, without saying a word; and a couple of tomahawks were soon hacking at the tree.

It was but a slender one, of soft pine wood; and shortly fell. Then, lopped and topped, its trunk was dragged up to the spot where the chief stood, and where he had remained standing ever since issuing the order.

"It will do," he said, looking at the felled piñon, as if satisfied of its being suitable for his purpose. "Now take it to the fall there, and set it up; behind the jet of the water, so that it just clears it. Sink a deep hole, and see you stake it firmly."

The hole was sunk; the tree set upright in it; and then firmly wedged around with stones. The tiny stream, coming down from the cliff, fell vertically in front, according to the directions given, just clearing its top.

By further instructions from the chief, a stout piece of timber, taken from one of the limbs, was lashed transversely to it, forming a cross, about five feet above the ground.

During all these preparations no one knew for what they were intended. Even the Indians employed could not tell, and Waboga was himself ignorant.

The captives were equally at a loss to make out what was meant; though they surmised it to be the preliminary to some mode of punishment intended for themselves.

When they saw the erection taking the form of a crucifix, this of itself was suggestive of torture; but observing also the strange spot in which it was being set up, there began to glimmer on their minds a shadowy thought of its kind. Snively and one or two others—Blount Blackadder among them—in the upright post and its cross-piece, with the water-jet falling in front, were reminded of a mode of punishment they had themselves too often inflicted.

"I wonder what they can be after wantin' with that," said one of the planters to his fellow-captives.

None of them made reply. The same thought was in the minds of all, and it was terrifying them beyond the power of speech.

The interrogatory was answered in a different way. About a dozen of the Indians, who had been called up around the chief, appeared to receive some directions from him. They were given in the Cheyenne tongue, and the captives could not make out what was said; though they could tell by the attitude and gestures of the chief Indians it related to themselves.

They were not long before discovering its object. Five or six of the young braves, after listening to the commands of their leader, turned their backs upon him, and came bounding on to the spot where the prisoners lay. They appeared in high glee, as if some sport was expected; while the hostile glance from their fierce eyes proclaimed it to be of a malignant kind—some ceremony of torture. And so was it.

It could scarce have been by accident that Blount Blackadder was the first victim selected. He was behind the others, and half crouching in concealment, when he was seized by two of the painted savages; who, jerking him suddenly to his feet, undid the fastenings around his ankles.

It was not to set him free; only to save them the trouble of carrying him to the spot where he was to afford them a spectacle. And it was of the kind at which he had himself often assisted—though only as a spectator.

His fellow-prisoners had no longer a doubt as to the torture intended for him, and in store for themselves. If they had, it was soon settled by their seeing him conducted forward to the spot where fell the tiny cataract, and forced under it—with his back towards the tree-trunk.

In a few seconds, his ankles were bound around its base. Then his arms, set free, were pulled out to their full stretch, and fast lashed to the transverse bar, so that his attitude resembled that of one suffering crucifixion!

Something still remained to be done. A raw-hide rope was passed around his throat and the tree-trunk behind, to which it was firmly attached. His head was still untouched by the water-jet, that fell down directly in front of his face.

But he was not to remain thus. As soon as his position seemed satisfactory to the Indian chief, who stood examining it with a critical eye, and, so far as could be judged through the paint, with a pleased expression upon his face, he called some words of direction to a young warrior who was near. It was obeyed by the Indian, who, picking up an oblong block of stone, stood holding it above the head of him who was bound to the cross.

"So, Blount Blackadder!" cried the Cheyenne chief, no longer speaking in the Indian tongue, but in plain understandable English. "It's your turn now. *Give him a double dose!*"

As he spoke, the Indian, who held the stone, sogged it down between the back of Blackadder's neck and the trunk of the tree. Wedged there, it brought his head into such a position, that the stream of water fell vertically upon his crown!

The words pronounced by the Cheyenne chief produced a startling effect. Not so much upon him, who was transfixed under the jet; though he heard them through the plashing water, that fell sheeted over his ears.

For he well knew the purpose for which he had been so disposed, as well as the pain to be endured; and he was already in a state of mind past the possibility of being further terrified.

It was not he, but others, who heard them with increased fear; others who knew them to be words of dread import.

Snively started as they fell upon his ear; and so to Clara Blackadder. She looked up with a strange puzzled expression upon her countenance.

Give him a double dose!

What could it mean? Snively had heard the order before—remembered a day on which he was commanded to execute it!

And the words, too, came from the mouth of an Indian chief—a painted savage—more than a thousand miles from the scene that recalled them. Even among the blacks, huddled up in the rocky embayment, there were faces that expressed surprise, some the ashy pallor of fear, as if from a stricken conscience.

“Give him a double dose! Gollamity!” exclaimed one. “What do de Indyin mean? Dat’s jess wha’ Massa Blount say five year ago, when dey wa’ gwine to pump on de head ob Blue Dick!”

More than one of the negroes remembered the cruel command, and some also recalled how cruelly they had sneered at him on whom the punishment was inflicted. A speech, so strangely recurring, could not help giving them a presentiment that something was nigh at hand to make them repent of their heartlessness.

They, too, as well as Snively, looked towards the chief for an explanation, and anxiously listened for what he might next say.

For a time there was no other word to make the matter clearer! With his wolf-skin robe hanging from his shoulders, the chief stood contemplating the punishment he had decreed to his captive; a smile of exultation overspreading his face, as he thought of the pain his white victim was enduring.

It ended in a loud laugh, as he ordered the sufferer to be unloosed from his lashings; and dragged clear of the cross.

And the laugh broke forth again, as Blount Blackadder, half drowned, half dead from the aching pain in his skull, lay prostrate on the grass at his feet.

Then came from his lips an additional speech, the young planter might not have heard, but that smote upon the ears of the overseer with a meaning strangely intelligible.

“It’ll do for the present. Next time he offends in like manner, he shall be pumped upon till his thick skull splits like a cedar rail!”

Chapter Thirteen.

Making a Bolt.

At the new and still strange speech, Snively started again, and Clara Blackadder looked up with a yet still more puzzled expression; while among the blacks there ran a murmur of interrogatories and exclamations of terror.

It was on the overseer, however, that the words produced the strongest impression. He was a man of too much intellect—or that ‘cuteness that passes for it—to be any longer in doubt as to the situation in which he and his fellow-captives, were placed. A clear memory, coupled with an accusing conscience, helped him to an explanation, at the same time telling him of a danger far worse than being captive in the hands of hostile Indians. It was the danger of death, with torture for its prelude. Both now appeared before his imagination, in their most horrid shape—an apprehension of moral pain, added to the physical.

He glanced at his fastenings; examined them, to see if there was any chance of setting himself free. It was nor the first time for him to make the examination; but never more earnestly than now.

The raw-hide thong, wetted with the sweat of his body—in places with his blood—showed signs of stretching. By a desperate wrench he might get his limbs clear of it!

What if he should succeed in untying himself?

His liberty could only last for a moment—to be followed by a renewal of his captivity, or by a sudden death?

Neither could be worse than the fate that now seemed to be awaiting him, and near? Even death would be preferable to the agony of apprehension he was enduring!

One more glance at his fastenings, and along with it the determination to set himself free from them.

And, without reflecting further, he commenced a struggle, in which all his strength and cunning were concentrated.

The raw-hide ropes yielded to the superhuman effort; and, clearing himself of their coils, he sprang out from among his fellow-prisoners; and off at full speed towards the prairie!

He did not continue far in the direction of the outward plain. With no other hope of getting clear, than that held out

by mere swiftness of foot, he would not have made the attempt. With the Indians' horses standing near, ready to be mounted at a moment's notice, the idea would have been simply absurd. Even before he had made a half-score strides, several of the savages were seen rushing towards their steeds to take up the pursuit, for the prairie Indian never thinks of following a foe upon foot.

Had Snively kept on for the open plain, the chase would have been a short one. He had determined on a different course. While lying on the ground, and speculating on the chances of getting away, he had noticed a ravine that ran sloping up towards the summit of the cliff. Trees grew thickly in it. They were dwarf cedars, bushy and umbrageous. If he could only get among them, screened by their foliage, he might succeed in baffling his pursuers. At all events, their arrows and bullets would be aimed with less likelihood of hitting him.

Once on the mountain slope above, which was also forest-clad, he would have at least a chance for his life.

He was a man of great strength, swift too of foot, and he knew it. It was his knowledge of the possession of these powers that gave him hope, and determined him on the attempt he had made.

It was not so unfeasible, and might have succeeded, had his only pursuers been they who had taken to their horses.

But there was one who followed him on foot, of equal strength, and swifter of foot than he. This was the Cheyenne chief. The latter had noticed the prisoner as he gave the last wrench to the ropes, and saw that he had succeeded in setting himself free from their coils. At the same instant that Snively sprang out from among his fellow-prisoners, the chief was upon the hound after him, with his long spear poised and ready for a thrust. He had thrown off his wolf-skin cloak to obtain freedom of movement for his arms.

Snively, as he had intended, turned abruptly to one side, and struck up the ravine, with the chief close following him. Those who had taken to their horses were for the time thrown out of the chase.

In a few seconds, both fugitive and pursuer had entered the gorge, and were lost to view under the spreading fronds of the cedars.

For a time those remaining below could not see them, but by the crackling of the parted branches, and the rattle of stones displaced by their feet, it could be told that both were still struggling up the steep.

Then came loud words, proclaiming that the pursuer had overtaken the pursued.

"A step further, you accursed nigger-driver! one step further, and I'll run my lance-blade right up through your body! Down again! or I'll split you from hip to shoulder."

Although they saw it not from below, a strange tragical tableau was presented at the moment when these words were spoken.

It was the chief who had uttered the threat. He was standing upon a ledge, with his spear pointed vertically upward. Above him, hanging from a still higher ledge, with one hand grasping the edge of the rock, was the long lathy form of the Mississippian overseer, outlined in all its ungainly proportions against the façade of the cliff!

He had been endeavouring to climb higher; but, not succeeding, was now overtaken, and at the mercy of his savage pursuer.

"Down!" repeated the latter, in a voice that thundered along the cliffs. "Why do you want to run away? You see I don't intend to kill you? If I did, how easily I might do it now. Down, I say!"

For a moment Snively seemed to hesitate. A desperate effort might still carry him beyond the reach of the threatening spear. Could he be quick enough?

No. The eye of his enemy was too watchful. He felt, that on turning to make another attempt, he would have the iron blade, already red with his own blood, thrust through his body.

Another thought came into his mind. Should he drop down, grapple with the savage, and endeavour to wrest the weapon from his hands? He now knew whose hands held it.

It was a design entertained but for a moment. Ere he could determine upon its execution, half a dozen of the Indians, who had close followed their chief, came rushing up the ravine, and stood upon the ledge beside him.

Exhausted by long hanging, with but slight foothold against the cliff, Snively's gripe became detached from the rock; and he fell back into their midst; where he was at once seized and tied more securely than ever.

"Drag him down!" commanded the Cheyenne chief, speaking to his followers. And then addressing himself to the overseer, he continued: "When we get below, Mr Snively, I'll explain to you why you're not already a dead man. I don't wish that; I want to have you alive for awhile. I've a show for you, as well as the others—especially those belonging to old Blackadder's plantation; but above all for yourself, its worthy overseer. Bring him below!"

The recaptured captive, dragged back down the ravine, though with fearful apprehensions as to what was in store for him, had no longer any doubt as to the identity of him with whom he had to deal.

When the Cheyenne chief strode up to the waterfall; washed the paint from his face; and, then, turning towards the other captives, showed them the bright yellow skin of a mulatto, he was not taken by surprise.

But there was profound astonishment on the countenances of the negro captives; who, on recognising the freshly

washed face, cried out as with one voice:

"*Blue Dick!*"

Chapter Fourteen.

The Rescuers.

While the savage scenes described were being enacted in the mountain valley, a band of horsemen was fast approaching it, making their way around the skirting spurs that at intervals protruded into the prairie.

It is scarce necessary to say that these were the trappers from Saint Vrains, nor to add that they were riding at top-speed—fast as the horses and mules on which they were mounted could carry them.

Conspicuous in the front were two who appeared to act in the double capacity of leaders and guides. One of them seemed exceedingly anxious to press forward—more than any of the party. He was acting as if some strong urgency was upon him. It was the young Irishman, O'Neil. The man riding by his side, also seemingly troubled about time, was his old comrade, 'Lije Orton, the trapper.

The two kept habitually ahead, now in muttered converse with one another, and now shouting back to their companions, to urge them onward. Some of these came close up, while some, at times, showed a disposition to straggle.

The truth is, the "mountain men" had brought their whisky-flasks along with them, and, at every stream crossed, they insisted on stopping to "take a horn."

O'Neil was the one who chafed loudest at the delay. To him it was excruciating torture.

"Arter all," said Orton, with the intention less to restrain than comfort him, "it won't make so much diffrence, Ned. A wheen o' minutes ant neyther hyur nor thur, in a matter o' the kind. In course, I know well o' what ye're thinkin' about."

He paused, as if expecting a rejoinder.

O'Neil only answered with a deep, long-drawn sigh.

"Ef anything air to happen to the gurl," continued 'Lije, rather in the strain of a Job's comforter, "it will hev happened long 'fore this."

The young Irishman interrupted him with a groan.

"Maybe, howsomdever," continued 'Lije, "she air all right yet. It air possible enuf the Injuns'll all get drunk, as soon as they lay ther claws on the licker that must 'a been in the waggins; an' ef that be the case, they won't think o' troublin' any o' thar keptives till thar carousin' kums to a eend. This chile's opeenyun is, ef they intend any torturin', they'll keep that sport over till the morrow: an', shud they do so, darn me, ef we don't dissapeint 'em. Oncst we git upon the spot, we'll gi'e 'em sport very diff'runt from that they'll be expectin'."

There was reason in what 'Lije said. His words were consolatory to O'Neil; and, for a time, he rode on with a countenance more cheerful.

It soon became clouded again, as he returned to reflect on the character of the Indians who were supposed to have "struck" the caravan; more especially their chief, whose fame as a hater of white men was almost equalled by his reputation as a *lover* of white women. There was more than one story current among the trappers, in which the Yellow Chief had figured as a gallant among white-skinned girlish captives, who had fallen into his hands on their passage across the prairie.

With the remembrance of these tales coming freshly before his mind, O'Neil groaned again.

What if Clara Blackadder—in his memory still an angel—what if she should, at that moment, be struggling in the arms of a paint-bedaubed savage? Beauty in the embrace of a fiend! The reflection was fearful—odious, and, as it shadowed the young hunter's heart, he drove the spurs deep into the flanks of his horse, and cried to his comrade, "Come on, 'Lije! come on!"

But the time had arrived when something besides haste was required of them. They were nearing the spot where the pillagers of the caravan were supposed to have made camp; and the trappers were too well acquainted with the wiles of prairie life to approach either men or animals in an open manner. They knew that no Indians, even in their hours of carousal, would leave their camp unguarded. A whole tribe never gets drunk together. Enough of them always stay sober to act as sentinels and videttes.

Safe as the Cheyenne Chief and his fellow-plunderers might deem themselves—far away from any foe likely to molest them—they would, for all this, be sure to keep pickets around their camping-place, or scouts in its vicinity.

There was a bright daylight, for it was yet early in the afternoon. To attempt approaching the bivouac of the savages across the open plain, or even close-skirting the mountains, could only lead to a failure of their enterprise. They would be sure of being seen, and, before they could get within striking distance, the Indians, if not disposed to fight, would be off, carrying along with them both their booty and their captives. Mounted on fresher horses than those

ridden by the trappers, now panting and sweating after a long, continuous gallop, they could easily accomplish this.

There seemed but one way of approaching the Indian camp—by stealth; and this could only be done by waiting for the night and its darkness.

As this plan appeared to be the best, most of the trappers counselled following it. They could think of no other.

The thought of such long delay was agony to O'Neil. Was there no alternative?

The question was put to his comrade, 'Lije, while the discussion was in progress.

"Thur air a altunative," was the answer addressed to all, though to none who so welcomed it as his young friend.

"What other way?" demanded several voices, O'Neil's being the first heard.

"You see them mountings?" said 'Lije, pointing to a range that had just opened to their view.

"Sartin; we ain't all; blind," replied one of the men. "What about them?"

"You see that hill that sticks out thur, wi' the trees on top o't, jest like the hump o' a buffler bull."

"Well, what of it?"

"Clost by the bottom o' that, them Injuns air camped—that be, ef this chile hain't made a mistake 'bout thar intenshuns. We'll find 'em thur, I reck'n."

"But how are we to approach the place without their spying us? There ain't a bit o' cover on the prairie for miles round."

"But there air kiver on the mounting itself," rejoined 'Lije. "Plenty o' tree kiver, as ye kin see."

"Ah! you mean for us to make a circumbendibus over the ridge, and attack 'em from the back-side. Is that it, 'Lije?"

"That's it," laconically answered the old trapper.

"You must be mistaken about that, Orton," put in Black Harris, supposed to be the sagest among "mountain men."

"We might get over the ridge 'ithout bein' noticed, I reck'n; but not with our animals. Neyther hoss nor mule can climb up yonder. And if we leave them behind, it'll take longer than to wait for the night. Besides, we mightn't find any track up among the rocks. They look, from here, as if they had been piled up by giants as had been playing jackstones wi' 'em."

"So they do, Harry," responded 'Lije, "so do they, But, for all that, there's a coon kin find a path to crawl through among 'em, an' that's 'Lije Orton. I hain't trapped all roun' hyur 'ithout knowin' the neer cuts; an' there's a way over that ridge as'll fetch us strait custrut to the Injun campin'-groun', an' 'ithout their purseevin' our approach in the clarest o' sunlight. Beeside, it'll bring us into sech a pursishun that we'll hev the skunks 'ithin reech o' our guns, afore they know anythin' 'bout our bein' near 'em. Beeside, too, it'll save time. We kin get thur long afore dark, so as to have a good chance o' lookin' through the sights o' our rifles."

"Let us go that way," simultaneously cried several voices, the most earnest among them being that of O'Neil.

No one dissenting, the mountain-path was determined upon.

Continuing along the plain for a half-mile farther, the trappers dismounted, *cached* their animals among the rocks, and commenced ascending the steep slope—'Lije Orton still acting as their guide.

Chapter Fifteen.

Retaliation in Kind.

The thrill that passed through the captives as Blue Dick discovered to them his identity was not so startling to all. With Blount Blackadder and Snively, his words, as well as his acts, had long since led to his recognition. Also among the slaves were some who remembered that scene in the court-yard of the old home plantation, when he had been subjected to the punishment of the pump. Despite their supposed obtuseness, they were sharp enough to connect it with the very similar spectacle now before their eyes; and, on hearing the command, "Give him a double dose," more than one remembered having heard the words before. Those who did were not happy, for they also recalled their own conduct on that occasion, and were apprehensive of just retaliation from the hands of him whom they had scoffed. Seeing how their young master had been served, they became sure of it; still more when the overseer, Snively, was submitted to the same dread castigation, and, after him, the huge negro who had worked the pump-handle when Blue Dick was being *douched*.

Both these received the double dose, and more than double. As Snively was unloosed from the cross, and dragged out beyond the water-jet, the hideous gash along his cheek looked still more hideous from its blanching.

And the negro, thick as was his skull, roared aloud, and felt as though his head had been laid open. He said so on recovering his senses. The grin upon his face was no longer that of glee, as when he himself was administering the punishment. It was a contortion that told of soul-suffering agony.

He was not the last to be so served. Others were taken from the crowd of slaves, not indiscriminately, but evidently selected one after another. And the rest began to see this, and to believe they were not to be tortured. Some were solaced by the thought that to others gave keen apprehension. They had not all jeered their fellow-slave, when he was himself suffering. Only the guilty were stricken with fear.

And need had they to fear; for, one after another, as the chief pointed them out, they were seized by his satellites, dragged from amongst their trembling fellow-captives, and in turn tied to the pine-tree cross. And there were they kept, till the cold melted snow from Pike's Peak, descending on their crania, caused them to shriek out in agony.

All this while were the Cheyennes looking on; not gravely, as becomes the Indian character, but laughing like the spectators of a Christmas pantomime, capering over the ground like its actors, and yelling until the rocks gave back the mimicry of their wild mirth in weird unearthly echoes.

Never till now had they held in such high esteem the mulatto adopted into their tribe, who, by brave deeds, had won chieftainship over them. Never before had he treated them to such a spectacle, consonant to their savage natures, and still more in consonance with their hate for the pale face.

For, even at this period of their history, when the elders of the Cheyenne tribe were in a sort of accord with the white man, and professing a false amity, the young filibustering "bloods" were with difficulty restrained from acts of hostility.

The Yellow Chief, who had strayed among them coming from afar, who had married the belle of their tribe—the beautiful daughter of their "medicine man"—who surpassed all of them in his hatred of the white race, and more than once had led them in a like murderous maraud against their hereditary enemies was the man after their heart, the type of a patriotic savage.

Now, more than ever, had he secured their esteem; now, as they saw him, with cruel, unsparing hand, deal out castigation to their pale-faced captives; a punishment so quaintly original, and so terribly painful, that they would not have believed in it, but for the cries of keen agony uttered by those who had to endure it.

To Cheyenne ears they were sounds so sweet and welcome, as to awake the intoxicated from their alcoholic slumbers, and call them up to become sharers in the spectacle. Drunk and sober alike danced over the ground, as if they had been so many demons exhibiting their saltatory skill upon the skull-paved, floors of Acheron.

Nor was their laughter restrained when they saw that the punishment, hitherto confined to their male captives, was about to be extended to the women. On the contrary, it but increased their fiendish glee. It would be a variety in the performance—a new sensation—to see how the latter should stand it.

And they did see; for several of the female slaves—some of them still young, others almost octogenarian "aunties"—were ruthlessly led up to the stake, to that martyrdom of water painful as fire itself!

Chapter Sixteen.

The White Women.

For more than two hours was the fiendish spectacle kept up—a tragedy of many acts; though, as yet, none of them ending in death.

But neither actors nor spectators knew how soon this might be the termination of it.

So horrified were the captives, they could not calmly reflect; though, from the heartless revelry around them, instinct itself guided them to expect very little mercy.

The discrimination shown in their punishment led some to entertain a hope. All, both blacks and whites, now knew with whom they had to deal; for, in a whispered conversation among themselves, the story of Blue Dick was told to those of the emigrant party who had never heard of him before.

And the slaves who were not of the Blackadder plantation, as also the white men to whom these belonged, began to indulge in the belief that they were not to be made victims to the vengeance of the mulatto.

They were allowed time enough to reflect; for after some ten or a dozen of the female slaves had been *douched*, to the delight of the young Cheyennes, and the apparent satisfaction of their chief, there was an interlude in the atrocious performance. The renegade, as if contented with revenge—at least, for the time—had turned away from the waterfall, and gone inside his tent.

Among the three captive groups, there was none in which apprehension could be more keen than that composed of the white women. They had to fear for something dearer to them to life—their honour.

Several of them were young, and more than one good-looking. Not to know it they could not have been women.

Up to that hour the savages had not insulted them. But this gave them no assurance. They knew that these loved wine more than women; and the whisky taken from the despoiled wagons had hitherto diverted the savages from intruding upon them.

It could not long continue, for they had been told of something besides this. The character of cold incontinence given to the forest-Indian—he who figured in the early history of their country's colonisation—has no application to the fiery

Centaur of the prairie. All they had ever heard of these savages led to this conclusion; and the white women, most of them wives, while thinking of danger to their husbands, were also apprehensive about their own.

She who had no husband, Clara Blackadder, suffered more than any of them. She had seen her father's corpse lying upon the prairie sward, bathed in its own blood. She had just ceased to behold her brother subjected to a punishment she now knew to be fearfully painful; and she was reflecting what might be in store for herself.

She remembered Blue Dick well. As his master's daughter—his young mistress—she had never been unkind to him. But she had never been specially kind; for some influence, exerted by the slave Sylvia, had rather turned her against him. Not to actual hostility; only to the showing of a slight disfavour. The truth was, that the heart of the planter's daughter had been so occupied with its own affairs—its love for the young stranger, O'Neil—it had little room for any other thought.

The same thought was still there; not dead, but surrounded by a woe-begone despair; that, even now, hindered her from feeling, keenly as she otherwise might have done, the danger of the situation.

Still was she not insensible to it. The Cheyenne Chief, in passing, had glared angrily upon her, with an expression she remembered more than once to have seen in the eyes of Blue Dick. As Sylvia's mistress, as the friend and confidant of the quadroon slave, more than all, as the sister of Blount Blackadder, she could not expect either grace or mercy from the mulatto. She knew not what she might expect. It was painful to think, still more to converse, upon it with the women around her.

These did not talk or think of her fate. It was sorrow enough for them to reflect upon their own. But she had more to dread than any of them, and she knew it. With that quick instinct peculiar to women, she knew she was the conspicuous figure in the group.

As the horror of the situation came palpably before her mind, she trembled. Strong as she was, and self-willed as through life she had been, she could not help having the keenest apprehensions.

But along with her trembling came a determination to escape, even with Snively's example and failure before her face!

She might be overtaken. No matter. It could not increase the misery of her situation. It could not add to its danger. At the worst, it could only end in death; and death she would accept sooner than degradation.

She was but slightly tied. In this the Indians do not take much pains with their women captives. It is not often these make any effort to get free; and when they do, it costs but little trouble to track and recapture them.

Still have there been incidents in the history of the prairies where brave, heroic women—even delicate ladies—have contrived to escape from such captivity, and in a manner almost miraculous. The early history of the West teems with such episodes; and she, a child of the West, had heard them as part of her nursery lore. It was their remembrance that was partly inspiring her to make the attempt.

She did not communicate the design to her fellow-captives. They could not aid, but only obstruct her. Under the circumstances, it would be no selfishness to forsake them.

One might deem it a wild, hopeless chance. And so, too, would she, but for a thought that had stolen into her mind. It had been suggested by the sight of an animal standing near. It was her own horse, that had been appropriated by one of the Indians. He was standing with the saddle still on, and the bridle resting over the crutch. A riding-gear so new to them had caught the fancy of the Indians, and they had left it on for exhibition.

Clara Blackadder knew her horse to be a fleet one.

"Once on his back," thought she, "I might gallop out of their reach."

She had a thought beyond. She might get upon the trace which the wagons had followed from Bent's Fort. She believed she could remember, and return along it.

And still another thought. At the Fort she had seen many white men. They might be induced to come back with her, and rescue her captive companions—her brother.

All this passed through her mind in a few short moments; and while it was so passing, she slipped off the thongs, that were but carelessly lapped around her delicate limbs, and prepared for a start.

Now was the time, while the chief was inside his tent.

Chapter Seventeen.

A Flight Urged by Despair.

"Now or never!" was the reflection that passed through Clara Blackadder's mind; and she was in the act of springing up from her recumbent position, when a circumstance occurred seeming to say, "never!"

The mulatto had stepped out from the canvas screen, and stood in front of it; no longer robed in the costume of an Indian chief, but wearing the same dress he had worn as a slave on the Mississippi plantation. It was the same as on that morning when she had been a spectator of his punishment. He was the Blue Dick of bygone days, only taller and

stouter. But the coarse jeans coat and cotton trousers, of copperas-stripe, had been ample enough not to be outgrown.

"You'll know me better now, my old masters and fellow-slaves," he shouted out, adding a derisive laugh. "And you, too, my young mistress," he continued, turning toward the group of white women, and approaching it in a triumphant stride. "Ha, Miss Clara Blackadder! You little thought, when one fine day you stood in the porch of your father's fine house, looking calmly on while I was in torture, that, some other fine day, your turn would come for being tortured too. *It has come!* The rest, including your beautiful brother, have had a taste—only a taste of what's in store for them. I've kept you to the last, because you are the daintiest. That's always the way in a feast of revenge. Ha, ha, ha!"

The young lady made no reply. In the fiendish glance cast upon her, she saw there was no hope for mercy, and that words would be thrown away. She only crouched cowering before him.

But even at that moment she did not lose presence of mind. She still contemplated springing up, and making toward her horse.

Alas! it seemed impossible. He stood right in the way, and could have caught her before she had taken three steps.

And he did catch her before she had made one—even before she had attempted to stand erect.

"Come!" cried he, roughly clasping her waist, and jerking her to her feet. "Come with me. You've been a looker-on long enough. It's your turn now to afford sport for others."

And, without waiting for a reply, he commenced dragging her in the direction of the waterfall.

She made no resistance. She did not scream, nor cry out. She knew it would be idle.

But there was a cry sent from the other side of the glen—a shriek so loud, wild, and unearthly, that it caused the mulatto to stop suddenly, and look in the direction whence it came.

Rushing out from among the crowd of negro captives, was one who might have been the oldest of them—a woman of near seventy years of age, and that weird aspect common among the old crones of a plantation. With hollow cheeks, and white wool thinly set over her temples, with long shrivelled arms outstretched beyond the scant rag of garment which the plunderers had permitted to remain upon her shoulders, she looked like some African Hecate, suddenly exorcised for the occasion.

Despite the forbidding aspect, hers was not an errand of destruction, but mercy.

"Let go hole of de young missa!" she cried, pressing forward to the spot. "You let go hole ob her, Bew Dick. You touch a hair ob her head! Ef you do, you a tief—a murderer. Yach! wuss dan dat. You be a murderin' ob you own fresh an' brud!"

"What do you mean, you old fool!" cried the mulatto, at the same time showing, by his looks, that her words had surprised him.

"Wha de ole fool mean? She mean wha she hab jess say. Dat ef you do harm to Missy Crara, you *harm you own sissa!*"

The mulatto started as if he had received a stab.

"My sister!" he exclaimed. "You're gabbling, Nan. You're old, and have lost your senses."

"No, Bew Dick; Nan habent loss none o' her senses, nor her 'membrane neider. She 'membra dan'lin you on her knee, when you wa' bit piccaninny, not bigger dan a 'possum. She nuss Miss Crara 'bout de same time. She know who boaf come from. You boaf childen ob de same fadder—ob Mass Brackadder; an' she you sissa. Ole Nan tell you so. She willin' swar it."

For a time Blue Dick seemed stunned by the startling revelation. And equally so she, whose wrist he still held in angry clasp. It was a tale strange and new to both of them.

But the asseverations of the old negress had in them the earnestness of truth; more so at such a moment. And along with this were some gleams of light, derived from an indefinite source—instincts or dreams—perhaps some whispering over the cradle—that served to confirm her statement.

Revolted as was the thought of such a relationship to the delicate sensibilities of the young lady, she did not attempt to deny it. Perhaps it might be the means of saving her brother and herself; and, for the first time, she turned her eyes toward the face of Blue Dick in a glance of appeal.

It fell in sudden disappointment. There was no mercy there—no look of a brother! On the contrary, the countenance of the mulatto—always marked by a harsh, sinister expression—seemed now more merciless than ever. His eyes were absolutely dancing with a demoniac triumph.

"Sister!" he cried, at length, sarcastically hissing the word through his teeth. "A sweet sister! she who all my early life has been but my tyrant mistress! What if we are from the same father? Our mothers were different, and I am the son of my mother. A dear father, indeed, who taught me but to toil for him! And that an affectionate brother!"—here he pointed to Blount, who, restored to his fastenings, lay stretched on the grass—"who only delighted in torturing me; who ruined my love—my life! Sweet sister, indeed! you, who treated me as a menial and slave! Now shall you be

mine! You shall sweep out my tent, wait upon my Indian wife, work for her, slave for her, as I have done for you. Come on, Miss Clara Blackadder!"

Freshly grasping the young lady's wrist, he recommenced dragging her across the camp-ground.

An involuntary murmur of disapprobation rose from the different groups of captives. During their long, toilsome journey across the plains, Clara Blackadder had won the good wishes of all—not only by her grace and beauty, but for many kindnesses shown to her travelling companions, black as well as white. And when they now saw her in the clutch of the unnatural monster, being led, as they supposed, to the terrible torture some of them had already experienced, one and all uttered exclamations against it. They were not certain that such was the torture intended by the spiteful renegade; they only guessed it, by the direction in which he was conducting her.

Whatever might have been his purpose, it was prevented.

With a spring as if all the energies of youth had been restored to her shrivelled frame, the old nurse rushed upon him; and clutching his throat in her long bony fingers, caused him to let go his hold.

He turned upon her like an enraged tiger, and, after a short struggle, ending with a blow from his strong arm, old Nan fell flat upon the earth.

But on facing toward the girl to renew his grasp, he saw she was no longer within his reach! While he was struggling with the negress, she had darted away from his side; and, springing upon the back of her own horse, was urging the animal in full gallop out of the gorge!

Chapter Eighteen.

The Stalkers Astonished.

Making their way up the steep mountain-path, climbing over fallen tree-trunks, obstructed by thicket and scaur, the trappers at length got close to the cliff which, as 'Lije Orton had told them, looked down on the camping-place of the Cheyennes.

They had ceased talking aloud, and communicated with one another only in whispers. There was a deathlike stillness in the pure mountain air, and they knew that the slightest sound might make known their approach to the enemy.

They had thrown themselves into a deployed line, after the manner of skirmishers, crouching silently among the stunted pines, and gliding rapidly forward where the ground was without cover. Orton was directing them by signs; O'Neil stepping close by his side, and near enough for the slightest whisper to be heard between them.

The young Irishman still kept impatiently urging the advance. Every moment of delay seemed a month to the heart of the lover. Over and over again came before his mind that hideous picture his fancy had painted—Clara Blackadder struggling in the embrace of a savage! And that savage the Yellow Chief of the Cheyennes!

These fancies were like the waves of a tempestuous sea, following one another at intervals. As each rose grimly before him, he came near groaning aloud. He was only restrained by knowing the necessity for silence. As a relief he kept constantly whispering to his old comrade, and urging him to a more rapid advance.

"Dod rot it, Ned!" replied the latter; "don't be so hurried 'bout it. We'll git theer in good time, take this chile's word for it. Theer's been plenty o' licker in the emigrant wagons, I guess. Them Massissippi planters don't offen go travellin' 'thout a good stock o' corn. An' as for the Injuns, they ain't a-goin' to trouble theerselves 'bout weemen as long 's the licker lasts. Don't you be uneezzy; we'll git up time enuf to purtect the gurl, an' chestise the skunks has ev captered her; you see if we don't."

"But why go creeping this way? Once upon the cliff, we must declare ourselves. We can't get down among them, as you say; and since it must all be done with our rifles, the first shot will discover us."

"So it will; diskiver us to a sartinty. But theer's jest the pint. That fust shot must be deelivered by all o' us at the same instinck o' time. Unless we make a *latter* o' them, as the French trappers call it, they'd be off in the shakin' o' a goat's tail, prehaps takin' thar prisners along wi' 'em. An' whar 'ud we be to foller 'em? Thurfor, we must fix things so'st' every one may take sight on a different Injun at the same time; an' then, afore they kin git clar out o' the gully, we'll be loaded for a second shot. I guess that'll make 'em think o' somethin' else than toatin' off thar captives. Keep yur patience, young fellur! Trust to ole 'Lije Orton, when he sez yur gurl air still safe an' soun'."

The anxious lover, despite his anxiety, could not help feeling confidence in the words thus whispered. More than once had he seen 'Lije Orton acting under circumstances of a like trying nature, and as often coming out triumphant. With an effort he restrained his impatience, and imitated the cautious approach of his comrade.

They were soon sufficiently near the edge of the cliff to hear a murmur of voices rising up out of the valley. As the ears of all were well attuned to such sounds, they knew them to be the voices of Indians. And these could be no other than Yellow Chief, and his band of marauders.

A halt was made; and a hurried council held, about the best mode of making attack.

"There must be ne'er a noise among ye," whispered 'Lije, "not the speakin' o' a word, till we've got one fire at 'em. Then charge yur rifles agen, quick's ever you kin. Two sets o' shots oughter thin 'em, so as they won't mind 'beout thar captives, nor any thin' else, 'ceptin' to streak it—that air, sech as be left o' 'em."

This counsel was delivered in a whisper, and in the same way passed along the line.

"Only one half o' ye fire at a time," continued 'Lije. "You fellurs on the left shoot first. Let the tothers resarve for the second volley. 'Twon't do to waste two bullets on the same redskin. Leave Yellow Chief to me. I hev got a ole score to settle wi' that Injun."

With these precautions, communicated from left to right, the trappers once more advanced—no longer as skirmishers, but in line, and as near to one another as the inequality of the ground would permit.

They could now hear the voice of a man, who talked loudly and in a tone of authority. They could even make out some of the words, for they were in English!

This gave them a surprise; but they had scarce time to think of it, when there arose a chorus of cries, uttered in quick sharp intonation, that told of some unusual occurrence. Among these were the screams of women.

At the same instant the trampling of hoofs resounded along the rocks, as if a horse was going off at a gallop over the hard turf of the prairie. Then succeeded another chorus of yells—a confused din—and soon after the pattering of many hoofs, as of a whole troop of horses following the first.

The sound, reaching the ears of the trappers, carried their eyes out toward the plain; where they beheld a sight that caused one and all of them wild throbbings of the heart. Upon the prairie, just clearing the scarp edge of the cliff, was a woman on horseback. At a glance they could tell it was a young girl; but as her back was toward them, they could see neither face nor features. She was in a lady's saddle; and urging her horse onward as if riding for life—her skirt and hair streaming loosely behind her.

There was one among them that knew who she was. The quick instinct of love told Edward O'Neil well the fugitive upon horseback was Clara Blackadder. His instincts were aided by remembrance. That magnificent head of hair, black as the plumage of a raven, was well remembered by him. It had often been before his fancy in a lone bivouac—at night entwining itself with his dreams.

"O Heavens!" he exclaimed, "it is Clara herself!"

"Yur right, Ned," responded 'Lije, gazing intently after her. "Darned ef it ain't her, that very gurl! She's a-tryin' to git away from 'em. See! thar goes the hul o' the Injuns arter her, gallopin' like h—!"

As Orton spoke, the pursuers began to appear, one after another passing outside the cliff-line—urging their horses onward with blows and loud vociferations.

Several of the trappers raised their rifles to the level, and seemed calculating the distance.

"For yur lives, don't shoot!" cautioned 'Lije, speaking in a constrained voice, and making himself better understood by a wave of the hand. "It kin do ne'er a good now, but only spile all. Let 'em go off. Ef the gurl gits clur, we'll soon track her up. Ef she don't, they're boun' to bring her back, an' then we kin settle wi' 'em. I reck'n they're not all arter her. Theer's some o' the skunks still below. Let's jest see to them; an' then we kin lay out our plans for them's have rid out in the purshoot."

'Lije's counsel was unanimously accepted, and the gun-barrels brought down again.

"Lie clost hyur," he again counselled, "while some o' us steal forard an' reconnoitre. Harry, s'pose you kum 'longs wi' me?"

His purpose was understood by Black Harris, who instantly volunteered to accompany the old trapper—his senior in years, and his equal in rank among the "mountain men."

"Now, boys!" muttered 'Lije on leaving them, "lie close as I've tolt you, and ne'er a word out o' one o' ye till we git back."

So saying, he crept forward, Black Harris by his side—the two going on hands and knees, and with as much caution as if they had been approaching a herd of antelopes.

The glance of the others did not follow them. All eyes were turned downward to the prairie; watching the pursuit, now far off and still going farther across the open plain.

But no one watched with such anxiety as O'Neil. It absorbed his whole soul, like some pent-up agony. His very breathing seemed suspended, as he crouched behind the dwarf cedar-tree, calculating the distance between pursuers and pursued. How he regretted having left his horse behind him! What would he not have given at that moment to be on the back of his brave steed, and galloping to the rescue of his beloved!

Perhaps his suffering would have been still more acute, but for the words just spoken by his old comrade. The girl would either get off, or be brought back; and either way there was hope of saving her. With this thought to console him, he witnessed the spectacle of the pursuit with more equanimity. So, watching it with eager eyes, he awaited the result of the reconnoissance.

Crouching slowly and cautiously along, Orton and Harris at length reached the edge of the cliff, and looked down into the valley below. A glance enabled them to comprehend the situation. It was just as they had conjectured. The white and negro captives seen in separate groups, guarded by something less than a moiety of the Indian band, and these reeling over the ground half intoxicated.

"They'll be a eezy capter now," said 'Lije, "and we must capter 'em. Arter that, we kin kill 'em 'ithout much noise."

"Why not bring up the rest, and shoot 'em whar they stand? We can rub out every redskin of 'em at a single volley."

"Sartin we could; but don't ye see, old hoss, that 'ud niver do. Ye forget the gurl; an she are the only one 'o the hul lot wuth savin', I reckon; the only one I'd give a darn to waste powder for. Ef we wur to fire a shot, the purshooers out yonner 'ud be surtin to hear it, and then good-bye to the gurl—that is, if they git their claws on her agin."

"I see what you mean; an you're right. We must bag this lot below, without makin a rumpus; then we can set our traps for the others."

"Jess so, Harry."

"How are we to do it, think ye, 'Lije? We'll have to go back to whar we left our horses, and ride round by the open eend of the valley. That way we'll have them shut up like sheep in a pen."

"No, Harry; we han't time to go back for the anymals. Afore we ked git roun' thar, the purshooers mout catch the gurl and be comin' back. Then it 'ud be no go. I bethinks me o' a better way."

Black Harris waited to hear what it was.

"I know a pass," continued 'Lije, "by the which we may git down wi' a leetle streechin' o' the arms. If we kin only reech bottom afore they sees us, we'll make short work o' 'em. But we must be cunnin' beout it. Ef but a one o' the skunks hev the chance to eescape, the gurl'll be lost sure. Thar aint a second o' time to be wasted. Let's back to the boys, an at oncest down inter the gully."

Chapter Nineteen.

Setting a Strange Scene.

Retreating from the edge of the cliff with the same caution as they had approached it, the two mountain men rejoined their companions in ambush. 'Lije, after making known his design, led them toward the pass of which he had spoken—a sloping ravine, the same up which Snively had made his vain attempt at escaping.

Screened by the scrub-cedars, the trapper party succeeded in descending it, without being perceived either by the Indians below, or the captives over whom these were keeping but careless watch.

Their sudden appearance upon the plain was a surprise to both: to the latter a joyful sight; to the former a terrible apparition—for they saw in it the quick harbinger of death.

Not a shot was fired by the assailants. On the moment of their feet touching the plain, they flung aside their guns; and, drawing daggers and knives, went at the Indian sentinels, in a hurried but silent slaughter.

There was grappling, struggling, and shouts; but the attacking party outnumbered those attacked; and in less than ten minutes' time the shouting ceased—since there was not a living Indian upon the ground to continue it. Instead was the green meadow sward strewn with dead bodies, every one of them showing a bronze-coloured skin, horribly enamelled with gashes or gouts of crimson blood!

The captives were in raptures of joy. They saw that their rescue was complete. The whites, both men and women, sprang to their feet, and struggled with their fastenings—wishing to have their arms free in order to embrace their preservers; while the negroes, none of whom were bound, came pouring forth out of the *cul-de-sac*, where they had been hitherto penned up, uttering frenzied shouts.

"Keep yur groun' an' stop yur durned shoutin'!" cried 'Lije, with a gesture waving them back. "Don't one 'o ye stir out o' yur places. Back, back, I say! Stay as ye wur, till we gie ye the word. An' you alser," he continued, running to the other side and checking the forward movement of the whites, "hunker down jest as ye did afore. We haint finished this show bizness yit. Thar's another scene o' it to kum."

Both negroes and whites were a little surprised, at being thus restrained from the full ebullition of their joy. But the earnest tone of the old trapper, sustained as it was by the gestures of his companions, had its effect upon them; and all at once cowered back into their original position. What was the intention they could not guess; but, released from the agony of fear, they were willing to wait for it with patience.

They soon beheld a spectacle, so strange as almost to restore them to terrified thought. They saw the dead bodies of the Indians raised from their recumbent position; set up beside their long spears, that had been previously planted in the ground; and lashed to these in such a manner as to sustain them in an erect attitude. There were distributed here and there over the sward, most of them close to the captives, as if still keeping guard over them! Those not so disposed of were dragged off, and hidden away behind the large boulders of rock that lay along the base of the cliff.

"Now!" thundered the old trapper, addressing his speech to the captives, white as well as black, "ef one o' ye stir from the spot ye're in, or ventures to show sign o' anythin' thet's tuk place, till ye git the word from me, ye'll hev a rifle bullet sent plum through ye. The gurl hez got to be rescooed 'ithout harm done to her; an' I reckon she's wuth more than the hul o' ye thegither. Thar's but one way o' savin' her, an' thet's by yur keepin' yur heads shet up, an' yur karkidges 'ithout stirrin' as much as a finger. So don't make neery movement, ef ye vally yur precious lives. Ye unnerstan' me?"

The captives were too much controlled to make rejoinder; but they saw, by the earnestness of the old trapper, that his commands were to be obeyed; and silently resolved to obey them.

After delivering the speech, 'Lije turned toward his trapper companions—all of whom knew what was meant; and who, without waiting word or sign, rushed toward their rifles—still lying on the ground.

In a few seconds they had regained them; and, in less than five minutes after, not a trapper was to be seen about the place. They had disappeared as suddenly as sprites in a pantomime; and the little valley seemed suddenly restored to the state in which it had been left, when the pursuers of Clara Blackadder swept out of it. Any one glancing into it at that moment could have had no other thought, than that it contained the captives of an emigrant train, with their Indian captors keeping guard over them.

Chapter Twenty.

A Ride for more than Life.

Nerved by the fear of a terrible fate, did the escaping captive urge forward her swift horse, encouraging the animal both with words and caresses.

He knew her voice, and did his best. He seemed to know, also, why he was thus put to the top of his speed, for under such circumstances the horse seems to be stirred by something more than instinct.

The one ridden by Clara Blackadder was a hunter, of the best Kentucky breed, and might have distanced any of the mustangs mounted by the Indians.

But there was another of the same race among his pursuers—one superior in size, strength, and swiftness even to himself. It was the horse that had belonged to the young lady's brother, appropriated by Blue Dick, and now following with the mulatto upon his back.

She did not know who. She only knew that one of the pursuers was coming close after her, and saw that the rest had fallen far behind. But, to her terror, she saw that this single horseman was gradually gaining upon her.

Had she been a strong man and armed, she might have reined up, and given him combat. But she knew that the weakest of the Indian warriors would be more than a match for her: and, if overtaken, she must succumb.

There was no hope for her, but in the swiftness of her horse; and once more she spoke words of encouragement, patting him on the neck with her little hands, while striking the heel of her tiny boot against his sides.

The Kentucky blood, answering to this urgency, did his best; and galloped onward, as if his own life, as well as that of the rider, depended upon his speed.

It was all to no purpose. Ere the fleeing girl had made another mile across the prairie, the close clattering of hoofs gave warning that the pursuer was rapidly drawing near; and, giving a glance back, she saw him within less than a hundred lengths from the heels of her own horse.

She saw, besides, what rendered her fears yet more agonising, that it was no Indian who was thus hotly pursuing her, but a man in a cotton shirt—he who was once a slave on her father's plantation. It was the Yellow Chief divested of his Indian habiliments, whom now, from what she had heard, she must believe to be her brother.

And a brother so cruel—so unnatural! She trembled at the thought of the encounter!

It could not be avoided. In ten minutes more he was riding by her side.

Clutching the bridle-rein of her horse, he drew the animal down upon its haunches—at once putting an end to the pursuit.

"No, no, Miss Clarey!" he tauntingly cried out, "you shan't escape me so easily. You and I don't part company, till you've served me and mine as I've served you and yours. It makes no matter if I *am* your brother, as Old Nan says. You've got to come back with me, and see how *you'll* like being a slave. We keep slaves among the Indians, just as you proud planters of Mississippi. Come along with me, and see!"

The young lady offered no resistance; nor did she say a word in reply. From what she had already seen and experienced, she knew it would be idle; and resigning the rein, she permitted her horse to be controlled by him who had so easily overtaken her.

Turning about upon the prairie, captor and captive commenced retracing their tracks; the former sitting erect in his saddle, exultant of success; the latter with bent attitude, and eyes regarding the ground in a look of despair.

The Indians soon came up with their chief; and the captive was conducted back toward the scene where she had witnessed so much suffering.

And what was to be *her* torture? She could not tell. She did not even think of it. Her spirit was crushed beyond the power of reflection.

The chase had occupied about half an hour. It took over twice the time for the Indians to return. The sun had already sunk low over the ridge of the Rocky Mountains, and it was twilight within the little valley. But, as they advanced,

there was light enough for them to distinguish the other captives still lying on the grass, and their comrades keeping guard over them.

So thought the Yellow Chief, as, on reaching the crest of the ridge that ran transversely across the entrance, he glanced up the gorge, and saw the different groups to all appearance as he had left them.

Riding in the front, he was about to descend the slope, when an exclamation from the rear caused him to rein up, and look back.

Several of the Indians, who had also mounted the ridge, were seen halted upon its summit, as if something was causing them surprise or alarm.

It could not be anything seen in the encampment. Their faces were not turned in that direction, but along the mountain line to the northward.

The chief, suddenly wheeling about, trotted back to the summit; and there saw what was causing surprise to his followers, and what now, also, astonished himself. Making out from the mountain, and scattering over the prairie, was a troop of horses without riders. In such a place they might have passed for wild steeds, with some mules among them, for they saw also these. But they were near enough nor to be mistaken for *mustangs*.

Besides, it was seen that they all carried saddles on their backs, and bridles over their necks—the reins of most of them trailing down to the grass.

The red marauders knew at a glance what it meant. It could be nothing else than the *cavallada* of some camp that had “stampeded.”

An encampment of whites, or men of their own colour? This was the question that, for a while, occupied their attention, as they stood regarding the movements of the animals.

It did not take them long to arrive at a conclusion. The strange horses, at first scampering in different directions, had wheeled back toward a common centre; and in a drove were now coming toward the spot occupied by the Indians. As they drew nearer, the style of the saddles and other riding-gear told the Cheyennes that their owners were not Indians.

On first seeing them, the Yellow Chief had commanded his followers to take position behind a clump of trees standing upon the slope of the ridge, and hindering observation from the northward. There, for a time, they continued to observe the movements of the riderless horses.

What seemed strange was, that there were no men following them. If escaping from a camp in broad daylight, as it still was, they should have been seen, and some attempt made to recapture them. But, as they strayed under the eyes of the Indians, no owners appeared to be after them.

For some time the Cheyenne chief and his followers sat gazing upon the *cavallada*, and endeavouring to explain its presence.

They could make nothing out of it, beyond the fact of its being a troop of stampeded animals.

And these could only have come from a camp of whites; for neither the horses nor their trappings were such as are in use among Indians. There were American horses among them, very different from the mustang of the prairies.

Had they got away in the night, when their owners were asleep? Not likely. Even thus they would have been trailed and overtaken. Besides, when the Indians first set eyes on them, they were galloping excitedly, as if freshly stampeded. They were now getting quieted after their scare—whatever it may have been—some of them, as they stepped along, stooping their heads to gather a mouthful of grass.

To the Indians it was a tempting sight. Horse-stealing is their regular profession, and success at it one of their boasted accomplishments. A young brave, returning to his tribe with the captured horse of an enemy, is received almost with as much triumph and congratulation as if he carried the scalp of that enemy on the point of his spear.

They remained in ambush only long enough to see that there were no men within sight of the straying horses; and to reflect that, even if the owners were near, they must be afoot, and therefore helpless to hinder their cattle from being captured. A dash after the drove would do it. They were all provided with their lazos, and there could be little difficulty in securing the strays, to all appearance docile, as if jaded after a long journey. With the quickness of lightning these thoughts passed through the minds of the marauders; and simultaneously they turned their eyes upon the chief, as if seeking permission to ride off in pursuit. Not only was it given, but he himself determined to lead the chase.

Among his other evil passions, cupidity was one; and, by Indian law, the prize belongs to him who takes it. The chance of adding two or three fine horses to his stock was not to be slighted; and turning to one of the men who kept guard over the captive girl, he ordered him to take her on to the encampment.

Then, setting the example to his followers, he rode out from behind the copse, and, at an easy pace, directed his course toward the sauntering *cavallada*.

Chapter Twenty One.

A Pleasanter Captivity.

If the sight of the straying horses had caused surprise to the Indians, not less astonished were they who, within the valley, had been awaiting their approach. The trappers, placed in a well-contrived ambush, had seen Yellow Chief as he ascended to the crest of the ridge, and noticed his strange movements. Divided into two parties, they were stationed near the entrance of the gorge, about one-half their number on each side of it. Two lateral ravines running some distance into the face of the rocky cliff, and thickly studded with scrub-cedars, afforded them a place of concealment. Their plan was to let the returned pursuers pass in, and then, rushing out, to close up the entrance, and thus cut off their retreat. Trusting to their guns, pistols, and knives, as well as the panic which the surprise would undoubtedly create, they intended making a *battue* of the savages—to strike a grand “coup,” as they themselves expressed it. There was no talk of giving quarter. The word was not even mentioned. In the minds of these men the thought of mercy to an Indian enemy has little place; less for a Cheyenne; and less still for the band of braves led by the Yellow Chief—a name lately distinguished for treacherous hostility toward trappers as well as cruelty of every kind.

“Let’s kill every redskin of them!” was the resolution understood by all, and spoken by several, as they separated to take their places in ambuscade. When they saw the Indians mount upon the summit of the ridge, the chief already descending, they felt as if their design was soon to be accomplished. They were near enough to the savages to make out the expression upon their countenances. They saw no signs denoting doubt. In five minutes more the unconscious enemy would be through the gap, and then—

And then was it that the exclamation was heard from those upon the hill, causing the chief suddenly to turn his horse and ride back.

What could it mean? Not one of the trappers could guess. Even ‘Lije Orton was puzzled by the movement.

“Thar must be somethin’ queery on tother side,” he whispered to O’Neil, who was in ambush by his side. “That ere movement can’t a be from anything they’ve seed hyar. They waant lookin’ this way. Durn me, if I kin make out what stopped ‘em!”

Of all those awaiting the approach of the Indians, no one suffered so much from seeing them halt as the young Irishman. For the first time in five years he had a view of that face, almost every night appearing to him in his dreams. She was near enough for him to trace the lineaments of those features, indelibly impressed upon his memory. If he saw change in them, it was only that they appeared more beautiful than ever. The wan hue of sadness, and that pallor of complexion, natural to a daughter of the South, had been replaced by a red suffusion upon her cheeks, caused by the chase, the capture, and the terrible excitement of the situation; and she seemed to glow with beauty. And there was something that at the moment rendered her still more beautiful in the eyes of O’Neil. During the interval of hasty action since entering the Indian encampment, he had found time to place himself in communication with some of the white captives, her companions on the journey. From them he had learnt enough to know, that Clara Blackadder was yet unwedded; something, too, of her mood of habitual melancholy, as if there was a void in her heart, none of them understood!

As he knelt behind the cedar-trees, expectant of her return, he had indulged in sweet conjectures as to its cause; and when he saw her upon the ridge, riding down as it were into his arms, a thrill of delightful anticipation passed over his spirit. He could scarce restrain himself from rushing forth to receive her; and it was with difficulty the old trapper could keep him silent in his concealment.

Still more difficult as the Indians halted on the hill.

“They may ride off again,” said he, in an agonised whisper, to his more patient comrade. “Supposing they suspect our presence? They may gallop off, and take her along with them? We have no horses to follow. We should never overtake them afoot.”

“You kedn’t ef we charged on ‘em now. They’re ayont the carry o’ our guns. Ef they git a glimps o’ one o’ us, they’ll be sartin to stampede. Don’t show the tip o’ yur nose, Ned; for yur life, don’t!”

The counsel might not have been heeded. O’Neil was in an agony of impatient apprehension. It seemed so easy to rush up to the summit of the ridge, and rescue her he so dearly loved. He felt as if he could have outrun the swiftest horse, and alone vanquished the full band of savages that surrounded her!

Yielding to the impetuosity of his long-constrained passion, he might have made the suicidal attempt, had he not been stayed by the next movement of the Indians, who, to the surprise of all, both prisoners and trappers, were seen to turn their backs upon the encampment, leaving the young girl in the charge of a single savage! Even then Orton found it difficult to restrain O’Neil from leaping out from his ambush and rushing toward his beloved. It seemed now so easy to rescue her!

The old trapper was again compelled to use force, throwing his arms around and holding him in his place.

“A minnit more, ye fool!” was the hurried though not very complimentary speech hissed into O’Neil’s ear. “Hev patience one minnit, and she’ll coflumix right into yur arms, like a barked squirrel from the branch o’ a tree. Hish!”

The last exclamation was simultaneous with a movement on the part of the Indian who had been left in charge of the captive. In obedience to the hurried order of his chief, the savage had taken the bridle of her horse, and commenced leading the animal down the slope in the direction of the ravine, his eyes straying over the ground of the encampment.

Before entering the gap, he looked ahead! The silence there seemed somewhat to astonish him. It was strange there

was no movement. He could see several of his comrades lying upon the grass, and others standing over the captives, these still in their planes just as he remembered them, when starting forth on the pursuit.

The Indians upon the ground seemed natural enough. They were those who had drunk too freely of the white man's fire-water. But the guards standing erect—leaning upon their long lances—it was odd they should be so silent, so motionless! He knew his comrades to be trained to a certain stoicism; but, considering the exciting scenes that had occurred, this was beyond expectation.

For all, the thing caused him no suspicion. How could he have a thought of what had transpired in his absence?

He advanced without further pause, leading the captive's horse, till he had passed through the gap of the gorge. Whether he then saw enough to tell him of the trap into which he had fallen can never be known. If he did, he had no time either to reflect upon or escape from it. A man, gliding silently out from the bushes, sprang like a panther upon the croup of his horse; and before he could turn to see who thus assailed him, a bowie-knife had gone deep into his dorsal ribs, causing him to drop dead to the ground without uttering a groan!

It was the bowie-knife of old 'Lije Orton that had inflicted the fatal stab.

At the same instant another man, rushing out from the same cover, clasped the captive girl in his arms, and tenderly lifted her from the saddle.

She was surprised, but not terrified. There could be no more terror there. If there had, it would have passed in a moment, when in her deliverer she recognised one who, for five long years, had been alike the torture and solace of her thoughts.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Scene Re-arranged.

Edward O'Neil held Clara Blackadder in his arms. He now knew she loved and had been true to him, though not from any words that had passed between them.

There was scarce time for them to do more than pronounce one another's names; but the glance exchanged was eloquent to the hearts of both. Each saw in the other's eyes that the old fondness was still there, strengthened, if aught changed, by the trials through which they had passed.

Almost on the instant of their coming together they were again parted by the trappers; who, with 'Lije Orton and Black Harris directing them, had hastily commenced rearranging the ambuscade. Every moment they might expect the return of the Indians. A scout, who had hurried up to the crest of the ridge, telegraphed back why the savages had ridden off.

With the quick perception common to men of their calling, they at once understood all. They remembered that in their haste they had but slightly secured their horses. Something, some sort of wild beast, perhaps a grizzly bear, had got among them, causing the stampede. It was an occurrence not new to them.

It only increased their thirst for vengeance against the detested Cheyennes, and made them more than ever determined on a wholesale destruction of the predatory band.

"Let's rub them out, every redskin of them!" was the counsel passed around.

"We must get back our horses anyhow!"

"We'll do that," said Orton, "an' thar horses, too, to redemlify us for the trouble. But, boyees, 't won't do to go foolich about it. Though thar's no fear o' these hyur skunks tellin' tales, we must take percaushuns for all that. This nigger wants proppin' up like the rest o' 'em. When that air done, we'll be riddy to gie 'em thar recepshun."

The others knew what 'Lije meant, and hastened to reset the stage for the next scene of the sanguinary drama.

While the scout on the crest of the ridge kept them warned as to the movements of the Indians, the others were busy placing the tableau that was to greet them on their return. The young lady was directed to assume a half-recumbent attitude on the grass—her horse still saddled standing near. Close by, propped up, was the dead body of the savage to whose keeping she had been entrusted; not seeming dead, but life-like by the side of his own horse, as if still keeping guard over the captive. All was arranged in less than ten minutes of time. These rude mountain men are ready at such *ruses*. No wonder their wits should be quick and keen; their lives often depend upon the successful execution of such schemes.

They found time to make many changes in the arrangement previously made. In their haste the stage had not been set to their satisfaction. The other dead sentinels were placed in attitudes more life-like and natural, and all traces of the brief struggle were carefully blotted out or removed. The captives, both white and black, were cautioned to keep their places, and instructed how to act, in case of any unforeseen accident causing a change in the carrying out of the programme.

When everything was fixed to their satisfaction, the trappers returned to their ambush; as before, distributing themselves into two parties—one for each side of the gorge. A vidette was still kept upon the top of the ridge, though not the man first deputed for the performance of this duty. There were now two of them—Black Harris and 'Lije Orton.

It was an interval of strange reflection with the young Irishman, O'Neil. Before his eyes—almost within reach of his arms—upon the grassy sward, he saw lying that fair form which for long absent years had remained vividly outlined in his memory. How he longed to go nearer and embrace her! And all the more, that he could perceive her glance turned toward the spot where he lay concealed, as if endeavouring to penetrate the leafy screen that separated them. How he longed for the final event that would terminate this red tragedy, and bring them together again, in life never more to be parted! It was a relief, as well as joy to him, when his old comrade, Orton, close followed by Black Harris, was seen hastily descending the slope, their gestures showing that the horse-hunt was over, and the savages were riding back toward the encampment.

“Now, boyees!” said 'Lije, gliding to both sides of the gorge, and addressing the trappers in a cautious undertone, “ef ye'll jest keep yerselves purfectly cool for about ten minutes longer, an' wait till ye git the word from Black Harry or myself, ye'll have a chance o' wipin' out any scores ye may hev run up 'twixt yur-selves an' Yellow Chief. Don't neer a one o' ye touch trigger till the last of the cussed varmints hev got clar past the mouth o' this hyur gully. An' then wait till ye hear the signal from me. It'll be the crack o' my rifle. Arter that, the Injuns aint like to hev any chief; an' ye kin go in, an' gie 'em eternal darnation.”

In ten seconds after he had ceased speaking not a trapper was to be seen near the Indian encampment; only the captives with their sentinels standing over them, surrounded by a stillness as of death. It was like the ominous calm that comes between two gusts of a storm, all the more awful from the contrasting silence.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Stampeders Captured.

In starting in chase of the straying *cavallada*, the Cheyennes did not go on at full speed. The spectacle of over twenty horses saddled and bridled, wandering about without riders on their backs, or the sign of an owner following after them, was one so novel, that, while causing astonishment to the savages, it also aroused their instincts of caution. It looked like what the Indians had first taken it for—a stampede. And still it might be the ruse of an enemy, with the design of drawing them into an ambuscade. Partly for this reason, and partly that the ownerless animals might not be scared into a second stampede, and so become difficult of capture, the Cheyennes rode toward them slowly and deliberately.

As they drew near, however, and still no white men appeared in sight, they quickened their pace, and at length broke into a gallop—charging at full speed upon the sauntering drove. This had become necessary, as the white men's horses had “smelt Indian,” and with crests erect, and snorting nostrils, showed signs of making off.

For a period of ten minutes there was a confused movement upon the plain—a sort of irregular tournament, in which horses ridden by dusky riders, and others without any, were mingled together and galloping towards every point of the compass; long slender ropes, like snakes, suddenly uncoiled, were seen circling through the air; wild cries were heard, sent forth from a score of savage throats—the clamour increased by the shrill neighing of horses and the shriller hinneying of the mules—while the firm prairie turf echoed the tread of over a hundred hoofs.

And soon this tableau underwent a change. The dark moving mass became scattered over a wider surface, and here and there could be seen, at intervals apart, the oft-described spectacle of a horseman using the lazo: two horses at opposite ends of a long rope stretched taut between them, tails toward each other, one of them standing with feet firmly planted, the lazo fast to a stapled ring in the tree of his saddle; the other prostrate upon the ground, with the rope wound around his neck, no longer struggling to free himself, but convulsively to get breath.

And soon again the tableau became changed. The captured steeds were whipped back upon their feet, and their captors once more got into a clump together, each leading a spare horse, that followed without further resistance.

Some had none, while others, more fortunate or skilful, had succeeded in making a double take during the quick scramble.

After the more serious work of the morning, it was a light and pleasant interlude for the young Cheyennee, and, as they returned toward their camp, they were full of joyous glee.

Still were their thoughts damped with some suspicion of danger. The novelty of such an easy razzia had in it also something of mystery; and as they rode slowly back over the prairie swells, they glanced anxious glances toward the north—the point from which the stampeded horses had come.

But no one was in sight—there was no sign of a human being!

Were the owners of the lost horses asleep? Or had they been struck dead, before the scattering commenced?

The mutual congratulations of the savages on the handsome *coup* they had made were restrained by the mystery that surrounded it; and, with mingled feelings of gladness and apprehension, they once more approached the spot where, as they supposed, their comrades and captives awaited them.

They went with as much speed as the led horses would allow them. Their chief, cunning as he was courageous, suspected that danger might be nigh. Where there was smoke there should be fire; and thinking of this old adage, he knew that where there were over twenty caparisoned horses there must be at least this number of men not far off—men who could only be enemies. Now that the animals were in his possession, he was sure of their owners being white. The saddles, bridles, and other trappings were such as are never, or only occasionally, used by the red-skinned cavaliers of the prairie. Though now surely afoot, the men to whom the horses belonged would be as sure to follow

them; and the Yellow Chief knew that a score of white men armed with their death-dealing rifles would be an overmatch for his band, though these outnumbered them two to one. The captured animals told him something besides: their caparison proved them to belong to trappers; which, in his reckoning, more than doubled their number.

To gather up the spoils taken from the emigrant train, along with the captives, and take speedy departure from the place, was now his design.

He was thinking of the triumph that awaited him on his return to the head town of the great Cheyenne tribe; the welcome he would receive bringing back such a booty—horses, spoils, prisoners, the last to be distributed as slaves—of his increased glory in the nation, his promotion among the leaders, and the hope some day to become head chief of the Cheyennes—all these thoughts passing through his mind made him highly exultant.

And there was the other thought—revenge over his enemies in early life—those by whose tyranny and persecution he had been driven forth to find a home, and along with it honour, among the red men of the wilderness.

His fiendish spirit felt sweet joy, thus revelling in revenge; and as he rode back toward the camp, where he knew his victims awaited him, he might have been heard muttering to himself:

“They shall serve me, as I have served them. And she who is called my sister—*she shall be my slave!*”

Chapter Twenty Four.

Finale.

The sun was already close down to the summit of the *sierra*, when the Yellow Chief and his followers once more surmounted the ridge that brought them in sight of the encampment.

Although the daylight was still lingering around them, the little glen and the gap leading into it were obscured under the purple shadows of approaching night.

There was light enough left for the Indian horsemen to distinguish the salient features of the scene. They could see the various groupings of their prisoners, with their comrades standing sentry over them; the white men on one side; the women near; and on the opposite edge of the valley, the sable crowd, some seated, some standing, in all respects apparently as they had parted from them when starting on the pursuit of Clara Blackadder.

Apart from all the rest they saw her, with the Choctaw keeping watch close by, his hand clutching the withers of his horse.

The picture was complete. Nothing seemed wanting. No one was there who should not have been, nor any one missing. Who could have had suspicion, that close to those silent groupings there were others equally silent, but unseen and unsuspected? Not the young Cheyenne braves returning with their captured horses; not the daring chief who rode at their head.

Without the slightest warning of the surprise that awaited them, they pushed boldly through the gap, and on, over the level meadow, toward the spot occupied by their prisoners.

It was not till they had drawn up amidst the captive groups that things seemed a little strange to them. Why were their comrades so still, so silent? They did not think of those lying stretched along the grass—in all about a dozen. They had left them there, and knew that they were intoxicated. But the guards standing erect—why were these so undemonstrative? It was a thing unusual. Returning with such spoil, they might expect to have been hailed by a paean of congratulations. There was not even a salute!

It was a puzzle—a mystery. Had there been a better light, it might sooner have been solved. The blood sprinkled here and there over the grass, the gashes that would have been seen on the bodies of the sentinels, their stiff set attitudes and ghastly faces—all would have been apparent. But over all was the veil of a fast-darkening twilight, and through its obscurity only the outlines of their figures could be traced, in positions and attitudes seeming natural enough. It was the absence of all motion, coupled with the profound silence, that seemed strange, ominous, appalling!

“Waboga!” cried the chief, addressing himself to the Choctaw who stood guard over the girl, “what means this? Why do you stand there like a tree-stump? Why do you not speak?”

No answer from Waboga!

“Dog!” cried the mulatto, “if you don’t make answer, I’ll have you nailed to that cross, you have yourself erected. Once more I ask you, what is the meaning of this nonsense?”

The threat had no effect upon Waboga. It elicited no answer—not even the courtesy of a sign!

“Slave!” shouted the chief, leaping down from his horse, and rushing toward the silent sentry, “I shall not give you the grace of a trial. This instant shall you die!”

As he spoke, a blade glistened in his hand, which, as his gestures showed, was about to be buried in the body of Waboga.

The sentry stood staunch, apparently regardless of the death that threatened him!

The chief stayed his hand, surprised at the unparalleled coolness of the Choctaw.

Only for a moment; for as he stood regarding him, now close up to the body, he saw what explained all—a gash great as he could have himself inflicted!

Waboga was already dead!

The horse upon which the Choctaw was leaning, scared by the threatening gesture, shied to one side, and the lifeless form fell heavily to the earth!

The knife dropped from the hands of the Cheyenne chief, and, with a wild, distracted air, he turned toward his followers to seek an explanation. But before a word could be spoke all was explained.

A cordon of dark forms was seen closing up the entrance of the valley; the word “Fire!” was heard, followed by a serried sheet of flame, and the sharp “crack, crack, crack,” proclaiming the discharge of a score of rifles.

It was the last sight seen by the Yellow Chief—the last sound heard by him before passing into eternity!

And the same with his freebooting band. Not one of them went alive out of that valley, into which the trappers had decoyed them.

The emigrants continued on to California, now with diminished numbers; for, along with the leader, several others had been killed in the attack upon the caravan.

But, besides the dead, there was one living who went not with them.

Now that her father was no more, there was no one to hinder Clara Blackadder from staying behind, along with the man of her choice; no reason why she should not return with him to the seats of civilisation.

And she did so; not to share with him an humble home, but a residence far more splendid than the old plantation-house in the “Choctaw purchase.” As the Irish trapper had declared it, Edward O’Neil was one of the “Onales of Tipperary, a gintleman on both sides av the house;” and in due time the property belonging to both sides of the house became his.

It might be chivalry that he did not take his young Southern wife there, where she might feel lonely in a land of strangers. But it gave equal evidence of good sense, that he sold off his Tipperary estates, and invested the money in the purchase of town-lots upon an islet he had learned to love even more than the “gem of the seas.” It was the isle of Manhattan.

There he still lives, happy in the companionship of his beautiful and faithful wife; cheered by sweet children, and, at intervals, by the presence of his old comrade, ‘Lije Orton, who, now that railroads have penetrated the far prairies, comes occasionally to pay him a visit, and keep him posted up in the lore of the “mountain men.”

The End.

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