

Aimard Gustave

The Missouri Outlaws



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The Missouri Outlaws:

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NOTICE

GUSTAVE AIMARD was the adopted son of one of the most powerful Indian tribes, with whom he lived for more than fifteen years in the heart of the prairies, sharing their dangers and their combats, and accompanying them everywhere, rifle in one hand and tomahawk in the other. In turn squatter, hunter, trapper, warrior, and miner, GUSTAVE AIMARD has traversed America from the highest peaks of the Cordilleras to the ocean shores, living from hand to mouth, happy for the day, careless of the morrow. Hence it is that GUSTAVE AIMARD only describes his own life. The Indians of whom he speaks he has known – the manners he depicts are his own.

PREFACE

Very few of the soul-stirring narratives written by GUSTAVE AIMARD are equal in freshness and vigour to "The Missouri Outlaws," hitherto unpublished in this country. The characters of the Squatter, the real, restless, unconquerable American, who is always going ahead, and of his wife and daughter, are admirably depicted, while his eccentric brother is a perfect gem of description. The great interest, however, of the narrative is centred in Tom Mitchell, the mysterious outlaw, whose fortunes excite the readers' imagination to the utmost. There can be no doubt he is one of the most original characters depicted by the versatile pen of the great French novelist. In addition to being a story of adventure, "The Missouri Outlaws" is also a love tale, and abounds in tender pathos, the interest of which is well sustained in "The Prairie Flower" and in its sequel, "The Indian Scout."

PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

London: *February, 1877.*

CHAPTER I.

THE GOOD SHIP PATRIOT

On the 4th of August, 1801, a little after eight o'clock at night, just as the last rays of the setting sun disappeared behind the heights of Dorchester, gilding as they did so the summits of certain islands scattered at the entrance to Boston Bay, some idlers of both sexes, collected on Beacon Hill, at the foot of the lighthouse, saw a large vessel making for the harbour.

At first it seemed as if the ship would be compelled to desist from her design, as the wind was slightly contrary; but, by a series of skilful manoeuvres, it at last passed by the danger which threatened, the sails were one by one taken in and furled, and finally the anchor was cast beside one of the many vessels in port.

A few minutes later nothing was to be seen on deck save one man walking up and down doing duty as watch for the time being.

The vessel had, under cover of a dense fog, escaped from Brest, slipped past the English cruisers, and finally, after many dangers, reached its destination.

Descending into the cabin, we find two men seated at a table upon which were glasses, bottles, pipes, and tobacco, conversing and smoking.

These were Captain Pierre Durand, a young man, with regular but rather effeminate features, and yet a look of frank honesty,

to which his sparkling eyes, his broad forehead, his long waving hair, gave an appearance of singular energy. Though every inch a sailor, there was a refinement about him not generally found in his class.

His companion was a handsome and haughty young man, of about two-and-twenty, of moderate height, but with very broad shoulders; he was evidently of powerful make, with nerves of steel. His complexion was olive; his hair long wavy black; his eyes were large and bold; the expression of his countenance sombre and thoughtful, while at this early age many a wrinkle caused by thought or suffering was to be observed.

There had evidently been a warm discussion, for the captain was walking up and down, a frown upon his brow. Suddenly, however, he reseated himself and held out his hand across the table.

"I was wrong. Do not be vexed," he said.

"I am not angry, my good Pierre," he answered.

"Then why sulk with your friend?"

"I do not sulk, heaven knows; I am simply sad. You have reopened a wound I thought forever closed," the other added with a sigh.

"Well, then, in heaven's name, if it be so," cried the captain, "let us talk about something else – and above all, let us drink. This old rum is a sovereign remedy for the blues. Your health, my friend."

Both drank after touching glasses, and then silence again

ensued.

"Now, my dear Oliver," resumed the captain, "at last we are safe in Boston. We leave tomorrow. What do you intend to do?"

"You remember our conversation at Brest?"

"I have not forgotten it, but I never seriously entertained the idea. We had dined rather copiously."

"We were very sober. There were two bottles on the table, one empty and the other nearly full. I then told you that though I had only just returned to France after an absence of ten years, I was compelled to leave at a moment's notice, and to leave without raising any suspicion. I wanted to depart without anyone being able to obtain the slightest clue; you remember," he added.

"I do, and I told you that I would run the blockade that very night, if the weather turned out as bad as I expected. Did I keep my promise?"

"With all the loyalty of your honest heart. I also told you I intended remaining in America."

"It is to that madcap resolution I object," said the captain emphatically. "Why not stay with me? You are an excellent sailor – you shall be my chief officer."

"No, my friend. I can accept nothing which can ever tempt me to return to France," he answered.

"How you suffer!" sighed his friend.

"Horribly. Come, my friend, as we shall part for ever tomorrow, I will tell you my history."

"Not if it makes you suffer."

"I will be brief. Sad as my story is, it is not very long."

"Go on," replied Captain Durand, filling up two more glasses of rum, and lighting a fresh cigar for himself.

"I will not sermonise, but begin at the beginning. I was born in Paris, but might be English, German, or even Russian, for all I know. I am simply aware that my birthplace was Paris, in the house of a doctor, where my mother took refuge. It was in the Rue St. Honoré I first saw the light but, as soon as I could be removed, was sent to the Foundling. There I remained four years, until a loving young couple, who had lost their only child, adopted me. They were poor, and lived on the third floor of a wretched old house, in the Rue Plumet, where, I must own, I had enough, but of very coarse, food."

"One day, however, fortune knocked at the door. My adopted mother was, and still is, one of the handsomest women in Paris. By accident an old friend, a distant relation, a man of high position, found her out. He at once procured a lucrative appointment for my supposed parent, and we moved to a splendid residence in the Faubourg du Roule. The friend, who lived close by, at once began to visit us every evening, and, by a curious coincidence, the husband always found business which required his absence. He never returned until a quarter of an hour after the other had left."

"Accommodating husband," sneered Durand.

"Just so. But, unfortunately for me, I became older, curious, was always turning up when not wanted, and saying things which

were not required. It was decided that I was an incorrigible scamp, and must be sent away."

"My adopted mother had relations at Dunkirk, and I was packed off to them to be sent to sea as cabin boy. Then only did I discover that these people were not my parents. My supposed mother coldly kissed me, told me to be a good boy and gave me ten sous; my father, who escorted me to the ramshackle vehicle which traded between Paris and Calais, told me to remember this, that society never having done anything for me, I was to do nothing for society; the only virtues to which men ever owed success were, he said, selfishness and ingratitude. He further added, 'Good-bye, we shall never meet again.'"

"He turned his back and left me. This was my first young sorrow, and I felt it very much."

"I feel for you," said the captain; "your story is very much like my own."

"These people, knowing me then to be very delicate, hoped that the hardy profession they had selected for me would kill me. They were mistaken."

"As I see," answered Durand.

"I was first boy on board a herring boat, where I had to endure the brutality and insolence of a low drunkard, who never spoke except with an oath from his mouth, accompanying it with a blow from his cane. My apprenticeship was one long terror. Sometimes a whaler, sometimes a cod fisher, sometimes a slaver. I have been five or six times round the world; abandoned

on the wildest coast of America, I was a long time prisoner; shipwrecked on an island in the Pacific, I wonder I did not die of misery and despair."

"Poor Oliver!"

"But bad as was my life, I everywhere in savage lands found some friend; but in France, from which I was ignominiously expelled eleven years ago, I found on my return two implacable foes – Calumny and Hatred. I was a very sharp boy, and trusted wholly to strangers. I could not help hearing many things I should not have heard. I discovered the secret of my birth, who were my father and mother, their exact names, and their position in society. One day, in a moment of frenzy – and you know I am extremely violent – I was foolish enough to let out the fact that I knew all. From that day a vow was made to accomplish my ruin; the most calumnious reports pursued me; I was accused behind my back and in the dark of the most horrible crimes. It is to me still a wonder how I have escaped all the ambushes laid for me. My foes hesitated at nothing. They tried to assassinate me. Is it not horrible? Well, having failed in the ordinary way, they bribed the captain of a ship I had joined to maroon me on the coast of New Mexico, where dwell the most ferocious Indian tribes."

"And the captain did this?"

"Pardieu!" cried Oliver; "He was a poor man, and the father of a family. I was cast on shore stupefied by laudanum. When I recovered the ship was already out of sight. I expected to be killed by the savages or to die of hunger. How neither happened is too

long a story to tell now. But the end of all is, I have determined on an eternal exile. Never again will I place myself in the power of my foes, who live rich, happy, and respected in France."

"You will establish yourself in Boston?"

"No! I have done with civilised life; I shall now try that of the desert. It is my intention to bury myself in the wilds until I find an Indian tribe that will welcome me. I will ask them to receive me as a warrior. I thoroughly understand the manners and customs of the aborigines, and shall easily make friends."

"I believe," observed the captain, "that you are right in this particular. You are young, brave, and intelligent; therefore you will succeed even in this mad project. But mark my word, you may live five, perhaps ten years with the Indians; but at last you will weary of this existence – what will you do then?"

"Who knows? Experience will have ripened my reason, perhaps killed my grief, even deadened the hatred which burns within my heart. I may even learn to forgive those who have made me suffer. That in itself is a sort of vengeance."

"But you will never come to that," said his friend.

The young man rose without making any reply, and went on deck.

Next day, as soon as the usual formalities had been gone through, the captain landed in his boat with his young friend. Both were silent before the sailors. Very soon they were threading their way along the crowded quays. Boston was by no means the really magnificent town which now excite universal

admiration, but it was already a very busy and important commercial emporium.

The Americans, with their restless activity, had hastened to clear away all signs of the War of Independence; the town had grown quite young again, and assumed that gay and lively physiognomy which belongs to great commercial centres, where almost everybody can find the means of living.

As soon as they were alone the captain spoke.

"When, my friend, do you propose to start?" he said.

"Tonight, two hours before the setting of the sun. I burn with a fierce desire to breathe the air of the great savannahs, to feel free from the trammels of civilisation," he answered.

"Well, my friend, I must leave you now, but promise to wait breakfast for me, and to do nothing until you have seen me again," insisted the captain.

"I was about to ask you to join me. Where shall we breakfast?"

The captain indicated a hotel at no great distance, after which he hurried away to wait on the consignees.

"What on earth can Pierre mean," muttered Oliver to himself, "by my doing nothing until we meet again? Probably he will try once more to change my resolution. He ought to know that once I make up my mind I never falter. He is a good fellow, the only man who has ever been my sincere and devoted friend – the only being in the world I am sorry to part from."

Musing thus Oliver strolled about, looking listlessly at the streets, the shops, and particularly selecting those which, by-and-

by, he would have to visit for the purpose of his outfit, which he would have to purchase after breakfast.

An hour later the two men met in front of the hotel. Both were exact to a minute. They ordered breakfast in a private room. As soon as they had finished the captain opened the ball.

"Now let us chat," he said.

"With the greatest of pleasure," replied Oliver. "Nothing is more agreeable after a meal than to enjoy a cigar, a cup of coffee, and a friend's company."

"And yet you have determined to deprive yourself of these luxuries forever," replied Durand.

"Man is ever insatiable. The unknown always did and always will attract him. He will ever quit the substance for the shadow. The fable is right. But let us talk of something else. Serious conversation after eating is folly," observed Oliver.

"You are quite right – some more rum in your coffee? It is an excellent thing. What do you think I have been doing since I saw you?"

"It is impossible for me to guess," cried Oliver.

The captain rose, went to the window, and gave a short whistle. After this, he returned to his seat, Oliver staring at him while he sipped his coffee.

Five minutes elapsed, and then in came several men, carrying various packets, which they placed on a side table, and went out without speaking.

"What does it mean?" cried Oliver, in comic astonishment.

"Then something can rouse you?" cried Durand, smiling.

"No, only I wondered."

"Never mind. You still intend going off tonight?" asked the captain.

"Certainly," said Oliver rising; "that reminds me – "

"One moment. We are old friends, and there should be no secrets between us," urged Durand.

"There shall be none," answered Oliver.

"Have you much money?" asked Durand.

"Do you want to lend me any?" cried Oliver.

"No matter if I did. But still I want an answer," urged Durand.

"I have eleven thousand francs in gold sewn in my belt, and in a bag fastened round my neck diamonds worth a hundred and twenty thousand more. Besides this I have about eighty guineas in English money for immediate expenses. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly," said the captain laughing, "and now listen to me."

"Then it appears you are not quite satisfied?" cried Oliver, in his turn surprised.

"Don't be in a hurry. I wish to interest you if I can."

"I will wait your pleasure," observed Oliver, smiling at the other's hesitation.

"It is useless," said Durand, "for me to feign a gaiety I do not feel. I feel more like weeping than laughing. The mere idea of this long, perhaps eternal, separation makes my heart bleed. I think that the hand now in mine I shall never shake again."

"Don't be downhearted. Perhaps we may meet sooner than

either of us expect," retorted Oliver.

"I hope you may be a true prophet. Still I cannot help shuddering at the thought of your starting off amidst people whose language you do not even know."

"There you are mistaken," responded Oliver; "as well as French, I speak English, Spanish, and Dutch, with about five Indian dialects, which I picked up at different times."

"It is a wonder," mused the other, "that, placed as you have been, you should have had the time."

"Before I became a cabin boy I could read and write a little. After a time I spent every moment of leisure in study."

"I remember," sighed Durand, "I never met you without you were reading. What will you do for books now?"

"What book is more interesting than that in which God has written on the plains, on the mountains, on the minutest blade of grass?" replied Oliver with enthusiasm. "Believe me, my friend, the sacred book of Nature has pages too interesting to ever weary us; from them you always find consolation, hope, encouragement. But," he added with a smile, "I have two books with me which, in my opinion, epitomise all great human thoughts, make man better, and even restore his courage, when bowed down by the heavy weight of misfortune. I have these books by heart, and yet I read them over again."

And he laid on the table two books bound in black morocco.

"What!" cried the amazed captain, "'The Imitation of Jesus Christ' and 'Montaigne'!"

"Yes. 'The Imitation of Jesus Christ' and 'Montaigne,' the most complete and sincere books ever written, for they tell the story of doubt and belief. They tell the rival story of all the philosophers who have existed since the creation of the world. With these two books and the magnificent spectacle of Nature around me have I not a whole library?"

"I cannot make you out. You overwhelm me," said the captain; "but I have not the courage to contradict you. You are too much for me. Go forth, seek the unknown, for alone that will comprehend you. You are one of those whom adversity purifies and renders great; you will often feel inclined to fall by the way in the gigantic combat you are about to undertake against the world. But fail is not a word in your dictionary. Even death, when it comes, will not conquer you."

"All the more that death is but a transformation, a purification of brutal matter by Divine agency. But," he remarked with a smile, "I think we are talking about very serious matters very foreign to our subject. Let us return to business, for the hour of our departure is rapidly approaching."

At this moment the tramp of horses was heard, and the captain again ran to the window.

"Hilloa!" cried the young man; "Another of your mysterious walks! Do explain yourself."

"All right," he replied, reseating himself, "there is no reason for circumlocution between friends. The truth must be told. I had hoped to lend you money, and I know that had you have required

it, you would have borrowed it."

"Certainly, without hesitation, my friend."

"Of course, as I find you are very much better off than myself, I withdraw the proposition; but I had already provided your outfit."

"What can you mean? Provided my outfit!"

"Yes! I mean to say that there is not a single thing required for your journey that is not ready. Look!"

And both rising, the captain opened the parcels which had been left on a side table.

"Look here," said the captain; "this is a real Kentucky rifle, the only gun fit for a hunter; I have tried it. This is a ball pouch, with mould and everything necessary to make others when needed; this is your powder horn, which is full, while here are two small canisters to replenish with; this is a 'necessary,' as we sailors call it, containing spoon, fork, cup, knife, and other trifles; this is a leather belt; this is a game bag, with gaiters, riding boots, a cloak, and four rugs."

"My dear friend," said Oliver, deeply moved, "you have been ruining yourself."

"Get out of that and wait a little longer. As you seriously wish to adopt savage life, at all events you must be rigged out accordingly," he added, laughing. "This is a hunting knife, which you put in your belt; these pistols are to be placed in the holsters; that sword is perhaps one of the best cavalry swords I have ever seen. What, more! Oh, yes. This portmanteau, which is

neither too large nor too small, in which you will find shirts and other necessaries. Then some pipes, tobacco, flint and steel, and a dozen boxes of preserves, in case you may someday be short of provisions. I think, on my honour, that is all. No, I had forgotten: paper, pens, ink, and pencils. And now my watch as a last remembrance."

"This I must refuse. Your watch is too useful to yourself."

"My friend, every time you look at it you will think of me," said the captain.

And the two Frenchmen embraced.

"I accept," replied Oliver, with deep emotion.

"Now I know," continued the captain, "you are really my friend; and now let me see you dressed up as a true traveller, while I put the other things back into their parcels."

"But before I don my new prairie costume, I have something else to buy," cried Oliver.

"What!" cried the captain, "I thought surely I had forgotten nothing."

"Do you think, my dear friend, that I am going to carry all this on my back. I don't want to look like a comic Robinson Crusoe, and, besides, it is more than I could do. I must have a horse."

The captain burst out laughing.

"Look out of window, my dear friend," he said, "and then you shall decide whether or not I forgot anything."

Oliver approached the window, and saw two magnificent horses admirably caparisoned.

"What do you think of those animals?" asked the captain.

"They are both splendid; above all, the black one – a true horse of the prairies – a mustang."

"You seem to know all about it."

"I have seen them often enough," replied the young man; "the owner of this one should be proud."

"It is yours," said Durand.

"What do you mean?"

"I bought it for you," was the simple reply.

"Pierre! Pierre! I repeat, you are ruined."

"Hush; I may as well add that under the saddles I have placed double pockets, which contain many things I have forgotten."

"But there are two horses," he cried.

"One for you and one for myself. At all events, I must see you fairly on your way."

Oliver made no reply, but turned away to dress in order to hide his emotion. When he was in full costume his friend burst out laughing, and told him he looked like a Calabrian bandit.

"And now which way do we go?" asked the captain.

"Straight forward," replied Oliver.

"Yes," cried the captain, "just so, as you are going round the world."

In two hours, after a hearty and warm shake of the hand, they parted. They were too deeply moved to speak.

CHAPTER II.

SAMUEL DICKSON GIVES ADVICE TO HIS BROTHER

On the same day on which the *Patriot* anchored in the Bay of Massachusetts an interesting event took place between seven and eight in the morning in a pretty village named Northampton, at no great distance from Boston.

Everybody was excited. A crowd of men, women, and children pressed around a number of waggons, each drawn by six horses. They stood in front of a brick house, the only inn of the village. Four magnificent saddle horses, with very handsome harness, were held by a young intelligent-looking Negro, who at the same time smoked a short pipe.

The crowd was very excited, but very decorous and quiet – as a New England crowd always is – waiting simply for an explanation.

Suddenly the sharp trot of a horse was heard at the entrance of the street. This served to create a new sensation in the crowd.

"Samuel Dickson!" cried the people; "At last he has come. Now he will make them listen to reason."

The new arrival was a man of middle age, with a pleasant countenance, delicate and intelligent features, clothed in the dress of a rich farmer, and in those parts was looked up to as a

most important individual.

He made his way carefully through the crowd, bowing on either hand, and rather puzzled at the ovation he was receiving.

"Ah! Ah! That is you, massa," said a Negro, with a chuckle, as he approached the inn door.

"Sandy, is that you? Then I suppose the others are inside," he remarked, as he dismounted and handed him the bridle.

"Yes, Massa Samuel, dem all dere."

"I am glad of it," he replied, "for I have come a long way to see them. Look after my horse, he is rather fresh."

Then, bowing once more to the crowd, Samuel Dickson entered the inn, closing the door behind him.

In a large and comfortable room six persons, two women and four men, were seated at one of those copious breakfasts which are never seen to such perfection as in America. Upon benches round the room sat about twenty persons in a humbler station in life, amongst others two coloured young women, who were eating from bowls and plates placed on their knees.

Those at the table were the members of the family – father, mother, daughter, and three sons. Those around were the servants.

Joshua Dickson, the head of the family, was in reality a man of fifty-five, not, however, looking more than forty. He was a man of rude manners, but frank, honest expression. He was six feet high, as powerful as Hercules, a true type of those hardy pioneers who opened up the forests of the New World, drove back the

Indians, and founded stations in the desert, which in time became rich and flourishing towns.

His sons were named Harry, Sam, and Jack, aged respectively thirty, twenty-eight, and twenty-six. They were all three as tall as their father, and about as Herculean – true Americans, with no thought of the past, only looking to the future.

Susan Dickson, the mother of this trio of giants, was a woman of about fifty – small, elegant, but extremely active, with delicate features and a pre-possessing physiognomy. She looked much younger than she really was – thanks to her really admirable complexion and the singular brightness of her eyes. She must have been rarely beautiful in her youth.

Diana, the child of her old age, as she loved to call her, was scarcely sixteen, was the idol of the family, the guardian angel of the fireside; her father and brothers actually worshipped her. It was something wonderful to see their rude natures bending like reeds before the slightest wish of this delicate child, and obeying her most fantastic orders without a murmur.

Diana was a charming brunette, with blue and dreamy eyes, slight and flexible form; she was pale; a look of profound melancholy was to be remarked on her countenance, giving to her physiognomy that angelic expression rarely found except in the Madonnas of Titien. This sadness, which all the family saw with sorrow, had only been in existence a few days. When questioned on the subject, even by her mother, she had no answer to give.

"It is nothing at all," she said, "only a slight feeling of sickness,

which will soon pass away."

Hearing this, all had ceased to question her, though all felt uneasy, and slightly annoyed at her reticence. Still, as she was the spoiled child of the family, no one had the heart to blame her or pester her with questions. They had seduced her to govern them unquestioned that it appeared hard now to want to curb her will.

The entrance of the stranger into the hall where the emigrants were breakfasting like persons who knew the value of time, caused no small stir; they ceased eating, and, glancing at one another, whispered amongst themselves. The stranger, leaning on his riding whip, looked at them with an odd kind of smile.

The chief of the family, though himself somewhat surprised, was the first to recover himself. He rose, held out his hand, and spoke in what he intended should be a jovial tone. The attempt was a failure.

"My good brother," he said, "this is indeed a surprise. I really did not expect to see you; but sit down beside my wife and have some breakfast."

"Thank you; I am not hungry."

"Then excuse me if I finish my meal," continued the emigrant.

"Brother," presently said Samuel, "for a man of your age you are acting in an extraordinary manner."

"I don't think so," replied the other.

"Let me ask you where are you going?"

"Northward, to the great lakes."

"What is the meaning of this?"

"My friend, I am told there is good land to be had but for the taking."

"May I ask who put this silly idea in your head?"

"No one. It is a splendid country, with splendid forests, water in abundance, a delicious climate, though rather cold, and land for nothing."

"Have you seen this beautiful country?"

"No; but I know all about it."

"Do you?" sneered the other; "Well, beware of the creeks."

"Never you fear. Wherever there is water there are bridges."

"Of course; and now may I ask, what have you done with your magnificent southern property?" the other asked.

"I have sold it, slaves and all, keeping only such as were willing to follow me. I brought away all that could travel – my wife, my sons, my daughter, my furniture, my horses, all I wanted."

"May I without offence ask you this question: Were you not very well where you were? Did you not find the land excellent?"

"I was well off, and the land was excellent."

"Were you unable to sell your produce?"

"I had an admirable market," was the answer.

"Then," cried Samuel, angrily, "what in the devil's name do you mean by giving it up and going to a land where you will find nothing but wild beasts, brutal savages, and a hard and rigorous climate?"

The bold adventurer, driven into his last intrenchment, made no reply, only scratching his head in search of a reply. His wife

here interfered.

"What is the use," she said, smiling, "asking for reasons which do not exist? Joshua is going for the love of change – nothing more. All our lives, as you well know, we have been roaming hither and thither. As soon as we are once comfortably settled anywhere, then we begin to think it time to be off."

"Yes! Yes! I know my brother's vagabond habits. But when he is in one of his mad fits, why do you not interfere?" he cried, impetuously.

"Brother, you don't know what it is to be married to a wanderer," she said.

"Good!" cried Joshua, laughing.

"But if you don't find this beautiful country?" asked Samuel.

"I will embark on one of the rivers."

"And where will you land?"

"I have not the slightest idea. But there, do not be uneasy, I shall find a place."

"Then," said Samuel, gazing at him with perfect amazement in his looks, "you are determined?"

"I am determined."

"Then, as we shall never meet again, come and spend a few days at my house," urged Samuel.

"I am very sorry to decline, but I cannot go back. If I were to waste a day, it would be a serious loss of time and money. I must reach my new settlement in time for the sowing."

Samuel Dickson, putting his hands behind his back, walked

across the room with great strides, backwards and forwards, watching his niece curiously under his eyes.

He several times struck the ground with his riding whip, muttering to himself all the time. Diana sat with her hands crossed on her knees, the teardrops falling from her eyes.

Suddenly the farmer appeared to have made up his mind. Turning round, he laid his heavy hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Joshua!" he said, "It is clear to me that you are mad, and that I alone in the family possess any common sense; never, God forgive you, did more crooked notion enter the head of an honest man. You won't come to my house? Very good. I will then ask you one thing, which, if you refuse, I shall never forgive you."

"You know how much I love you."

"I know you say so; but this is the favour I ask: don't start until you see me again."

"Hem! But – "

"I must get home on important business at once. My house is but twenty miles distant; I shall soon be back."

"But when?" cautiously asked the emigrant.

"Tomorrow, or the next day at the latest."

"That is a long delay," continued Joshua.

"I do not deny it. But as your paradise, your El Dorado, your beautiful country will not probably run away, you are bound to reach it sooner or later. Besides," urged Samuel, "it is important, very important, we should meet again."

"As you will, my brother," sighed Joshua; "I give you my

word to wait until the day after tomorrow at seven o'clock in the morning – no later."

"That will suit me admirably," cried the farmer; "so good-bye for the present."

And with a bow to all, and a smile to Diana, he hurried out of the room.

The crowd still patiently surrounded the inn and received him with a loud shout. He, however, took no notice, but rode off.

"We could not very well refuse, Susan," said the farmer to his wife.

"He is your brother," she replied.

"Our only relative," murmured Diana.

"True. Diana is right. Children, unharness the animals: we will stop here tonight."

And, to the great surprise of the gaping crowd, who hung about after the fashion of idlers, the horses of the emigrants were unyoked and taken to a shed, the waggons placed under cover, without the curious knowing the reason why.

On the morning of the second day Joshua Dickson, shortly after sunrise, was overlooking the horses being fed by his sons and servants, when a great noise was heard in the street, as of many waggons, and then there was a sharp knocking at the door of the inn.

Joshua hastily left the stables and took his way to the great room of the hotel.

He came face to face with Samuel Dickson, who had just been

admitted by the sleepy innkeeper.

"Hilloa!" cried Joshua, "Is that you, my brother?"

"Who else do you suppose it is?" cried Samuel.

"Well, but I did not expect you so early."

"Well," said Samuel, drily, "I was afraid you might give me the slip, so I came early."

"An excellent idea, brother," said Mrs. Dickson, who now entered.

"And knowing how anxious my brother is to reach the promised land, I would not keep him waiting."

"Quite right," coolly replied Joshua; "and now about this important business?"

"Look out of window," drily answered Samuel.

Joshua obeyed, and saw five heavily-laden waggons, drawn each by horses, with about twelve hired men.

"Well," coolly observed Joshua, "what may be the meaning of all this?"

"It means," answered the farmer, "that as you have found yourself such a fool, it becomes my duty, as your elder brother, to come and look after you. I have sold up everything, and invested part, as you see."

"Oh, my brother!" cried Joshua, with tears in his eyes.

"Am I not your only relative? Wherever you go, I shall go – only there will now be two fools, but I am the bigger of the two. I talk like a wise man and act like a foolish child."

Uncle Samuel was adored by all the family, everyone was

delighted, while Diana was radiant.

"Oh, my good uncle," she said, warmly embracing him, "it is for me you do this."

"Do you think," he whispered, "I ever meant to desert my niece?"

Two hours later the double caravan started on its way.

CHAPTER III.

A QUEER CUSTOMER

It was the beginning of the month of October, and some sharp frosts had rid the land of mosquitoes and gnats, which during the hot season abound in myriads near watercourses and beneath the leafy arches of the virgin forest, being one of its worst scourges.

A few minutes after the rising of the sun a traveller, mounted on a magnificent horse, wearing the costume of a prairie hunter, and whose general appearance indicated a white man, emerged at a walking pace from a high thicket, and entered upon a vast prairie, at that day almost unknown to the trappers themselves, those hardy explorers of the desert – and which was not far from the Rocky Mountains, in the centre of the Indian country, and nearly two thousand miles from any settlement.

This traveller was Oliver. He had, we see, already travelled a long distance.

Two months only had elapsed, during which, going always straight before him, he had traversed all the provinces of the young American republic, never stopping except to rest himself and horse; then he had passed the frontier and entered the desert.

Then he was happy. For the first time in his life he was free and unfettered, having cut himself off forever, as he thought, from the heavy trammels of civilisation.

Oliver had at once begun his apprenticeship as a hunter, and a rude apprenticeship it is, causing many of the boldest and bravest to retreat. But Oliver was no ordinary man; he was young, of rare vigour and address, and, above all, possessed that iron will which nothing stops, and which is the secret of great deeds; that leonine courage which laughs at danger, and that indomitable pride which made him, he thought, the equal of any living being. He therefore considered nothing impossible, that is to say, he felt he could not only do what anyone else had ever done, but even more, if he were called upon by extraordinary circumstances to try.

During two months he had met with numerous adventures. He had fought many a battle, and braved dangers before which the bravest might have retreated – perils of all kinds, from man, beast, and Nature herself.

A victor in every case, his audacity had increased, his energy had redoubled. His apprentice days were over, and he now felt himself a true runner of the woods, that is to say, a man whom no appalling sight, whom no dreadful catastrophe, would terrify – in fact, one who was only to be moved by the majestic aspect of nature.

He had paused as he left the thicket to examine the scene.

Before him was a valley through which flowed two rivers, which after some time joined and fell into the Missouri, whose vast lake surface appeared like a white vapoury line on the distant horizon. Upon a promontory projecting into the first river was a superb bosquet of palms and magnolias; the latter, shaped like

a perfect cone, stood in lustrous verdure against the dazzling whiteness of the flowers, which, despite the season, were still blooming. These flowers were so large that Oliver could see them a mile off.

The great majority of these magnolias were over a hundred feet high; many were very much more.

To the right was a wood of poplars, overrun with vines of enormous size, which wholly concealed the trunks. They then ran to the top of the tree, then redescending along the branches, passed from one tree to another, mixing up with piquot, a kind of creeper which hung in garlands and festoons from every bough.

The young man could not take his eyes off the magnificent spectacle. Suddenly he started, as he made out a thin column of smoke rising from the centre of the magnolia thicket.

Now the presence of smoke denotes fire, and fire indicates human beings. In nine cases out of ten, in the desert, such human beings are enemies.

It is a harsh word, but it is certain that the most cruel enemy of man in the desert, his most terrible adversary, is his fellow man.

The sight of this smoke roused no excited feelings in the bosom of our adventurer; he simply saw that his weapons were in order, and rode straight for the magnolia valley. As it happened, a narrow path led exactly in that direction.

No matter whether he was to meet friends or foes, he was not sorry to see a human face; for a week, not a white man, Métis, or Indian had fallen across his path, and, despite himself, this

complete silence and absolute solitude began to tell upon him, though he would not own it even to himself.

He had passed over about one-third of the distance which separated him from the thicket, and was only a pistol shot away, when he suddenly stopped, under the influence of strange emotion.

A rich and harmonious voice rose from amidst the trees, singing with the most perfect accent a song with French words. These words came clear and distinct to his ears; the surprise of the young man may be conceived when he recognised the "Marseillaise." This magnificent work, sung in the desert by an invisible being, amidst that grand scenery, and repeated as it were by the echoes of the savannah, assumed to him gigantic proportions.

Despite himself, Oliver felt the tears come to his eyes; he pressed his hand upon his chest, as if to repress the wild beatings of his heart; in a second all his past came rushing tumultuously before him. Once more he saw in his mind's eye that France from which he believed himself forever separated, and felt how vain must ever be the effort to repudiate one's country.

Led on by the irresistible charm, he entered the thicket just as the singer gave forth in his rich and stentorian voice the last couplets.

He pushed aside some branches that checked his progress, and found himself face to face with a young man, who, seated on the grass by the riverside, near a glowing fire, was dipping biscuit in

the water with one hand, while with the other, in which he held a knife, he dipped into a tin containing sardines.

Lifting up his head as the other approached, the unknown nodded his head.

"Welcome to my fireside, my friend," he said in French, with a gay smile; "if you are hungry, eat; if you are cold, warm yourself."

"I accept your offer," replied Oliver, good-humouredly, as he leaped from his horse, and removing the bridle, hopped him near the unknown.

He then seated himself by the fire, and opening his saddlebags, shared his provisions with his new friend, who frankly accepted this very welcome addition to his own very modest repast.

The unknown was a tall young fellow about six feet high, well and solidly built; his colour, which was very dark, arose from his being of a mixed race, called from the colour of their skin Bois brulé, under which general appellation we have half-castes of all kinds.

The features of this young man, rather younger if anything than our hero, were intelligent and sympathetic with a very open look; his open forehead, shaded by curly light chestnut hair, his prominent nose, his large mouth, furnished with magnificent teeth, his fair rich beard, completed a physiognomy by no means vulgar.

His costume was that of all the trappers and hunters of high

northern latitudes: mitasses of doeskin, waistcoat of the same, over which was thrown a blouse of blue linen, ornamented with white and red threads; a cap of beaver fur, and Indian moccasins and leggings reaching to the knee; from his belt of rattlesnake skin hung a long knife, called langue de boeuf, a hatchet, a bison powder horn, a ball bag, and a pipe of red-stone clay with a cherrywood tube; such was the complete costume of the person upon whom Oliver had so singularly fallen. Close to his hand on the grass was a Kentucky rifle and game bag, which doubtless he used to carry his provisions in.

"Faith," cried the adventurer, when his appetite was satisfied, "I have to thank fortune for meeting you in this way, my friend."

"Such meetings are rare in the desert. And now allow me to ask you a question."

"Ten if you like – nay, fifty."

"Well, then, how was it that the moment you saw me you addressed me in French?" he asked.

"For a very simple reason. In the first place, all the runners of the woods, trappers, and prairie hunters, are French, or at all events, ninety-five out of every hundred," he answered.

"Then of course you are French?"

"And Norman as well. My grandfather was born at Domfront. You know the proverb, Domfront, city of evil. You enter it at twelve, and are hung before one."

"I am also French," said Oliver.

"So I perceive. But to continue. My grandfather was, as I have

said, from Domfront, but my father was born in Canada, as I was, so that I am a Frenchman born in America. Still we have the old country on the other side of the water, and all who come from it are received with open arms by us poor exiles. There are brave and noble hearts in Canada; if they only knew it in France they would not be so ungrateful and disdainful towards us, who never did anything to justify their cruel desertion."

"True," said Oliver, "France was very much in the wrong after you had shed so much blood for her."

"Which we would do again tomorrow," replied the Canadian. "Is not France our mother, and do we not always forgive our mother? The English were awfully taken in when the country was handed over to them; three-fourths of the population emigrated, those who remained in the towns persisted in speaking French, which no Englishman can speak without dislocating his jaws, and all would insist upon being governed by their old French laws.¹ You see, therefore, that the insulars are merely nominally our masters, but that in reality we are still free, and French."

"Our country must have been deeply rooted in your hearts to cause you to speak thus," said Oliver.

"We are a brave people," cried the stranger.

"I am sure of it," responded Oliver.

"Thank you," replied the stranger, "you cause me great

¹ This is history as told by a Frenchman. As a matter of fact, the French Canadians remained where they were, until they became the most loyal subjects the British Crown possesses. – Editor.

pleasure."

"Now that we know one another as countrymen, suppose we make more intimate acquaintance?"

"I ask nothing better. If you like, I will tell you my history as briefly as possible."

"I am attention," said Oliver.

"My father was a baby when Canada was definitively abandoned in 1758 by the French, an act which was perpetrated without consulting the population of New France. Had the mother country have done so, it would have been met by a flat refusal. But I will avoid politics, and speak only of my family."

"Good. I hate politics."

"So do I. Well, one day my grandfather Berger, after being absent a week, came to his home in Québec in company with an Indian in his full war paint. The first thing he saw, standing by the side of the cradle in which lay my father, was my grandmother, her arms raised in the air, with a heavy iron-dog, with which she was menacing an English soldier; my grandmother was a brave and courageous woman."

"So it seems."

"A true daughter of Caudebec, handsome, attractive, and good, adored by her husband, and respected by all who knew her. It appears that the English soldier had seen her through the open door. He at once entered with a conquering air, and began to make love to the pretty young person he had noticed performing her maternal office. It was an unfortunate idea for

him. My grandfather lifted him up and threw him through the window on to the stones outside. He was dead. My grandfather then turned round and spoke of something else."

"A tough old gentleman!"

"Pretty solid. He even had Indian blood – "

"You spoke of Domfront."

"Yes; but his father, having come to America with Comtesse de Villiers, married in Canada. He shortly after returned to France with his wife. There she died, unable to bear the climate!"

"Very natural," said Oliver.

"Before dying she made her husband promise to send his son to Canada."

"But," continued Oliver, "the finale of your history."

"As soon as that matter was settled, my grandfather embraced his wife, offered the Indian a seat, and began smoking his pipe. He then explained that he meant to leave Canada."

"'This,' he said, 'is Kouha-hande, my mother's brother, the first sachem of his nation. He has offered me a shelter with his warriors, and has come with some of his warriors to escort us. Will you remain a Frenchwoman and follow me, or will you stay here and become an Englishwoman?'"

"'I am your wife, and shall follow you wherever you go, with my little one on my back,' she answered."

"'My sister will be loved and respected in our tribe as she deserves to be,' remarked the Indian, who had hitherto smoked his pipe in silence."

"I know it, my cousin,' she said."

"No further words passed. My grandmother began at once to pack up. Two hours later the house was empty; my grandparents had left without even shutting the door behind them. Before sunset they were making their way up the Lawrence, in the canoes of Kouha-hande."

"The river was crowded with fugitives. After a journey of four days my grandfather reached the tribe of the Hurons-Bisons, of which our relative Kouha-hande was the first sachem. Many other Canadians sought refuge in the same place, and were hospitably received by the Indians. I need say nothing more save that we have lived there ever since."

"And your grandfather?"

"Still lives, as does my father, though I have recently lost my mother and grandmother. I have a sister much younger than myself. She remains in the village to nurse my grandfather. My father is at this moment with the Hudson Bay Company."

At this moment there was a peculiar rustling in the bushes at no great distance.

"Be quiet," whispered the Canadian in the ear of his new friend, and before the other could in any way interfere with him, he seized his gun and disappeared in the high grass, crawling on his hands and knees.

Then a shot was heard.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALLIANCE OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE

Hearing this unexpected shot, Oliver was in the act of rushing to assist his friend, whom he supposed attacked by some wild beast, when the hearty and joyous voice of the Canadian was heard.

"Don't disturb yourself, my friend," he cried, "I have only been providing our dinner."

And next minute he reappeared, carrying on his back a doe, which he hung to one of the lower branches of the magnolia, and then began to open.

"Handsome beast, is it not?" he said. "I believe the rascal was listening. He paid dear for his curiosity."

"A fine beast and cleverly killed," replied Oliver, helping to skin the animal.

"It is a pity to spoil a good skin. I am a pretty good shot, but you should see my father shoot a tiger in the eye."

"That," cried Oliver, "seems extraordinary."

"I have seen him do it twenty times, and still more difficult things," said the other. "But such deadly certainty is pure habit. We live by our guns – but to finish my story."

"Go on, my friend."

"My father was a child when we left Canada. He is now about forty-eight. My grandfather taught him to be a hunter, and to bind him to the tribe he married him when very young to a charming young Indian, a relative of Kouha-hande, and my mother in consequence. We are mere children. I am only twenty, and my sister but fifteen, lovely as the breath of dawn, and whose real name is Angela, my father's wish. But the Indians call her Evening Dew. That is all. I am a hunter. I hate the English and the North Americans, who are worse than John Bull himself, and I love the French, whose countryman I am."

"You are quite right. Few native-born Frenchmen are such strong patriots as you. But now for your name."

"Have I not told you? My name is Pierre Berger, but the Indians, in their mania for such names, call me Bright-eye, I hardly know why."

"Of course because of your admirable power of shooting."

"Well, perhaps you are right. I am a pretty good hand," said the young man, modestly. "And now, my friend, I have to add that I reached here yester evening at sundown, and that I am waiting for a friend, who will be here shortly. It is now your turn to tell me your history, unless, indeed, you have any motives for remaining silent, in which case a man's secrets are his own."

"I have no secrets, especially from you, my dear Bright-eye, and the proof is that if you will listen, I will tell you who I am and why I came into this country."

"I shall be delighted to hear your story," cried the Canadian,

with evident delight.

From the very first moment when he saw the hunter and came to speak to him, Oliver felt himself attracted towards him by one of those movements of attraction or irresistible sympathy which spring from intuition of the heart.

He had therefore, during his conversation, determined if possible to make him a friend.

He thereupon told him his story in its most minute details, the Canadian listening with the most profound and sustained attention, without interrupting him by a single remark. He appeared sincerely interested in the numerous incidents of a life wretched from its commencement, and yet which the young man told frankly and simply, without bitterness, but with an impartiality which indicated the grandeur and nobility of his nature.

"Sad story, indeed," he cried, when the other had concluded; "how you must have suffered from the unjust hatred of these people! Alone in the world, without any to interest himself in you; surrounded by hostile or indifferent people; compelled to suffer from dark and insidious foes; capable of great things – young, strong, and intelligent, yet reduced to fly into the desert, and separate yourself from your fellows. Pardon if my cruel curiosity has reopened the wound which long since should have been cauterised."

He paused, keenly watching the other's face.

"Will you be my friend?" he suddenly cried. "I already feel for

you an affection I can scarcely explain."

"Thanks," cried Oliver, warmly, "I accept your offer with delight."

"Then it is agreed: from henceforth we are brothers."

"I swear it," resumed Oliver.

"We shall henceforth be two to fight the battle of the world."

"I thank heaven we have met."

"Never to part again. You have no family. I will find you one, brother, and this family will love you," he added.

"Heartily accept my thanks, Bright-eye," exclaimed Oliver; "life already seems changed, and I feel as if happiness were yet possible in this world."

"There can be no doubt about it. Believe me, it depends on yourself. Look upon the past only as a dream, and think only of the future."

"I will do so," returned Oliver, with a sigh.

"And now to business. Young as I am, you will soon find that I enjoy a certain amount of reputation among the Indians and trappers. Very few would dare to attack me. I was educated in an Indian village, and, as I believe I have already told you, I am here to keep an appointment with a young Indian, my friend and relative. This Indian I now expect every moment, and I shall introduce you to him. Instead of one friend, you will have two devoted brothers. Now then," he added, laughing, "are you not fortunate?"

"I am convinced of it," said Oliver.

"When we have finished our business in these parts – and you may help us in this business – we will return to my tribe, of which you shall become a member."

"I am wholly in your hands, Bright-eye," he said; "I make no resistance. I only thank you."

"No thanks. I am useful to you today; you may be as useful, or more so, tomorrow."

"Very well. But what is the affair that detains you here, to which you just alluded?" asked Oliver.

"I must say that I do not know, though frankly I have my own suspicions. My friend has not thought proper to explain as yet, but simply gave me a rendezvous here, saying that I might prove useful. That was enough for me, and, as you see, I am here. It would be an act of indiscretion on my part to tell you anything I had not been directly told. Besides, I may be mistaken, and speak to you of a wholly different matter from the true one."

"You are quite right."

"To pass the time I will prepare supper."

"And while doing so tell what manner of man your friend is."

"He is a young man like ourselves, grandson of Kouha-hande. He is himself a chief, and a noted brave. Though young, his reputation is immense. He is tall, athletic, and even elegant of face. His features are handsome, even to effeminacy. His glance, gentle in repose as that of a dove, is, when his anger is aroused, so terrible that few can face it. His physical force is stupendous, his cunning sublime. But you will soon judge for

yourself. His enemies call him Kristikam-Seksenan, or Black Thunder; his friends call him Numank-Charake, the brave man, in consequence of his mighty deeds."

"You have simply been describing a hero," said Oliver.

"You shall judge for yourself," smiled the other.

"I am extremely anxious to do so."

"You will soon have the opportunity. It is now five o'clock. In a few minutes he will be here."

"What, after making an appointment so long ago, you expect him to keep it to the minute!"

"Yes; it is the politeness of the desert, from which nothing absolves but death."

"A summary excuse, truly," said Oliver.

"Listen," cried Bright-eye.

Oliver listened, and distinctly heard in the distance the trampling of a horse, which suddenly ceased, to be followed by the cry of the goshawk.

Bright-eye responded with a similar cry, and with such perfection that the Frenchman mechanically raised his head in search of the bird.

Then the sound of a horse galloping recommenced, the bushes parted violently, and a horseman bounded into the clearing, checking his steed so artistically that next moment he stood like a centaur rooted to the ground.

The rider was very much as Bright-eye had described him. There was about him, moreover, an air of grandeur, a majesty

which inspired respect without repelling sympathy. One glance sufficed to fix him as a man of superior nature.

It was the first time Oliver, since his journey on the prairies, had seen an Indian so near, and under such favourable circumstances. He at once formed a friendly opinion of him.

The chief bowed, and then pointed to the sun gilding the summits of the trees.

"It is five o'clock. Here is Numank-Charake."

"I say welcome, chief. I know your extreme punctuality. Supper is ready."

"Good," said the chief, alighting from his horse with one bound.

Bright-eye then placed his hands on his friend's shoulders.

"Let my brother listen. The hunter is my friend."

"Numank-Charake has read it in the eyes of Bright-eye," replied the Indian, turning to Oliver; "I put my hand on my heart, what will my brother give me in return?"

"My hand and my heart; that is," he added, with a smile, "all that is not Bright-eye's."

"I accept my share; henceforth we are three in one, one in three. Numank-Charake was once the Bounding Panther. Let that name be the name of my brother."

They shook hands. All was done. According to the customs of the country they were brothers, and held everything in common.

Almost on the threshold of his desert life, Oliver found himself associated with two men noted as the most honest and

doughty champions of the prairie.

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT MEDICINE COUNCIL

For some time the three men, of such different birth, race, and manners, remained silent. It was a solemn moment. Their meeting appeared to them providential.

Above all was the young Frenchman absorbed in his reflections. Alone an hour or two ago, he was now one of a formidable trio.

All the time the Canadian went on with his cooking, while the chief gave fodder to the horses.

"Supper is ready," suddenly cried Bright-eye, laughing, "let us eat."

And all three seated themselves around a magnificent roast leg of venison *à la boucanière*.

We must hasten to remark that nearly all Indian tribes on the borders of Canada understand and speak French, at all events, they did at the time of which we speak. This was the more fortunate as Oliver did not know one word of Huron.

The guests did honour to the feast, that is to say, they left nothing but the bones.

The meal, which was washed down by several draughts of French brandy, was merry, enlivened by jokes and witticisms. The Indians are always thus among themselves. It is only when in

the presence of the whites, whom they hate, that they are grave, silent, and sullen, never unbending except under the influence of drink, when their conduct is that of beings under the influence of delirium tremens.

Brandy, or rather spirit in every shape and form, is doing the work of extermination for the American.

As soon as the repast was finished, they began to smoke, speaking of indifferent things. It was the design neither of Bright-eye nor Oliver to hurry the young chief. Indian etiquette is excessively severe on this point. It is a proof of intense ill breeding to question a chief, or even a simple warrior, when he appears anxious for silence.

And yet the sun had disappeared from the horizon; night had spread over the desert, blotting out the landscape, and mixing up forms in the most fantastic and strange manner. The sky, of a deep blue, was dotted with stars. The moon, in its second quarter, began to show itself above the trees, floating in ether, and spreading on every side its silvery rays, that lit the prairie here and there with fantastic gleams. The night wind shivered through the branches of the trees producing plaintive and melodious sounds, like those of the Æolian harp.

The sombre dwellers in the desert, roused by the setting of the sun, moved slowly about in the darkness, breaking the silence occasionally by their wild brays, their sharp barks, and their deep roars. Under every blade of grass murmured the never silent world of grasshoppers.

The night was cold. It was the period of the great autumn hunts. Several white frosts had already cooled the earth, soon the temperature would be below zero. The rivers and streams would be frozen, and snow would cover the desert as with a shroud.

The adventurers, after throwing on an armful of dry wood to revive the flame, had wrapped themselves in their ponchos, and, sheltered by the trees, continued smoking silently.

"This is the hour of the second watch," suddenly observed Numank, drawing from his belt the medicine calumet, which is only used by chiefs in council; "the blue jay has sung twice, all rests around us. Will my pale friends sleep or listen to the voice of a friend?"

"Sleep is for women and children," replied Bright-eye; "men remain awake when a friend desires to speak of serious things. Speak."

"We listen," added Oliver, bowing.

"I will speak, since my friends desire it; but as what I have to say is grave, it will not be a talk but a medicine council."

"Let it be so," said Bright-eye.

Numank rose, bowed to the four cardinal points, speaking some indistinct words; then he seated himself on his hams again, stuffed his calumet with moriche, a kind of sacred tobacco only used in great ceremonies. Then having burnt some in the fire as an oblation, he took a medicine stick, and with it lifted a burning coal to the bowl of the calumet.

The chief then gave several puffs, and then, still holding the

bowl in his hand, presented the stem to Bright-eye. The hunter gave several puffs, as did Oliver in his turn; it then came back to the chief, this going on until the last morsel of tobacco was consumed.

Then Numank-Charake rose, bent again to the four cardinal points of the heavens, shook the ashes into the fire, and spoke.

"Wacondah, master of life," he said, "you who know all, inspire my words."

This formality over he replaced his calumet and sat down.

Some minutes elapsed, during which he remained wrapped in deep thought. Then he raised his head, before bowed on his chest, bowed to his audience, and began.

"Eight moons ago," he said, "I had just returned from an expedition against the Piekanns. After presenting the scalps taken by myself and young men to the sachems, and receiving their thanks, I was going to my wigwam to visit my father, detained at home by old wounds, when I suddenly saw a young girl leaning against the ark of the first man. The young girl was about fifteen, tall, elegant, and beautiful. I had long loved her without ever revealing the secret of my heart. On this occasion she seemed to wait for me, and saw me approach with a melancholy glance."

Bright-eye's eyes glistened, despite his self-control.

"When I was near her the young girl spread out her arms towards me, and then made a step forward. I paused, and waited. 'Numank is a great warrior,' she said, modestly lowering her eyes;

"his hut is lined with the scalps of his foes, he has rich skins of every kind of beast, his ball never misses; happy will be the woman whom he loves."

"On hearing these words, I was deeply moved, and seizing the hand of the young girl, 'Onoura – beautiful child,' I said in her ear, 'I have a little bird in my heart which is always singing and repeating your name. Does this bird sing in your heart?' She smiled, looked at me from under her eyelashes, and murmured, 'Night and day he whispers tender words in my ear, and repeats the name of the warrior who loves me. Does not Numank-Charake find his hut very solitary during the long winter nights, when the wind howls in the forest and the snow covers the earth?' 'My heart has long flown out to you,' I cried, warmly, 'from the first hour that I saw you amidst your companions. Do you love me?' 'For life,' she said, blushing deeply. 'Good,' said I, 'then I will attempt a new expedition to win the marriage presents, and ask you of your father. You will wait for me, Onoura?' 'I will wait for you, Numank. Am I not your slave for life?' and she gently pressed my hand. I then took a wampum off my neck, and placed it on hers. She kissed it, her eyes full of tears, and taking a gold ring from the thumb of her left hand, she placed it on one of my fingers. I allowed her to do so with a smile. 'You love me,' she said; 'nothing shall ever separate us,' and before I could say another word she fled as does the gazelle before the hunter. I followed her with my eyes as long as I could, and then when she had disappeared round a corner I thoughtfully took my way to

my father's hut."

The chief paused. After a few minutes the Canadian, finding that the other was not disposed to continue, touched him gently on the arm.

"Why did Numank-Charake show such want of confidence in his brother?" asked the Canadian, reproachfully.

"What does my brother Bright-eye mean?" asked the chief, with slight embarrassment.

"My brother knows what I mean," said the Canadian, with great animation. "Born almost the same day, brought up together, having made our first trails together on the prairies, as also our first expedition against the Sioux and Piekanns, our hearts melted into one, I thought we had no secrets. I know who is the woman whom my brother loves, but why let me guess all about it, instead of telling me? Have I done anything to offend?"

"Oh, Bright-eye, don't think that," cried the young man, eagerly; "but love delights in mystery."

"And yet it likes to confide its sorrows and its joys to the heart of a friend. On that very same night when she had this interview with the chief, Evening Dew – Nouma Hawa – on her return to her hut, told her brother all. Her heart overflowed with joy, and she could not repress her feelings."

"Then Evening Dew owned her love to Bright-eye?"

"Am I not her brother, and your best friend?"

"True. Let my brother forgive me; I was wrong not to place confidence in him. Perhaps I was fearful he might disapprove of

it."

"On the contrary, it carries out my dearest wishes, and binds us more and more to one another."

"My brother is better than I am, his heart is better; he will pardon the weakness of a friend."

"On one condition," said the hunter, laughing; "that Numank-Charake has no more secrets."

"I promise you," continued the chief, in a low, sad tone; "what I have now to say is very terrible. But the friends of Numank-Charake must know all. Two moons had elapsed since I and Evening Dew had spoken. I had not been able to carry out my projects. One day I again met her near the ark of the first man. 'The chief has forgotten his promise,' she said. 'No,' I replied; 'tomorrow I will keep it.' I left her with only a few more words. Next day I began to carry out my promise. I prepared everything, even the usual ceremonies were carried out – those you know so well."

"One moment," interrupted Oliver. "Bright-eye, brought up in your villages, knows all about them, but I, as a mere stranger, know not what you mean. As I mean to live with you, I should like to know a little."

"My brother is right," said the chief; "I will tell him the whole expedition. Before starting, the turf was taken off a considerable square of earth, the mould being made soft and pliable with the hands. It was then surrounded by stakes. When all was ready I went in and sat at the end opposed to the direction in which the

enemy lived. After singing and praying, I put on the edge of the open space two little white stones."

"After waiting half an hour in prayer, asking the Wacondah to guide me right, the village crier, or hachesto, approached. I gave him my orders. He turned and invited all the great warriors to smoke; then in their turn the inferior warriors were invited. After all had smoked, everyone examined the result of the ko-sau-ban-zich-egass. The white stones had fallen in the direction of a well-known path."

"And what was the result?" asked Bright-eye.

"The Wacondah favoured his children. The path led towards the land of our hereditary foes, the Sioux of the West."

"Good," said the hunter.

"Our party consisted of a hundred and fifty warriors, the picked men of the nation, armed with guns. Every man carried the offerings to be cast away on the field of battle, and hidden, if possible, in the entrails of our foes."

"A pious custom," said Bright-eye.

Oliver looked at the Canadian, wondering whether he spoke seriously or not. But there was no doubt of his good faith.

"Two days later we started. A small band of twenty presently joined us, commanded by Tubash-Shah, the Cheat. My brother knows this restless and ambitious chief. I offered to yield the command to him. My warriors would not consent. Misunderstandings soon arose. Crossing some vast prairies, we began to feel great thirst, and Tubash at once violated the laws

of war. I knew that water was not far off. The greater number of the elder warriors, who had to walk, were exhausted by heat and fatigue. Tubash sent out mounted scouts, and private signals were agreed on. Soon a small river was discovered. Those who got first to it fired guns, but before the detachments and the laggards had got up to the river, the sufferings of most of us were excessive. Some vomited blood, others were delirious. The expedition was a failure. Next day desertions began among the warriors of Tubash, he setting the first example. Soon I had only five-and-twenty men left. They offered to follow me to the end of the world. But what could I do? With despair in my soul I turned homeward. Halfway our scouts gave the alarm. An hour later we were engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with the Sioux. Their party, six times as numerous as ours, was luckily composed chiefly of young warriors on their first warpath. Our defence was so desperate, that the Sioux yielded and fled. We were masters of the field, but out of four-and-twenty only ten were alive, and these were badly wounded."

"It would be too terrible to tell the story of our sufferings on the way home. We found that all was known about the expedition. But all the sachems acclaimed us, the more that I brought back the scalps of eighteen Sioux who had fallen on the field of battle. But if my honour was safe, my happiness was lost. Evening Dew was gone."

"My sister abducted?" cried Bright-eye.

"No," said the other, sadly, "not abducted. She went away of

her own accord."

"Of her own accord?" repeated the hunter.

"During the absence of Bright-eye and myself, a paleface came to the village. This man, it appears, for your father and grandfather refused any explanation, is a relative of my brother. After remaining a week he went away, accompanied by your father. Evening Dew followed, weeping bitterly. Still she offered no resistance to the orders of her father. Three days after your father returned to his tribe. He was alone. What had become of the lovely young girl none could tell me. I made the most minute inquiries without any result. Not knowing what else to do, I then sent a warrior to my brother to appoint a meeting. Here I am, my friend – what am I to do?"

"I tell you, chief, that your extraordinary story is inexplicable to me. I cannot advise."

"Allow me to speak," said Oliver, "I am wholly disinterested in the matter. I can therefore speak with that calmness which suits neither of you at this moment."

"Speak!" cried the two young men.

"My advice is, to start at daybreak for the village. The father of Bright-eye may have reasons for refusing explanations to the chief. Family matters are sacred. But the brother of Evening Dew has a right to demand a full explanation. I am certain it will be given to him by his father, who can have no reason for being mysterious with him. Let us then away to the village. Successful or not, we shall know what to do. In every case, my dear friend

and brother, count on me."

"What says the chief?" asked Bright-eye.

"The chief thanks Bounding Panther," replied the young man, warmly; "his heart is loyal, and his soul generous. His advice is good and should be followed. With two such friends, the redskin warrior is certain of success."

The conversation then continued for some time on a subject always interesting to a lover and a brother. Then, after throwing a pile of dry wood on the fire, the three men rolled themselves in their blankets, and lay down on the ground.

The two wood rangers lay face downwards, according to Indian custom. As for Oliver, he lay on his side with his feet to the fire. At the first hoot of an owl – the first bird which announces the rising of the sun – the chief wakened his companions, and ten minutes later they started on their journey.

CHAPTER VI.

SAMUEL DICKSON

HUNTS A MOOSE DEER

The traveller who for the first time reaches the Rocky Mountains is amazed at the pile of hills above hills, called by the early discoverer the Sierra of the River of the Wind, that immense reservoir whence flows so many great streams, some flowing into the Atlantic, others into the Pacific.

We now transport our readers to a fork formed by a rather extensive stream, flowing from the Mountains of the Wind, just before it joins the Missouri, in the centre of a vast and delicious valley.

This charming spot, enchanting in its aspect, was covered by scattered thickets, young trees, fat pasturages, and watered by many rills, which fell in all directions in silver cascades from the mountains, and finally lost themselves in the Missouri.

This unknown Eden, buried in the mountains, had been discovered by a hardy explorer, and already the hand of man was at work destroying its savage grandeur. In a word, the squatters were at work.

Squatters are generally men of restless habits, greedy of exertions, no matter what they may be, impatient of control, and sworn enemies of the peaceful and regular life of the great

centres of population. Gifted with the courage of a lion, of a will – or, rather, obstinacy – which nothing can conquer, these men of indomitable energy, in whose hearts ferment the most violent passions, are the true pioneers of the desert and the vanguard of civilisation in the New World.

Accustomed to place themselves above the law, as soon as the tide of civilisation always rising reaches them, they abandon without regret all they possess – houses and land – and snatching up their hatchets, bury themselves gaily still further in the desert, until they find another suitable site, on which they squat.

There is no one to contest their claim. At all events, to do so would be a rather imprudent enterprise, for they at once appeal to their rifle, and make that the legal arbitrator.

Joshua Dickson was a true specimen of a squatter; his whole life had been one long pilgrimage across the States of the Union. Weary of rambling within the purlieus of civilisation, where he always felt uneasy, one day, as we have already recorded, he came to a final resolution, and, abandoning all that he possessed, he started with his family and servants in search of a land where none before had ever set their foot.

We cannot relate all the incidents of his journey without guide or map. They would fill a volume. We come to the point. One night they had fixed their camp near a very narrow and wooded gorge. It appearing to be rather a difficult spot to travel in the dark, and there being no hurry, they had halted by a small stream, in the midst of a green prairie, which offered admirable

pasturage for their beasts and horses.

Before daybreak, while his companions still slept, Samuel Dickson rose, took his rifle, and advanced in the direction of the defile, with the double object of examining the locality and of shooting, if possible, two or three head of game for the morning repast, provisions being rare in camp, so much so that the night before they had gone to bed almost without supper.

Harry Dickson, who acted as sentry, alone saw him go out, but as his uncle did not speak, he did not venture to make any observation.

Samuel Dickson went away with his rifle on his shoulder, whistling "Yankee Doodle," and shortly after disappeared in the tall grass without his nephew being able to make out in what direction he had gone.

Seen by the light of morn the defile was not so choked up by trees and bushes as it had seemed in the dusk of the evening; the entrance only was marked by a curtain of young trees, which would easily succumb to a few blows of a hatchet.

The American pushed forward, cutting a passage with his bowie knife, resolved to reach the extremity of the defile, in order to examine it thoroughly and report to his brother.

Suddenly a moose deer bounded across his path.

"There is a demon who does not suffer from rheumatism. How he runs! But remember, my friend, that's your breakfast."

With which words he took to his heels, and, catching sight of the deer, followed him up through the dense undergrowth,

without being able to get a shot at him. This went on for about twenty minutes, during which, his rifle at full cock, he never looked to the right or left. Suddenly the moose deer stood still, as if he sniffed another enemy in the direction in which he was going.

The American lost no time, but took steady aim for a second or two and fired.

The stricken deer bounded into the air, and then once more took to its heels.

But the hunter was determined not to lose him. Unhappily, however, in his eagerness, he did not look before him, and just as he thought the deer began to droop, while he increased his speed his foot slipped and he went head over heels, falling a height of about fifteen feet, to alight upon a kind of pavement of hard flint stones.

The fall was so heavy that the American not only was bruised all over, but fainted.

A feeling of coolness suddenly came over him, and caused him to open his eyes.

He looked wildly around him, and saw a young man of about seven-and-twenty, in the costume of a trapper, his handsome face bent over him with a look of deep solicitude, while he bathed his face with a handkerchief soaked with water.

"Are you better, Mr. Samuel?" said the other.

"Hem!" cried the American; "Am I mad?"

"Not in the least, Master Samuel, at least, that I am aware of,"

was the reply.

"But what has happened?" cried the other, with an awful grimace.

"A very simple thing: you shot a deer, and in your eagerness to catch him you did not notice that you were on the summit of an eminence, and so rolled over, to the detriment of your bones."

"A very simple thing!" groaned the other; "You speak very complacently, Master George. Is anything broken?"

"Nothing. I examined you carefully – nothing but bruises, of that I am sure."

"Cursed deer! If I only had secured it. But the brute escaped me after all."

"No, my friend. You are too good a shot to miss your aim. There lies your game, quite dead."

"Thank goodness! That is lucky. But oh! Oh! I feel as if I had received a severe beating. Help me up."

"But had you not better rest a while?"

"Go to the deuce. I am not a whining sniggler, like my niece," he began; "by the way," he added, "that puts me in mind! Young man –"

"Allow me to help you up – take my arm. I am strong; so lean as heavily as you like. There, you are all right. Your rifle will serve you as a staff."

Thanks to the assistance of the young man, the American contrived to stand on his legs, making horrible grimaces and groaning all the time.

"I wish my brother had been anywhere, with his mad notion of emigration," he said, grumbling; "but that is not the immediate question. Will you answer me?"

"I am quite ready. You cannot carry the deer – shall I hang it up in safety until you send for it?"

"Will you answer me?" cried Samuel, ferociously.

"You have not yet asked me any question," said the young man, gently.

The American looked at him with considerable anger in his glance; then his muscles relaxing, he burst out laughing.

"Forgive me, George," he said, offering his hand. "I am an old fool. I am trying to get up a quarrel with you, instead of thanking you for your kindness. In truth, I believe you have saved my life."

"You exaggerate, Mr. Samuel," replied the other.

"Between you and me, I don't think so. What would have become of me, fainting in the desert?"

"Chance brought me here."

"Oh, yes! Chance has very broad shoulders," answered the American: "I suppose it brought you out here."

The young man held down his head and blushed.

"Well, well, I won't tease you, George," cried Samuel; "you are a noble and generous fellow, and I loved your father."

"As you do his son," responded the other.

"I suppose it is so. But this being understood, let us talk like two old friends."

"I am at your command."

"Always the same eternal chorus. Now I do not want to dive into your secrets, but without going beyond the limits of politeness, allow me to ask you one simple question," said Samuel.

"Ask; and if it be in my power, I will answer truthfully," replied the other.

"Hem! You are confoundedly close. First let us sit down. I am all aches and pains."

The young man gently led him to a soft mound of turf, helped him to be seated, and followed his example.

"Now I am good for an hour. Let us chat."

"I am your most obedient servant to command."

"How is it, Mr. George Clinton," began the old man, with a sly look, "that three months ago I left you at Boston at the head of a large house of business, and that I now find you dressed like a runner of the woods, hundreds of miles from the nearest settlement, just ready to save my life."

"If my journey served me no other purpose, I am thankful – still I own there is another motive."

"I am glad to hear you say so. May I ask its nature?"

"Well, Master Samuel," began Clinton, "I am young, vigorous, and passionately fond of field sports; I am a good shot, and very much inclined for a free and independent life. Many times while at Boston chance brought me in contact with persons who have accomplished wonderful journeys into the almost unknown interior of our vast continent, and who brought back astounding

accounts of what they saw; my curiosity was aroused, and I felt within myself a strong desire to attempt one of these expeditions in search of the unknown."

"Or the ideal," smiled the American.

"If you like it. As long as my father was alive I kept my ideas to myself, but as soon as my actions were quite free my old ideas were revived. An opportunity presented itself which I eagerly embraced. Confiding my house of business to a trustworthy partner, I started."

"You had a definite object, I suppose?"

"No; I went wherever chance or my feelings urged me," the other answered.

"My young friend," said Dickson, laughing, "chance plays too great a part in all this. You will excuse me if I don't believe a word of your story."

"You are not generous, sir."

"I am not generous?"

"You will not believe that a young man could give way to his adventurous instincts; and yet you, a wise man, very much older than I am, you, whose position was settled, I find you here, without being able to give the slightest explanation of your conduct."

"Well answered, George. You hit me hard, but you know I am an old fool. I am so, as sure as fate. Yes, my friend, I am mad enough for a straitjacket. But at the same time, I can see that you will not make me your confidant."

"I assure you – " began Clinton.

"What is the use of holding out any longer? You must rely on me in the end; but when you do come to me with the truth, it will be my turn."

"You are not angry with me?"

"No, my boy: keep your secrets; but remember I am your friend. Keep your own counsel then, if you will – it concerns only yourself. But remember, whenever you want me, I am ready," he answered.

"I know not how to thank you."

"What nonsense! You owe me nothing. It is I who am your debtor. But it is getting late, and I must return to the camp, where they must be getting anxious. Thanks to my rest I feel not only able to walk, but to carry the confounded deer."

"Wait, however, while I clean and skin him. It will then be easier."

"You are quite right. Be quick, as we are short of food."

"But the country is enormously rich in game, and what a beautiful spot!"

"It certainly is," replied Samuel, after which his young friend soon prepared the game so as to be easily carried.

"And now take my arm while I lead you through the defile, which is the only way out of the valley."

And so they started, Samuel walking much better than he expected, though suffering much.

"One favour," said the young man, after a time.

"What is it, my friend?" asked Samuel.

"Say not one word of our meeting."

"Since you wish it, I will be strictly silent on the subject. Like other people I know, I will invent some sort of story – it is not difficult."

The young man smiled, and shook him heartily by the hand. Then Samuel Dickson walked away in the direction of the camp, while George busied himself in the valley.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSHUA DICKSON BECOMES MASTER OF THE VALLEY

After Samuel had walked some distance he found that he had miscalculated his strength. He was very weak about the ankle, and the way being rude and his load heavy, he could scarcely get along at all. Still he would not abandon the deer, knowing as he did how short of provisions they were in the camp.

Wiping the cold perspiration off his brow, the brave American resumed his journey.

The sufferings he endured it would be impossible to describe; at length he became scarcely able to drag one foot before the other; every now and then he had to stop, as the blood rushed to his head and myriad sparkles flashed before his eyes. He seemed to have the vertigo, his mouth was parched, his chest panting, his temples throbbing, and his eyes almost starting from his head.

When he had staggered to within five hundred feet of the camp he was utterly exhausted, and fell insensible on the grass, where he remained inert and motionless for a quarter of an hour. Luckily, as he roused himself, he found a small rivulet flowing at his feet. In this he bathed his hands and face, and felt better.

But he could walk no farther; that he knew was impossible. He, however, suspected they were looking for him, and if they

heard him would come to his assistance. His voice was powerless to reach them. There remained his rifle. Still seated on the ground, he loaded and fired three times in succession.

He had not long to wait before he saw his brother and nephews running towards him.

He was too weak to enter upon any explanations, but one nephew taking up the deer and the other their uncle, they at once made for the camp, where Mrs. Dickson and Diana anxiously awaited them.

When they saw the hunter they believed him dead.

Joshua had a great deal of difficulty in persuading them that he had only fainted, and was in no danger.

The Americans, especially the hunters and trappers, have great experience in wounds and bruises.

The sick man was at once carried to a covered waggon, placed upon a mattress, and stripped.

"Heavens!" cried Joshua, as he examined the numerous black bruises, "Poor Samuel has indeed had a bad fall. I wonder he was not killed outright."

"Fortunate nothing is broken," said the eldest son.

"So it is," replied the father; "and now let us do the best we can for him while your mother cooks the deer meat for breakfast. It was for us poor Sam risked his life. Get the camphorated brandy and some wool, and don't forget to tell your mother to cook the game. She is rather apt to burn venison, which does not improve its flavour. While you are about it bring the rum bottle – a little

poured down his throat will do him good. Above all, be quick."

Having given these orders, Joshua bathed his brother's forehead with cold water, passed burnt feathers under his nose, and did everything which could be done under the circumstances. Still the sick man never moved.

"Let us try the rum," he said, as his son returned.

And as he spoke, he forced open the other's teeth with the blade of his knife, and putting the neck of the bottle to his mouth, let the liquor slip through.

Samuel smacked his lips and opened his eyes.

"That is something like. And now to work."

The two men then, dipping the wool in camphorated brandy, began to rub the bruises.

Such a remedy, so roughly employed, was very soon quite efficacious. The sick man sat up, howling furiously, and trying to escape from their clutches.

But the two men, believing in the remedy, continued, and, despite all their victim could say, despite his prayers, howls, and curses, he finally had to submit to the treatment for half an hour.

"There you are," cried Joshua; "now try and sleep."

"Go to old Nick!" roared Samuel; "I'm skinned alive."

"You are as fussy as a woman. We scarcely touched you. Tonight we shall do it again perfectly, and tomorrow you will be quite well," said Joshua.

Samuel shuddered, but said nothing; shortly after he, however, slept soundly. At night the two men came again, and, despite his

lamentations, protestations, and prayers, continued to rub him as before, with all the vigour of which their hands and arms were capable.

Then Joshua told his brother to go to sleep, promising if in the morning he was not quite well to give him one more dose.

But Samuel was up first, and when they came to find him, he was dressed, singing "Yankee Doodle."

His brother was delighted, and while wishing him joy, highly eulogised his remedy, the very mention of which caused Samuel to shudder.

He was then questioned as to his adventure, which he related, leaving out all mention, however, of George Clinton. They were at breakfast, and everyone listened with avidity. The ladies especially, who were weary of their journey, heard the description of the beautiful valley with extreme delight.

"To conclude, I beg to remark," Samuel wound up by saying, "that I never saw a spot better suited for a settlement."

"We shall see," drily remarked Joshua.

Samuel knew his brother well, and was well aware how he should be treated.

"As for myself," he added, with indifference, "I don't care where or when we stop. As we have gone so far in the desert, what matters fifty leagues more or less? Let us then go ahead. Push on by all means, even as far as the Bay of Hudson."

"I don't want to go as far as that," cried Joshua; "if the valley's anything like what you say, perhaps we may stop."

"Well, perhaps it may not suit you. Everybody, you know, to their taste," continued Samuel.

"I shall judge for myself," replied Joshua.

"If we are to stop here all day," Samuel urged, quite satisfied, "I and Harry will fetch the deerskin."

"Why not go with me?" said his brother.

"I shall be delighted with your company."

"Then, by Jove, we'll all go. It will be a walk. Harry, Sam, Jack, tell Sandy to be ready for a start. Let the camp be raised. Tonight we will camp in the valley and examine it at our ease."

"You raise the camp for so small a journey?" said Mrs. Dickson.

"Does it displease you, mistress?"

"No. But it is a useless fatigue for horses and men."

"I shall do as I think proper," said the squatter, drily, as he went to hurry his men.

Samuel Dickson and the ladies smiled. They knew now they would stop in the valley.

An hour later the whole caravan took its way in the direction of the defile, preceded by a dozen of the hired men and others with hatchets, to act as pioneers.

Though he declared his health was quite restored, Samuel Dickson, instead of riding on horseback, clambered into a waggon with his sister-in-law and niece, with whom he gaily discoursed.

Every now and then the old farmer looked sideways at the

countenance of his pale and thoughtful niece, smiled to himself, and rubbed his hands with intense satisfaction.

Neither mother nor daughter could make out his pantomime, but after a few trials they knew it was useless to question him, and so let him chuckle to himself.

Joshua Dickson, without allowing it to be seen, had been very much struck by what his brother had said. Instead, therefore, of riding beside the caravan as usual, he had gone on in front.

Presently, as if no longer able to resist the impulse of curiosity which was devouring him, he signed to his three sons to follow, and next minute the four men were off at a hard gallop and were soon lost in the defile.

"The fish is in the net," said Samuel Dickson, with a hearty laugh.

"Is the valley so beautiful as you say?" asked Mrs. Dickson.

"Much more so. It is simply a terrestrial paradise. If you were to hunt for months you would never find a more agreeable or advantageous position. Everything is to be found in abundance, wood, water, pasture, and above all, game."

"If Joshua would only settle."

"A good deal depends on you."

"I have not the influence you suppose over my husband. You know his vagabond humour."

"He will remain here if you wish him to."

"I hope you are right," replied the wife, with a sigh.

"Chut! Here he comes. Attention, this is the decisive

moment," whispered Samuel, as Joshua came up.

"Holloa!" he cried, "I have come from the valley."

"Did you find the deerskin I left behind?"

"Deerskin be – " was the excited answer; "I had no time to think of it. But what a delicious valley! I never saw anything so beautiful in all my life."

"It is certainly pretty fair, but not worthy of such frantic eulogy," said Samuel.

"What a man you are!" cried Joshua; "You must always disagree with me. The moment I like a thing you must depreciate it."

"Do you then mean to make some stay in the valley?" asked Mrs. Dickson, innocently enough.

"Some stay, mistress!" cried the husband; "What are you dreaming about? I mean to take the whole valley. It belongs to no one now. It shall therefore be ours – that is, mine and my brother's."

"I want very little," said Samuel.

"You shall have your right share, no more and no less. Do you think I would cheat you?"

"Far from me be such a thought."

"But, my dear," said the wife, "pray think."

"I have thought," he replied, abruptly; "and my resolution is irrevocable. So thoroughly have I made up my mind that I have come back alone, leaving the children at work."

"At work!" cried Samuel.

"Yes; they are cutting down trees and clearing the ground. This will be so much gained, as the season is far advanced, and we have not a moment to lose if we would have our settlement quite ready for the winter."

All this while the caravan was advancing, and by degrees had got halfway through the defile.

"This narrow way might easily be stopped," said Joshua.

"Very useful idea, as many redskins are about."

"But we are very numerous."

"Yes; but if we are attacked we have no neighbours to help us, and must count only on ourselves alone."

"We shall be sufficient," drily responded Joshua.

"I hope so, and yet I doubt if the Indians leave us in peaceable possession if game is as abundant as I believe."

"Bah! Who cares? If the Indians come we will give them such a reception as shall astonish them."

"Who lives longest will see the most. It is best to be prudent," responded Samuel.

The squatter, half angry at his brother's manner, gave up the conversation, and, spurring his horse, disappeared.

"Now," said Samuel, with a smile, as the other rode off, "you may be satisfied. Joshua is sufficiently annoyed at my opposition to become seriously obstinate. Nothing will make him change his mind now."

"Perhaps you went a little too far."

"Not a bit, I only stimulated him."

"But what you said about the Indians made me seriously uneasy. Are there any about?"

"I suppose so, as we are in the very centre of their territory. They may not attack us if let alone."

"But this valley may belong to them."

"Then we shall have to negotiate with the tribe to which the place belongs. We shall buy it of the redskins – a thing done every day."

"You ought to know Joshua better by this time. He will take the land, and refuse all compromises."

"I know him; but should the contingency come, we must make him listen to reason. But look, we are entering on the confines of this garden of Eden, which henceforth will be all our own," cried Samuel.

"What a magnificent country!" cried the squatter's wife.

Miss Diana, despite her sadness and habit of concentrated thought, could not restrain an exclamation of surprise at the sight of the grand spectacle before her.

"Don't be too enthusiastic," said Samuel. "Here is Joshua."

A hundred paces off Joshua had halted, his sons beside him on horseback, gun in hand. The squatter held the American flag in his right hand. As soon as all the waggons were in the valley he signed to everybody to advance.

All the serving men and women surrounded the squatter. His wife, daughter, and Samuel remained in the waggon.

The squatter, making his horse prance, waved the American

flag over his head, then he planted the staff in the earth, and cried in a loud firm voice:

"I take possession of this wild territory by the right of the first occupant I proclaim myself its sole lord and master, and if anyone, white or black, dares to claim it, I will defend myself to the last gasp."

"Hurrah! Long live America!" cried all.

"My friends," continued the trapper, "we are now at home. This valley which we shall soon cultivate and bring to prosperity and civilisation, is the Valley of the Deer."

"Long live the Valley of the Deer!" cried all.

The squatter then headed the caravan, and led it to the spot he had selected for a settlement. It was twelve o'clock. At a little after two the ancient trees were falling beneath the axes of the Americans.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIANA DICKSON AND HER FOE

The activity of the North Americans is prodigious; they have a peculiar way of handling the axe which is marvellous. Their mode of procedure is almost incomprehensible, and goes beyond anything the imagination can conceive.

Fifty American woodmen will in a month clear the whole of a vast forest tract.

They always begin with the idea, a very logical one, though a proud one, that the modest plantation they commence may in time become an important town, and they act accordingly. The land is divided into lots, paths traced by the axe stand for streets, large open spaces represent squares, while notched trees indicate where the houses, shops, workshops, and other buildings are to be.

As soon as this is all settled they go to work with feverish haste, and trees of vast dimensions fall with a rapidity which is simply amazing.

Then they build the stables and sheds, then the blacksmith's forge, the carpenter's shop, and the water sawmill, of which the workmen at once take possession.

The earth, still encumbered by the roots of trees, is dug up and sown at once. Everything goes on at the same time with the

utmost regularity and industry.

In a few days the landscape is completely changed, and there, where had existed a virgin forest, with all its deep and impenetrable mysteries, suddenly arises, as if by means of the enchanted wand, the embryo of a town, which ten years later will be a rich flourishing emporium of commerce, and of which the population, coming from all parts of the world, will perhaps be fifty or sixty thousand.

But the squatter, the founder of the new city, will have disappeared, without leaving a trace behind. Nobody knows anything about him, not even his name. His work done, he will have taken his melancholy departure, frightened to see the desert so populated, and that civilisation from which he had fled so near; he probably has fled out West in search of a new virgin land, which he will transform like the first, without deriving any more advantage from it, finally to end his days, shot in some miserable Indian ambushade, or killed by the claws of a grizzly, or perhaps dies of misery and hunger in some unknown corner of the prairie.

Joshua Dickson did not act differently from his fellows; after dividing the valley into two, and handing over half to his brother, he fixed his residence near the fork of the two rivers. Samuel Dickson fixed his residence at the other end of the valley, near the river called the Deer River.

Everybody then set to work, and with such rapidity that before three weeks were over the principal buildings were finished. The houses, built with trees from the trunks of which the bark had not

been removed, piled one upon the other, and fastened together by iron clamps and long wooden nails, looked comfortable with their glass windows furnished inside with strong shutters, and their mud and brick chimneys from which the smoke already escaped in a bluish cloud.

All the servants and hired men had erected themselves, not exactly houses, but bark huts. They were, however, only temporary residences, soon to be replaced by more solid and eligible residences.

The ordinary means of defence so necessary in an Indian country had not been neglected; a solid double stockade of young trees surrounded the camp; the centre of this rampart was occupied by a ditch ten feet wide and fifteen deep.

There were several drawbridges, which were raised every night, by means of which only could the settlement be reached; near every one of these was a redoubt of stone, surmounted by stakes, behind which, in case of attack, the garrison could place themselves. All the houses were moreover loopholed.

Every night some twenty formidable dogs of the race formerly used by the Spaniards to hunt down the Indians, and until lately kept to track Negro slaves by the Americans, that is to say, bloodhounds, were let loose.

One morning, shortly after sunrise, Miss Diana, accompanied by her own enormous and favourite dog, quitted the Point, her father's habitation, for the residence of Samuel Dickson.

Very busy each about their own affairs, the brothers were

often two days without seeing each other, the more so that their respective residences were quite three miles apart.

Joshua Dickson, whose activity was immense, struck with amazement at sight of the magnificent waterpower at his door, and which he little suspected was the Missouri, had asked himself one day where these waters flowed to. He came at last to the conclusion that on its way to the sea it must run through some state of the Union.

Then, imbued with that commercial spirit which is innate in the Americans, he at once saw the value of the river as available for the carriage of his produce, as well as to obtain supplies for the colony. He therefore resolved to make a journey down the river, and reach the first settlement, and this as soon as the heavier labours were over.

Now with the squatter to resolve was to act, and even before anything else was finished he had set to work to construct a canoe sufficiently large to carry four persons, with victuals for a long journey, and strong enough to bear a voyage of some hundreds of miles.

The boat had been finished the night before, and Joshua Dickson, eager to begin his journey, had sent his daughter over to Dickson Point, to confer with his brother as to what was to be done in his absence. But neither Samuel nor Diana knew anything of Joshua's projects.

Joshua was one of those men who, without being deceitful, was very reticent, and never told his thoughts.

Diana, like a true heroine, traversed the faintly traced paths which led to her uncle's house, a hunting knife in her belt, and light gun in her hand. For further safety she was accompanied by Dardar, a large black and white dog, something between a wolf and a Newfoundland, terribly ferocious, and of mighty strength, as tall as a good-sized donkey, and who would have tackled a bear in defence of his mistress, whom he obeyed with the docility of a child.

With such a guardian Diana had nothing to fear from man or beast; moreover, the country was too little known to the squatters to allow a young girl to go out quite unprotected in the country, however short the distance.

Contrary to her usual mood, the young girl was quite joyous; her freedom, which allowed her to give free vent to her thoughts, had driven away the tinge of sadness which generally clouded her beautiful face.

She went along careless and dreaming through the fields, playing with Dardar, who, proud of the charge he was set to guard, ran wildly before her, dashing into the bushes and thickets with an intelligent glance that was almost human.

The young girl soon reached the river, where a kind of ferryboat had been provided by means of which to cross the river, here neither broad nor deep. In a few minutes Diana was across and within sight of her uncle's residence.

Inside the log hut, which was extensive, were seated two men, with a bottle of whisky before them. These were Samuel Dickson

himself and George.

Two horses, still saddled and smoking, were fastened in the court. They must have been on a long journey.

"You are a pretty fellow to make me gallop about in this way in search of you. I am not very handsome, but I am not ugly enough to frighten you."

"I simply did not see you."

"No nonsense. Do you think to keep me in ignorance of your motive in coming this way?"

The young man blushed deeply.

"Do you know my brother Joshua?" asked Samuel.

"I met him once or twice in Boston, but I do not think he ever noticed me," said George Clinton.

"Shall I introduce you to him?" said Samuel. "He has his faults, but he is a very worthy man."

"I don't think it would be wise just now."

"I don't think," continued the American, "that you have waited to be introduced to my niece."

"Sir," cried the young man, dropping his glass.

"Ah, ah!" cried the American, laughing, "That is the way you break my crockery. These lovers, these lovers. Do you think to cheat an old opossum like me? You love my pretty niece, which is very natural; you are a good fellow, and together will make an excellent couple."

"I regret to say it cannot be so," sighed George.

"Why so?" cried Samuel.

"I see you are so good, I can no longer refuse to enlighten you."

"That is right. Confess, for I am your true friend."

"What I have to say," began George, "is not much. I met Miss Diana at Boston at Mrs. Marshall's, where your niece stayed for some months last year. I was on very good terms with your relative."

"Yes, yes; my cousin," said Samuel.

"Need I say that from the first moment I saw her I loved your niece? My visits to Mrs. Marshall, once only occasional, became so frequent that the lady began to have suspicion of my intentions. She at once called me on one side, and while giving me every credit for loyalty and worth, she told me not to prosecute my attentions, as Diana's father would never consent to our marriage. Despite all my entreaties, however, she would give me no reason, until at last, yielding to my earnest entreaties, she explained that many years before there had been such a quarrel between my father and Joshua Dickson that any alliance between our families must ever prove impossible."

Samuel listened with extreme anxiety.

"You see yourself that I am right," said the young man.

"You are mistaken," cried the other; "the matter is rather serious, I allow. I really had forgotten that old affair. But don't ask me any questions; all I say is, have courage. Circumstances will probably alter, and believe me that in Samuel Dickson you will have a sincere friend."

"I should be only too glad to help."

"When I am on your side nothing is difficult. Now to breakfast. But how did you know of my brother's coming out here?" suddenly cried Samuel.

"Miss Diana told me herself."

"Oh, oh! Then I wonder no longer. To breakfast."

"I hope, Master Samuel, you will excuse me," began the other, taking up his hunter's cap.

"Sit down; if my niece were here you would not go."

"Can I come in?" suddenly said a soft voice at the door, a voice that made George start.

This sudden coincidence utterly overcame the old man's gravity, and, throwing himself back in his chair, he screamed with laughter, while Diana stood transfixed in the doorway, and George Clinton simply turned his cap round in his hand without being able to articulate a word.

It was Dardar who ended the scene.

The dog had remained outside for a moment or two, and then, seeing the door open, had rushed right into the middle of the room; seeing George Clinton he rushed at him, wagging his tail first, and then, leaping up, his paws on either shoulder, he licked his face with a joyous whine.

"By heavens!" cried the squatter, "The fellow is lucky. Everyone likes him, even that precious Dardar, and yet he despairs. Come in, Sly Boots, and kiss your uncle."

She did not require twice asking.

"You are welcome, mademoiselle," he said, with mock

politeness. "I suppose I need not introduce you to yonder tall young fellow?"

"I have known the gentleman some time," replied the young girl, holding out her hand, which George took and kissed.

"That's right," cried Samuel, rubbing his hands; "all goes well. And now once more I say, to breakfast. I am dying with hunger. We can talk while we eat, and you, Diana, can explain your early visit. I suppose you have not come three miles in the dew to kiss your old uncle?"

"Why not?" she said, with a smile.

"And you expected to meet nobody," he answered. But seeing that Diana blushed, he continued, "But no more delay," and seated himself.

The beginning of the meal was rather constrained, from the peculiar position of the young people. But the ice was soon broken; the squatter was merry and humorous; he avoided any pointed allusions, and the conversation, at first very meagre, soon became very pleasant.

When Samuel heard the object of Diana's visit, he promised to go over in the evening, and then questioned George as to his travels.

George at once proceeded to tell his story with so much wit and humour as to amuse uncle and niece.

"Now," said Samuel, when breakfast was over, "listen to me. You are two charming young people, whom I love, and whose happiness I desire. But you must let me act in my own way. I

know my brother well, and can do as I like with him. Look upon me as an ally, but commit no imprudence. Instead now of going with my niece, you must stop here. If you were seen together, we cannot say what might happen. At all times my house is open to you. Come as often as you like, but remember, courage and prudence, Diana, kiss me again, and then farewell."

"My darling uncle," she cried, embracing him.

"Oh, yes, very dear, because I do what you like."

"Au revoir, George," she continued.

"But when shall I see you again? Time appears so long."

"Already he grumbles," cried Samuel.

"Pardon me, but I love her so much."

"And do I not love you?" she said, naively.

"I am mad," he answered, tenderly, kissing her hand a second time as he spoke.

Then Diana went out, guarded by Dardar.

"Now," said Samuel, as soon as they were alone, "you must enter into fuller explanations, and explain where you have pitched your tent. I hope you are in no difficulty."

"Be easy on that point. I have a hut in a charming situation about twelve miles off. Will you come and see it?" added George Clinton.

"At once, if you like," cried Samuel.

"At once let it be, I am not alone; I have two faithful servants and a Canadian hunter, whom I engaged in Boston. I have books, arms, horses, dogs – everything that a man can wish for."

"Delighted to hear it. Let us start."

Five minutes later they were galloping through the forest.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY MAKE AN ACQUAINTANCE

That part of the valley towards which they were going had undergone no change. The squatters had had no time to visit it, and it retained all its original beauty and primitive majesty. George Clinton appeared fully to know his way, entering at full gallop on the most out-of-the-way and rugged paths, followed by Samuel Dickson, who was in a charming humour, and appeared delighted to explore this part of his domains, for all on that side of the valley was his present from his brother.

"You ride as if you had known the country ten years at least," he said.

"I came here about a month before you, but I have been everywhere with Charbonneau."

"Who may Charbonneau be?"

"My hunter, a great big Canadian, as long as a fishing rod, as thin as a nail, and as honest as a Newfoundland dog. I got him out of a very great scrape, and he has been devoted to me ever since."

"Lucky for you."

"More than you think. This fellow was brought up in an Indian tribe; his life has been spent more or less in the desert. He has friends everywhere with trappers, with white and half-caste hunters; speaks all the most difficult redskin dialects, and despite

his youth – he is not more than three-and-twenty – enjoys a great reputation on the prairie. He is called Keen-hand, because of his prodigious dexterity."

"An excellent servant," said Samuel.

"And a capital companion – always gay and contented, whichever way things go, he is always so philosophical I cannot but admire him. He is a perfect study. As an instance, he declared some time ago no squatter would ever see this place and go further."

"He was not far wrong. He is a sharp youth."

"You are right; but you shall judge for yourself."

"Then he has told you all about this country?" asked Samuel.

"In what way?" said George.

"I suppose he described the situation of the valley – its distance from all habitations?"

"Don't you know?" cried George.

"I know nothing. We have been travelling in the dark, and should all be glad of information."

"In the first place, two rivers cross the valley; that near you flows from the mountains of the Wind; the other, into which it discharges its waters, is the Missouri."

"Heavens! The Missouri! Then it runs through part of the United States. We are at home."

"Very nearly, though you are surrounded by red men, who, though very warlike, are generally friendly to the whites. Still, if you know the redskins you will not depend on them."

"Too true; and what nations are they?" he asked.

"Sioux and Dakotas, Piekanns, Crows, Hurons of the great lakes, with some Assiniboins and Mandans. A few others of no account are scattered about," he answered.

"A pretty lot; and no help near."

"Help is nearer than you think. About fifty miles distant is a fort belonging to one of the great fur companies. It has a garrison of fifty whites – Americans and Canadians, soldiers and hunters."

"Fifty miles is nothing," said Samuel.

"In a civilised country, yes; but in the desert it is as bad as fifty leagues," responded Clinton.

"I did not think of that," granted the squatter; "well, then, on the other side, what neighbours have we?"

"Some squatters, like yourselves, who have been two years on the Missouri. You are halfway between the two."

"Have these squatters much cultivated land?"

"They have been going ahead lately. It is already almost a village; soon it will be a town. But anyway, on one side or the other you are separated from men of your own colour by several Indian nations, whose villages it would be dangerous to visit, except in large numbers. In fact your only open route is the Missouri."

"That is something; but, if easy to go down, it is hard to ascend."

"Besides, both sides swarm with redskins."

"Hum! My dear George, that spoils all. What could put it into the mad head of my brother to bring us here? He is a lunatic; for the matter of that, so am I."

George could not help laughing.

"Laugh away, you young rascal," said the squatter; "but if we have to leave our bones here?"

"I hope it will not be so," replied George.

"Jehoshaphat! So do I. Your information is not pleasant; still I thank you. It is best to know the worst."

While speaking they kept on at as rapid a pace as the state of the ground allowed. They had left the forest, and had come out upon a green prairie, when suddenly they heard a gun fired.

"What is that?" cried the squatter.

"Charbonneau. I know the sound. Wait a minute."

And Clinton fired his rifle in the air.

Next instant there was a rush from out of a thicket, and two magnificent dogs of the same breed as Dardar came rushing out of a thicket, and, leaping at the young man to beg a caress, continued at the same time to growl at the squatter.

"Down, dogs, down!" cried the young man. "Down, I say, Nadeje, miss, and you the same, Drack; don't be mischievous. This gentleman, my fine fellows, is a friend; go and welcome him, to show what brave and intelligent beasts you are."

As if they had understood what their master said, the two dogs ceased to growl, and, going straight to Samuel Dickson, leaped up at him in the most friendly way. The squatter, a great dog fancier,

was very much struck by their beauty, and at once caressed them with many a word of praise, which pleased both, but especially Miss Nadeje; she was a magnificent animal, with an almost pure white skin, spotted only here and there with black, and at once took the squatter under her guardianship.

Almost at the same moment a man appeared in the full costume of a hunter, a man with rather angular but very intelligent features; in his hand was the still-smoking gun. He bowed, and called off the dogs.

"Pardieu!" he cried, "That was a lucky shot of mine."

"Were you hunting?" asked the other, shaking hands.

"At this hour it were folly, and I am not yet mad. Sport is only good morning and evening, is it not?"

"That is my opinion," replied the squatter.

"Mr. Samuel Dickson, one of my best friends," said George, "and I hope soon one of yours."

"I hope so; I like his looks," laughed Charbonneau.

"Thank you," said the squatter.

"It is quite unnecessary, only I don't say the same to everybody. But I have known you some time."

"If not hunting, what were you doing?" asked George.

"Something has happened at the wigwam. Three travellers, two white hunters and an Indian chief, have reached your house, and demanded hospitality," he replied.

"Of course you did not refuse?"

"Of course I did not. Besides, two of the hunters are my

friends, and the other is likely to become so."

"You know you are welcome to act; still, why look for me?"

"Well, I did not exactly look for you, but I wanted to give you warning; of course, I knew where you had gone."

The young man blushed, while the old man laughed.

"Now, then," cried Clinton, "let us go home."

"Wait one moment. About fifty yards in my rear the dogs opened cry. I ran and found – "

"A bear?" exclaimed the squatter.

"No, I would not have minded that. It was not a bear, but a man. He was lying insensible on the ground, his skull split open from a heavy fall, and a shot wound in his left arm. His horse was grazing close by. He appeared to be a traveller traitorously shot by an Indian. I thought I heard an explosion; at all events, the wretch fled before the dogs, just as he was about to rob the unfortunate."

"You assisted him?"

"How could I help it? I could not let him die like a skunk on the road; and yet it would have been wiser."

"Charbonneau!" cried the young man, "Is that really you?"

"You know me well, Master George. Well, despite myself, I don't like the look of this man, though he is handsome enough. He has a terrible expression, and you know it takes something to move me. Still, I feel an invincible repugnance for this man, whom I never saw before. The dogs were like myself; I had the greatest difficulty to prevent them tearing him to pieces. Nadeje

was like a mad creature; she wanted to strangle him. Do you know, Master George, dogs never make a mistake?"

"A very good thing," said George Clinton; "but the man is wounded, likely to die. We are bound to succour him."

"I know it, and have done so. I have seen to him as I would to myself or one of my dogs. Still, Master George, mark my words, it is a bitter foe you shelter under your roof."

"It may be so, but we must do our duty."

"As you please. Still I shall watch him."

"Where is he?"

"Just under yonder cluster of oaks, which you see from here. It was after dressing his wound I fired a shot on chance."

"Did he say nothing?" asked George.

"He is still quite insensible."

"Let us join him, and if the dogs are so ill-disposed towards the stranger, watch them carefully."

"All right, Master George. Be quiet, dogs," said the hunter, turning back, followed by the two great dogs, the others making up the rear.

The cluster of oaks was soon reached; the wounded man still lay without life; the dogs howled, but, at a sign from Keen-hand, they stood back silent.

George and Samuel alighted, and examined the man.

He was a tall, well made, even elegant man of about thirty or thirty-five; he was deadly pale; his features were well chiselled and delicate; his long, jet black hair fell in waving curls on his

shoulders; a black crisp beard hid the lower part of his face; his mouth, large and slightly open, showed magnificent teeth of dazzling whiteness; his strong and aquiline nose gave a terribly hard expression to his face, while his eyes, far too close together, and which were shut, were shaded by long lashes, and crowned by heavy eyebrows that almost touched.

The very sight of the man inspired instinctive repulsion, something like a chill, that sensation of terror and disgust which one feels at the sight of a reptile; still the man was handsome and elegant; he was well dressed, and his weapons were superior; his horse was extremely valuable.

He was, to all appearance, a prince among adventurers.

"Hum!" muttered Samuel Dickson, who was the first to speak; "I don't like his look at all."

"No more do I," said George; "still, we cannot let him die."

"Certainly not, since Providence has sent him here. Are we far from your hut?" replied Samuel.

"Not far off, are we, Charbonneau? But, then, how can we carry him?" continued George; "I don't see anything except a litter."

"Too long. Leave all to me. I will mount his horse; you can hand him up to me; I will then carry him in my arms to the wigwam – what say you?"

"Admirable!" cried George, as Charbonneau mounted and stood still, awaiting his burden.

George and Samuel then placed him before the guide.

Charbonneau pressed his head against his chest, and started.

Going slowly, they were an hour on the journey.

The wigwam, as the hunter called it, was a charming habitation built of wood, upon the summit of an eminence, round which ran a silver stream, lined with well-constructed palisades.

"Your house is delicious," said Samuel Dickson, examining the residence. "You should be very comfortable."

"My good friend, I want for nothing except happiness."

"Are you going to have the blues again?" said Samuel.

"You know I hardly dare hope," replied George.

"You are very foolish. When you are rich, young, and loved, Master George, you ought to hope for the best."

"You are very cruel to joke with me."

"I do not joke, I only try to inspire you with courage. But, look, here are your guests coming to meet you, while your servants seem to me to be rather muddled and mixed," observed Samuel.

"It is the first time they have ever seen strangers."

"Then," said Samuel, laughing, "they will have a change today."

Three persons were advancing in the direction of the advancing troop. They were Bright-eye, Numank-Charake, the Huron chief, and Oliver.

They bowed ceremoniously to Clinton, who renewed the invitation given by Charbonneau; and then alighting, the wounded man was carried by Bright-eye and Oliver to the best bedroom, placed on the master's own couch, and at once attended

to by one of the domestics, who knew something of medicine.

"What a disagreeable face!" murmured Oliver.

"He does not look pleasant," said Bright-eye.

"'Tis the face of a traitor," said the Indian chief, sententiously; "he should have been allowed to die."

"Hum!" cried Keen-hand; "There are others of my opinion."

"Let my brother watch carefully," remarked the Indian.

"Be not uneasy," smiled Charbonneau.

"In my opinion," said Bright-eye, "this man is one of the outlaws of the desert. I have seen him somewhere before. I must not only think over the matter, but put the master of the house on his guard."

Meanwhile the four men rejoined Clinton and Samuel Dickson in the drawing room, where copious refreshments awaited them.

CHAPTER X.

WHO THE STRANGER WAS

As soon as the farmer had taken some slight refreshment and assured himself as to the comfortable position in which he was placed, he took his leave. The day was far advanced, and he had to meet his brother on a matter of business.

On leaving George, the squatter bent low on his horse, and after one last glance at the hut:

"Beware, my friend," he said, "of the wounded man. I think him an unmitigated rascal. Get rid of him."

"I will take your advice. I do not like him myself, and as soon as he can travel he shall surely go."

And, after mutual promises to meet again, the two friends parted, and Samuel rode off in hot haste. George watched him until he was quite out of sight.

He then sighed. The departure of Samuel had broken the last link between the charming events of the morning and the more matter-of-fact events of the evening. He now gloomily turned on his heel, and found himself face to face with the three travellers accompanied by Keen-hand.

"You are not going?" he cried.

"No," answered Bright-eye; "on the contrary, if you will allow us, we intend remaining some little time."

"You will give me great satisfaction," continued Clinton, "use my house entirely as your own."

The hunters bowed courteously.

"We have come to meet you," said Oliver, "because, having something to say, we prefer the open air."

"Yes," continued Bright-eye, "though the wounded man whom you have so generously entertained is as yet incapable of listening, your servants –"

"Are discreet and devoted," observed Clinton.

"We know that, and have taken no precautions against them."

"You would have been very unwise to do so. Morris and Stephen knew me from my birth. They love me as if I were a child of their own. I have no secrets from them and should be sorry to wound their feelings."

"I was prepared for that objection," said Keen-hand, "and was therefore careful to warn them."

"You have done well, Charbonneau, as I would not for the world offend those worthy fellows. And now, gentlemen, follow me, and I will take you where you can speak openly without fear of being overheard."

Saying which George moved away from the house and led them to a hillock, wholly without trees, overlooking the river, and whence he could see a long way.

"This is my observatory," he said, smiling.

"Admirably well chosen," replied Oliver.

On the invitation of Clinton everyone seated himself on the

grass, and lit his pipe; then Bright-eye, who appeared general spokesman, addressed their host.

"We have learned from Keen-hand that you have not long left the cities of the United States to visit for a time the prairies of the Far West."

"I have no reason for making any secret of the matter."

"Everyone is master of his own actions," continued Bright-eye, "and we have no right to inquire in any way into your affairs. We only desire to indicate you as new to prairie customs."

"I am not very learned in the matter, and am therefore wholly guided by my hunter, who, despite his youth, is an old runner of the woods. But as I see no motive for this conversation, I should be glad if it were abridged."

"One question first – Are you prepared as a dweller in the desert to submit to its habits and customs?" asked Bright-eye.

"As long as they are just and reasonable," said the other, "I pledge my word to be guided by them."

"We find that your friend here described you well."

"Still you must be aware that you are keeping me waiting."

"Two words will explain," said Bright-eye; "we demand the body of the wounded man yonder."

"What to do?" cried Clinton.

"To apply Lynch law to him," coldly replied the hunter.

The young man shuddered, a livid pallor spread over his countenance; he looked at the hunters, who nodded their heads, with a glance of horror.

"What do you mean, gentlemen?" he cried; "Do you intend to torture this man, whose life hangs on a thread?"

"It is our right and our duty, not to torture him, but to try him, and execute the sentence, whatever it may be, at once."

"This is terrible!" cried the young man.

"You do not know him. If, for reasons best known to ourselves, we feigned not to know him, now that your friend has left we will tell you who the wretch is."

"No matter who he is," cried Clinton, fiercely, "all I know is that he is wounded and under the protection of my roof."

"Your sentiments of humanity do you honour," said Bright-eye, ironically; "they are well suited to civilised society, where the law defends you. In the desert they have no meaning. Every moment menaced with death, you must cut down your murderous foes without mercy."

"Better be victim than executioner," said George.

"If you like to present your breast to the enemies, that is your lookout; we beg to differ from you."

"But, gentlemen – " said Clinton, haughtily.

"You made a promise. Do you or do you not intend to be bound by it?" asked Bright-eye.

"This is your return for my hospitality."

"You are unjust, sir; we are but the instruments of public opinion, about to accomplish a painful duty, guided by our conscience and our sense of right. Do you give this man up to us, yes or no?" he continued.

"Take him, if you insist; but as on your private authority you judge this man, I will defend him."

"We are delighted to hear it."

"When do you intend trying this man who is dangerously wounded and nearly insensible?"

"He is not so ill as he pretends to be," replied Bright-eye; "and we intend trying him at once."

"Come, then, for the matter is getting wearisome," said George.

All returned to the house. Oliver and Numank had not spoken, but their firm step, their knitted brows, their flashing eyes, sufficiently indicated that they fully agreed with Bright-eye in his intentions.

When they entered the room where the wounded man lay he was quite conscious; his face, of an earthy pallor, had two red spots on the cheeks; the pearly sweat fell heavily from his brow; his eyes were half closed, but he could clearly see through his lashes. His attitude was that of a tiger at bay, unaware from what side danger was likely to come.

Bright-eye looked at him with such pertinacity that after a time he was compelled to open his eyes.

The Canadian smiled, whispered to Keen-hand, who nodded his head, and soon left the hut.

"Gentlemen," said Bright-eye in a loud tone, "we will at once proceed to instal the head of the court of Judge Lynch."

"You are the chief," said the others.

"I accept. You will be the accusers. I shall at once take my seat, as we are here to judge this man."

"You forget I am here to defend him," remarked Clinton.

"You are quite right," replied Bright-eye; "pray therefore attend carefully to the accusations I am about to make against him; you can then undertake his defence, if, indeed, when you know all, you care to do so."

The wounded man had appeared motionless and insensible to all around him, but on hearing the generous words of the young man, spoken in a gentle voice, he seemed to shiver all over, and, raising himself a little, looked keenly at George Clinton, with a glance of gratitude.

Bright-eye meanwhile reflected a moment, folded his arms, and throwing back his head spoke:

"Prisoner," he said, "you are before a terrible tribunal. Judge Lynch has been appointed to condemn you if guilty, to absolve you if innocent. Prepare yourself to hear and answer the charges made against you."

"I do not acknowledge the jurisdiction of Judge Lynch," said the man; "you are a tribunal of assassins."

"As you please," replied the Canadian; "but your silence will be treated as a confession of guilt."

The accused shuddered.

"Why, instead of leaving me to die in the prairie, was I brought here?" he asked; "Is hospitality a mere trick?"

"The man is right," cried George; "I cannot suffer such things

to pass under my roof. I protest, in the name of humanity, against all that is being done. You dishonour me by acting in this manner here."

"The jurisdiction of Judge Lynch is universal in the desert," was the cold reply; "none can check it. This man is an outlaw of the prairies, a man of blood and crime. Louis Querehard, Paul Sambrun, Tom Mitchell, and half a dozen aliases – you see we know you well – eleven days ago you basely attacked an old man in charge of a young girl; you killed the old man from behind at the Elk's Leap. Where is the young girl?"

"Base calumny," cried the wounded man, sitting up suddenly; "I know not what you mean. I killed no old man."

"I repeat that you killed the old man and stole away the girl. I have the proofs," he answered.

The wounded man sat biting his lips with rage.

"This morning," continued Bright-eye, "you quarrelled with one of your accomplices, while crossing this valley, and fell from the treachery of your fellow bandit."

"Falsehood!" cried the wounded man.

"We shall soon see," said the Canadian, coldly, and putting his fingers to his lips he uttered a shrill whistle.

A noise was heard and several men entered. These were Keen-hand, two servants of Clinton, and a prisoner – a man of wretched, mean, and ignoble appearance.

"This is your accomplice," said Bright-eye.

"I don't know him," replied the wounded man.

"You don't know me?" cried the other; "Really now, have you already forgotten poor Camotte?"

"You declare this man unknown to you?" said the judge. "Well, be it so. Now, fellow," to the man Camotte, "will you confess?"

"Caray, yes," said the prisoner, "anything you like."

"Speak then," responded Bright-eye: "we wait."

"Miserable wretch," asked the wounded man, "are you a traitor?"

"My good sir, I object to be hung," he answered.

"It is useless to question that rascal," said the wounded man. "I will tell you all you want to know; but before we go any further it must be on one condition."

"We decline to accept conditions," was the reply.

"Then beware. I alone know where the young girl is concealed. Refuse my conditions and my secret dies with me."

"It is true," said Camotte, in answer to a look from Bright-eye.

"What are your conditions?" resumed the judge.

"My life, liberty, and three hours' start," said the outlaw; "also the company of my friend Camotte yonder," he added, with a sneer, as that individual shivered; "further, I require my horse, arms, and my valise. On these conditions you shall have the young girl: I swear it."

"Anything else?" continued the judge.

"One moment," observed George; "I ask for him eight days to recover from his wound, during which time he shall remain here

under my guardianship and yours."

"We consent," said Bright-eye, gloomily; "now speak."

"The girl is concealed twelve miles away, in the Cavern of the Elk. I was going there with food when I was shot. Make haste."

Scarcely had he finished ere Oliver and the chief disappeared.

"Beware of my vengeance," cried Bright-eye, "if you have spoken falsely."

"I have spoken the truth," said the wounded man, and fainted.

CHAPTER XI.

EXPLANATIONS

We must go back a little in order to explain how the three hunters were driven to seek hospitality in the hut of George Clinton, and what were the motives of the deadly hatred they had vowed against the wounded, almost dying, man.

At the time of which we write nearly the whole American continent, north and south, was owned by Spain, which ruled her provinces with a yoke of iron, closed to all other nations with as much jealousy as ever was shown by China.

The United States alone stood free, independent.

The newly enfranchised people were, however, well aware that as long as the rest of the land was not free their work was unfinished.

Besides, it became necessary to give employment to the restless spirits let loose by the close of the war.

The Government at once set to work. The territory of the new republic was already immense, but thinly peopled, almost unknown, and occupied in many instances by wandering Indian tribes. These must first be got rid of.

The activity of the Americans is known. They rushed off into the desert, they erected forts to awe the redskins; hardy pioneers traversed the prairies and established settlements in the very

heart of the Indian country.

Every encouragement was given to emigrants from Europe, who were received most hospitably.

The Government was favoured by circumstances; it was a rising power while Spain was falling to pieces.

The American Government at once offered to buy Louisiana of France, and meanwhile sent out small companies of free corps to attack the frontier of the Spanish colonies. But alongside those recognised by the authorities were other bands, men isolated from all civilisation, having no control to fear, recruited from the scum which froths up during troublous times; these bands made war on their own account, pillaged friend and foe, burned haciendas, and allied themselves with the redskins, taking their dress in order the more readily to carry out their nefarious designs.

Among these bands was one more formidable than all the others of sad and monstrous celebrity.

This troop of two hundred desperadoes, called themselves outlaws, and, it was believed, though no one exactly knew their headquarters, were established on the Missouri, whence they carried their depredations far and near.

Powerfully organised, submitting to strict discipline, this band had spies in every direction, who kept them well informed, not only as to the number and strength of caravans about to cross the desert, with their destination, but as to the expeditions sent out by Government against themselves. By these means they were

always on their guard and never taken by surprise.

The chief of this terrible band was said to have only been six years in America, and yet he knew all the secrets of the desert; he was as clever as the most cunning and astute runner of the woods, quite equal to any redskin in deceit. He was supposed to be a Frenchman, though he spoke English, Spanish, and many Indian languages equally well. He was called Querehard, Sambrun, Magnaud, Tom Mitchell, and various other names.

But none knew his real one, though some did whisper that he was the chief of a certain fearful band who had played so terrible a part during the Reign of Terror.

Many asserted that he was not so bad as he was painted – that, in fact, though chief of this fearful crew, he always tried to prevent bloodshed, that he never allowed women and children to be ill-treated.

He was said to be very generous, and had as many friends as enemies.

Whatever the truth, Tom Mitchell was a kind of hero; the American and Spanish Governments had placed a price upon his head; but no one ever ventured to try for the reward of ten thousand dollars.

After the medicine council we have recorded, Numank-Charake and his two friends continued their journey.

On the seventh day, an hour before the setting of the sun, they reached a village built in the fork of two rivers.

The village was surrounded by lofty palisades, with a ditch full

of water, and drawbridges.

The travellers came up just as these were being removed.

They were warmly received by an eager crowd.

Since his landing in America this was the first time Oliver had entered a real village of redskins.

He was surprised to find it so superior to what he expected. Instead of ordinary bison tents, or huts made with hurdles, mud, and thatch, it consisted of admirably constructed Canadian cabins.

These cabins stood in rows, with small gardens in front, while here and there were some real Indian wigwams.

Those Canadians who had retreated with their families to the tribe of Bison Hurons had introduced these habits. Hence the rather hybrid character of the village, which was half Canadian and half Indian.

Reaching the centre of the village Numank left his companions, while Bright-eye pointed out a most comfortable looking cabin and declared it to be his home.

At the entrance stood two men leaning on their rifles. One, nearly a centenarian, but still robust and very tall, had a large white beard; his eyes still shone brightly, his complexion was the colour of brick, while his ropy muscles could be seen through his parchment skin. His expression was gentle and full of courage. This was the grandfather of the hunter, an old soldier of Montcalm.

The second was Bright-eye's father, whom he resembled in

every particular except age and height.

"They indeed appear a noble couple," whispered Oliver.

"Come with me," was the laconic reply.

In a few minutes they were at the door of the cabin. Bright-eye dismounted and took off his fur cap.

"I am back after a long absence. Give me your blessing."

"Take it with all our hearts," cried the two old men.

They then shook hands cordially, Oliver looking on with a deep sigh of envy and regret.

"He at all events has a family," he said.

"Come nearer, my friend," cried Bright-eye; and when Oliver stood beside him, he added, "this is Oliver, my friend. Eight days ago we met in the savannah, and we have never parted since. He loves me and I love him; he is a brave man and a most excellent hunter; our friend, the redskin, calls him Bounding Panther."

"He is welcome," said the old man; "all Frenchmen are our brothers; as long as he chooses to remain there is a hut to shelter him and a quarter of venison for his food."

"Well spoken, father," said his son, shaking hands with the young Frenchman; "we are French here. Welcome."

"Messieurs," replied Oliver, with a bow and a smile, "it is not with words we answer such words, but by acts."

"We welcome you as a second son; come in."

The horses were now taken away by a young Indian, and the whole party entered the house.

The hut, which was built with logs, was whitewashed both in

and out, and had four windows.

Oliver entered a rather large hall, lit by two of the windows, with a plank flooring, and a roof supported by heavy beams; at one end was a large chimney, near the kitchen a table, some seats and chairs, two oaken dressers covered by utensils in brown earthenware, and a large old-fashioned clock composed the furniture.

Two doors led, one into the kitchen, the other into the guests' room, which was pointed out to Oliver.

There were three other rooms, one occupied by the two old men, one by Bright-eye, and one by his sister when at home.

All were furnished alike; a bed, a little table, several boxes, two or three chairs; some hideously coloured prints from Epinal were fixed on the walls, also pipes of all sorts and sizes, a French long gun, a powder horn, lead pouch, game bag, hatchet, a knife with its deerskin belt, that was all.

It was one floor, except a large loft above.

Behind the house there was stabling for six horses, a yard with fowls, a rather large garden, well enclosed and full of choice vegetables. It was the old man who took care of the garden as child's play.

When, having made some slight change in his toilette, Oliver returned to the hall dinner was on the table.

"Have you had good hunting lately?" asked Bright-eye.

"Not very good. Game gets scarce. Still I made three hundred and seventy dollars in a fortnight," he replied.

"Pretty fair; and what was your game?"

"The blue fox, near Hudson's Bay," continued the other; "I have been home three weeks. But you say nothing of your sister."

"I am not in the habit of questioning you, father."

"The boy is right," said the old man; "it is your place to speak."

"I suppose," cried the hunter, "Angela is in the village."

"No, my son, she is absent," continued the old man, "and I am sorry for it, as she was the joy of the house."

"Where is she then, father?" asked Bright-eye.

"About five days' march, with our cousin Lagrenay, the squatter of the Wind River. His wife has been ill, he is alone; having no one to take care of her, he came here and asked for Angela to stay a few days."

"My dear father, our cousin Lagrenay's settlement is a long way off, in the heart of the Indian country."

"You are right," said his father; "I fear I have acted with too great haste. I will fetch her home tomorrow."

"I will go with you, father."

"It is unnecessary. Your health, sir," addressing Oliver; "is it long since you left France?"

"Many thanks. I have been in America two months."

"Though so far off news is welcome. How is the king?"

"There is no longer any king," said Oliver, gravely; "France is now a republic like America."

While the stupefaction which this news caused was still at its height Numank-Charake entered.

"Welcome; be seated and eat," said the old man.

"I came neither to eat nor to drink," replied the young Indian, sadly. "I came to tell you that your child, Evening Dew, has been carried off by Tom Mitchell, the outlaw, and that we must at once save her."

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE THREE TRAVELLERS WENT TO GEORGE CLINTON'S

This terrible revelation fell like a thunderclap upon the four personages who sat at table. There was for some minutes a silence caused by perfect stupor.

"You are indeed a sinister messenger, chief," said the old man, bitterly; "whence do you get this news?"

"Perhaps you are mistaken," gasped the father.

"Listen," said the chief, sadly, "and you shall hear what has passed in a few words."

"First sit down and break bread," cried the old man; "we are friends and relatives, and this awful catastrophe affects you as well as us."

"You say truly," responded the young chief, seating himself.

"Eat and drink," said the old man; "then we will talk."

The meal continued, to the great astonishment of Oliver. He could not understand the calm and sang-froid of these four men in presence of such an awful event. He was half inclined to accuse them even of coldness of heart.

He knew nothing of that Indian etiquette, more severe than that of any other country, which requires this apparent coldness. He soon, however, discovered how much he was mistaken, and

how deeply all these brave and loyal hearts were wounded by the fatal incident.

The repast was sad and gloomy. Nobody spoke. They ate as if it were a duty which must be done.

After the hasty repast was over there was silence.

"You have come, sir," said the old man, addressing Oliver, "at an unfortunate moment; pardon us if we seem rude and inhospitable. But evil has fallen on us."

"You told me, sir," replied the young man, "that I was to become a member of your family. Let me, then, share your sorrows as well as your joys. I feel more on the subject than you think, being Bright-eye's brother."

"Thank you; you are one of us," said the old man.

"You are my second son," cried the father.

"I thank you, and hope to prove myself deserving."

Everybody now rose from table, filled his pipe and lighted it, and then, the repast having in the meantime been cleared away, seated themselves by the fire.

"Chief," said the old man, "the time has come. We are ready to listen to you with the deepest attention."

Rising and bowing to all, the chief, who affected stoical gravity, but who had great difficulty in controlling his voice, spoke —

"Lagrenay's wife was never ill. Evening Dew was carried off by Tom Mitchell from the squatters."

"Are you quite positive?" asked the grandfather.

"I am positive. The news was brought to me just now by a courier in whom I have every confidence. He saw all that happened without himself being seen."

A deep silence prevailed. None interrupted the old man.

"Allow me," he said, "to speak frankly to you, chief. You are my relative; I remember your birth, and love you."

"My father is good, and knows I love him," replied the chief.

"I know it; but pardon me if I speak very plainly. There is a hesitation in your words which alarms me excessively. I am sure you have not told us all you think."

The chief bowed his head.

"I knew I was right," cried the old man; "you know far more than you choose to say."

"No skin covers my heart, my blood runs red and clear in my veins; the Wacondah sees and judges me. Let my father explain himself frankly. I ought only to speak after him. His head is white with the snows of wisdom. He is wise."

"Good, Numank-Charake, you are a great brave, despite your youth. Soon you will be renowned in council. I know the motives which shut your mouth. You love her."

The young man started.

"Do not deny it," said the old man. "I know it, as does my son, and we rejoice both of us. She will be happy with one who is both strong and brave. Not knowing our sentiments towards you, you have nobly hesitated to accuse a near relative. You have acted well. But time presses, and not a moment is to be lost. We

know our cousin as well, or perhaps better, than you do. We know also that falsehood never soiled your lips. To keep further silence would be to commit a bad action – to make yourself almost the accomplice of the ravishers. Speak out, then, like a man."

"I obey," replied the young man, respectfully.

"And hide nothing, I pray," added François Berger.

"I will tell you everything," he said, "as you know my heart is given to Evening Dew. I love her; her love is my joy, her voice my happiness. On my return to the village, after my unfortunate expedition, Evening Dew was no longer in her father's wigwam. I asked news of everybody; I even ventured to ask you. Your answer filled me with discouragement. I returned to my hut heartbroken with despair. My grandfather had pity on me. Kouha-hande loves me, and spoke like a wise man. 'Go,' he said, 'find Bright-eye at the spot agreed on; he is the brother of Evening Dew; he will grieve with you, and perhaps give you good advice. During his absence I will watch. If necessary, I will go to the hut of the white man on the Wind River. Adieu, my son, and may the Wacondah accompany you,' I obeyed my father. I put on my travelling moccasins, took my gun, provisions, all that a hunter requires, and started. But my soul was sorrowful; a sad presentiment froze me to the marrow of my bones; Wacondah sent it."

"Courage, child," said the old man, kindly. "Wacondah is powerful and just; He tries those whom He loves."

"Two hours ago I returned to the village of my nation. I was

very sad and uneasy. Without a word I left my comrades and friends, and rushed to my wigwam. My father's father awaited me. He was gloomy and thoughtful, and rose as I entered. I guessed at once what I had to expect. This is what I learned. Kouha-hande is a sachem whose words are not to be doubted. For two days, hid in the thickets, he watched the hut of the squatter of the River of the Wind. The second day, before the rising of the moon, there was a sharp whistle near the habitation, and a man appeared. He was very pale, wore the costume of the hunter of the prairies, and carried a rifle. At the distance the sachem could not make out his features. Almost immediately, however, a second person appeared on the scene, coming from the inside of the hut, and this was the squatter himself."

"Are you sure of what you say?" asked the old man.

"Kouha-hande knew him," replied the chief.

"Go on," gloomily remarked old Berger.

"The two men approached each other, spoke for a long time in a low tone, and then separated, after exchanging one phrase, which the sachem heard distinctly. This phrase, which seemed to summarise their conversation, was – "

"'You swear upon your honour that she will be quite safe and respected in every way,' said the squatter."

"'As if she were my own sister or daughter, I swear unto you,' replied the hunter."

"The two men then parted. That was all. Two hours passed away. Just about the time when the blue jay begins its first song,

the sachem, who had remained still in his hiding place, his eye and ear on the strain, heard a noise approaching rapidly, like that of a number of people who, fearing no surprise, thought it useless to take any precautions. They soon came in sight. They were no less than thirty palefaces, armed with rifles. They surrounded the hut and attacked it on all sides."

"The squatter and his servants defended themselves like people taken by surprise – that is, feebly."

"The assailants soon entered the hut. My grandfather now heard a great tumult inside. But he was alone, could do no good, and therefore remained in his hiding place. At the end of an hour the men came out, escorting a fainting female, who was wrapped in a frazada. Satisfied with the result of their expedition, they went off without even closing the doors behind them. Kouhande waited some little time, and then, convinced that the assailants had departed, went into the wigwam."

"All was in disorder. The furniture was overthrown and broken; the squatter, his wife, and servants, tied and gagged, lay on the floor. The sachem hastened to stir up the fire, then he lighted some torches, after which he set all the people at liberty. Even then for some time they were unable to move or speak."

"The squatter's wife wept, wrung her hands, and bitterly reproached her husband with his cowardice, which had been the cause of the abduction of her niece."

"And what did he say?" asked Berger.

"Nothing," said the chief; "he was overwhelmed, appeared

struck by stupor, remaining utterly motionless. Presently he seemed to recover his spirits. Kouha-hande then offered to start in pursuit of the ravishers, but the squatter refused, alleging that the trail was no doubt by this time so cleverly concealed as to render pursuit impossible. He left the punishment of the villains in the hands of God. The sachem, seeing plainly that he was not wanted, went away. But Kouha-hande was determined to reach to the bottom of the dark scheme; instead of returning to his village, he followed the abductors."

"These, having apparently no fear of pursuit, had left ample traces of their passage in the forest, and took not the slightest precaution to conceal their route in a straight line through the forest. It led direct to the Missouri. The sachem at once saw through the whole thing. These hunters, the sachem declared, could only be the redoubtable outlaws commanded by the extraordinary chief before whom all trembled, white and red, in the prairie."

"Tom Mitchell," groaned the old man.

"Himself," said the chief. "The sachem, after exploring the two banks of the river for many miles, came back to the village of his nation, and told me what he had seen. This is my story. Have I well said?"

"You have," cried François Berger; "but let me speak. I am the only one person in fault. I should never have separated from my daughter. It is my duty to go in search of her. I will find her or perish in the attempt."

He attempted to rise, but Oliver checked him.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, gently, "if I interfere in so delicate and grave a matter. The friendship I bear your son, the cordial way in which you have received me, compel me to feel as if I were personally concerned in the matter. May I therefore be allowed to speak a few words?"

"Speak," said the old hunter.

"Sir," replied the young man, modestly, "I have listened to every word as recorded by the chief, and I believe every word as recorded by him. It appears to me, therefore, in examining the facts, that the attack of the hunters, arranged with the squatter himself, his repugnance and refusal to pursue them, point either to treachery or a strange mystery, which it would be wise to clear up."

"Unfortunately," said the old man, "we share your opinion. The treachery is too flagrant to be doubted."

"You believe in treachery," urged Oliver.

"Base and cowardly treachery," cried Berger, striking the table.

"Be assured, then," continued Oliver, "and you will be a better judge of the correctness of my opinion than I am, your enemies, whoever they may be, have spies around you, spies employed to watch your movements, and to report them at once. You Will not have been ten minutes on the trail of the ravishers ere they would be on your track."

"Quite true," said the old man; "what is to be done?"

"A very simple thing, and one which I am very much surprised you have not thought of before. We have only reached the village two hours ago; I, as a stranger, am unknown to anybody, nobody troubles himself in any way about me. Whither I go matters to no one. With your permission, at nightfall I will start in company with Bright-eye. If our early departure is noticed, we can easily give some reason. It is you who are watched, and no one else. None, knowing the indomitable energy of your character, will believe that you have allowed anyone else to go in search of your daughter. We shall be three men, two of whom know the desert well. The trail of one man is easy to follow, but not of three wary hunters ever on their guard, at all events, without the spies be discovered and killed. This is my opinion, and, frankly, I think it good."

"You have spoken well," repeated the grandfather; "what you say is just. We are proud to have you for a friend, and we thank you. It is not necessary to reflect long without owning you are right. It would be folly to contest the matter, my son, and I, therefore, gladly confide to you the task of finding our child. Go, as you propose, this evening at the setting of the moon, my grandson, the chief, and yourself."

"And you will succeed," said the father.

"I hope so, sir," responded the Frenchman; "rely upon it, I shall do all I can for my new sister."

"My son was fortunate to meet you. God bless you all."

The two young people simply thanked Oliver by looks. It was

eleven o'clock at night when they started, without being noticed.
We already know how they met the outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM MITCHELL

The sun had long since gone down, the night was dark and cloudy, not a star shone in the sky. George Clinton, seated on a bench before his door, awaited the return of Keen-hand and his two dogs, who had accompanied the three travellers a short distance; the two serving men had gone to bed.

George Clinton, half an hour before, had satisfied himself that his wounded guest slept soundly.

His eyes fixed on vacancy, the young man was dreaming, giving way to soft and melancholy reverie; his soul, borne on the wings of fancy, was far away; it was wandering in the realms of space after the beloved, after the idolised young girl, for whom he had sacrificed and abandoned everything, and the mention of whose name made him quiver with delight.

Suddenly he was awakened from his Elysian dream by an almost superhuman cry of anguish.

The young man started as if he had received an electric shock; he turned pale, clutched the barrel of his rifle, and then listened, trying in vain to pierce the intense darkness which wrapped all nature as in a winding sheet.

Some minutes passed, during which there was not a breath in the air, not the slightest sound. George Clinton breathed more

freely, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Heaven be praised," he said, "I was mistaken."

Scarcely had he uttered these words, which he hardly believed, when the same frightful cry was repeated.

"It is a terrible warning," he cried; "some fearful crime is being accomplished. I cannot hesitate."

And, without another thought, he darted off in the direction whence came the lugubrious sound.

Almost ere George had quite disappeared in the darkness a shrill whistle, modulated in a certain way, was twice repeated; then a heavy black mass appeared crawling on the earth; this dark mass stopped at short intervals, and then again advanced. This strange phenomenon was soon followed by a second, a third, another, in all ten.

In a few minutes all were round the hut. Then a second whistle was heard, a signal of course, as they all rose and revealed ten armed men. They were ferocious-looking beings, with sinister features – true bandits of the prairies.

"We are the masters," said one; "the serving men sleep, the master is away, let us waste no time."

"Do you know where he is?" asked a second.

"I pretty well guess. The place is familiar to me. But let us be careful. I don't want to be caught."

"Be satisfied; Versenca and Jonathan never left their post, and Paddy is on the watch. All is safe."

"I am not more timid than another, but I like to be sure."

"We are losing time, and should act."

"Quite so, Sleepy; but I want to know why the captain, who must have heard our signal, is still quiet?"

"But you know the captain is wounded."

"True, but he is no puling girl to be affected for long by a wound. Let us go in and find him."

"'Tis useless, I am here," said a grave voice.

And a man leaning on his rifle and walking with some difficulty appeared before them in the doorway.

"The captain!" they all cried.

"Silence, boys," with an imperious gesture; "I am happy to see that you have not forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!" cried Versenca, boldly; "Do we not follow wherever you go? Are we not devoted to you body and soul?"

"Quite right," said the captain, with a bitter smile; "let us say no more about it. I am here, and all is well."

"And now, captain, we await your orders."

"Right! And how many are here?"

"Ten here ready to obey – three on the watch."

"Have you horses? – but of course, I need not ask. Bring them up and let us be off."

"With empty pockets?" cried Sleepy.

"What do you want?" asked the captain.

"Want!" exclaimed Sleepy, shrugging his shoulders; "Why, is not this wigwam very rich, and the owner absent? There can be no two opinions as to what should be done."

"Comrades," said Tom Mitchell, "the owner of this home found me wounded in the prairie and took me in."

"We know that – what then?"

"What then! Not only did George Clinton shelter me beneath his roof, but saved my life from the lynchers."

"Thank goodness," said Versenca, "that induced him to leave the hut by the exercise of cunning."

"Without violence, I hope," said Tom.

"Quite so; sent him on a false trail, that is all."

"Then you are agreed with me – no pillage."

"No pillage!" cried all; "Let us go."

None had entered the house, and now, on the order of the chief, they turned to go. George Clinton was before them.

"Gentlemen," he cried, standing resolutely before them, "what is the meaning of this visit in my absence?"

"Confound the fools who did not warn us."

"I was never far. I have heard nearly all."

"Much good may it do you; and now let us pass."

"On the contrary; I decline to let you pass," said Clinton.

"Good!" said Sleepy, rubbing his hands together; "After all there will be some broken bones here."

"Perhaps," continued Oliver, clutching his rifle.

"Ah! Ah! So the fun is going to begin," said the outlaw.

"Silence," cried the captain, sternly; "silence, and fall back." As soon as they had obeyed he advanced to Clinton.

"As you have heard our conversation," he said, "why do you

try and oppose our free departure?"

"Because, as you know, I am answerable for your person. I promised you should not leave my house until you were quite cured of your wounds."

"Your solicitude for my health is charming," said the captain, ironically, "and I really know not how to thank you."

"I take little interest in you. My honour is concerned."

"You are not polite, while I try to be courteous. I will therefore simply remark that strength is on my side. Still I should be sorry to proceed to extremities."

"Menaces are useless. Will you return to the house?"

"The demand is ridiculous," cried the captain.

"How so?" said a voice, and at the same time two magnificent dogs bounded to where Clinton stood.

There was a moment of profound stupefaction on the part of the outlaws, who saw this succour arrive.

Tom Mitchell, however, stooped towards Sleepy and whispered a few words in his ear. The man nodded, turned away and disappeared.

"Beware!" said the captain; "I have hesitated to attack one man. But if blood is shed it is your fault."

"We shall see," said Keen-hand, appearing beside his master, "you are ten and we are five. What do you think?"

"Nothing," replied the chief, laughing; "but you seem to forget that we have the advantage of the situation. If we like we can take possession of the hut, whence I fancy my good friend will

find it difficult to dislodge us."

"Without counting that we are master of the person of the owner of the wigwam," cried Versenca, triumphantly.

It was true. Assisted by the sentinels whom the outlaw had brought up behind, he had been seized.

He was at once taken inside and then secured with his servants, whom the noise had at last aroused.

But even this had not been done without a struggle. The two splendid dogs on seeing their master attacked had flown at the throats of the bandits, had knocked two down and throttled them in a minute; then, obedient to a whistle from Charbonneau, they had darted into a thicket, whence came a discharge of firearms. The three young men had returned.

The outlaws retreated into the hut, prepared to defend themselves to the last gasp. Battle was imminent.

"Stop," cried the voice of Oliver, "stop, for heaven's sake," and rushing forward he added, "Captain Tom Mitchell, I demand safety for myself and friends, and a truce until this unfortunate affair can be settled amicably. Speak."

"I consent at once," said the captain, frankly; "what has happened was not of my doing. Down with your arms. Let all retain their positions. As for you, sir, you may advance, you are entirely under the protection of my honour."

"I am here," replied Oliver, advancing.

The two men went into the house and seated themselves at a table near an open window.

"I am prepared to listen," said the captain; "I suppose you think I deceived you, or the young girl was gone."

"It was our opinion, sir."

"Don't be in the least uneasy," said the captain, "I only secured the girl as a hostage for my own safety."

"A hostage!" replied Oliver.

"Yes. I have an important question to treat of with her tribe. But let us speak of our own affairs."

"I don't understand you."

"I will explain, and you will find that all that has taken place today has been caused by yourself."

"Really," cried Oliver, "I understand you less and less."

"I have no doubt you are astonished," said the captain; "but we can come to an explanation in a few words, M. Oliver."

"You know my name."

"And a great many other things besides, as you will soon know," continued the other, coldly; "but let me explain. For reasons which it is unnecessary to mention, I had deep interest in making acquaintance with two new arrivals in this country, you, sir, and Mr. George Clinton. My plan of introduction was rough. My wound, which I inflicted on myself, and which is only a scratch, deceived you all. I am now personally acquainted with you both, and I am delighted. Still, things looked ugly for me – but what is the use of a battle in which half of us would be massacred? I want nothing of the kind. I have important business to transact and must go. In this instance I count wholly on you."

"On me, sir! By what title?"

"I cannot explain. I have promised to restore Evening Dew, and I will keep my promise. Just now she serves as a hostage. She is treated with the utmost deference and respect. Now let me pass at once. Delay is useless."

"But, sir – can I – " stammered Oliver.

"Save an outlaw, a man with a price on his head!" said the other, bitterly; "But I am not what I seem. One day – "

But Oliver was thinking, and, after some minutes of reflection, said, "It shall be as you wish."

"Thank you; and now away to your friends and take George Clinton with you," said the captain.

Oliver went out with the young American and soon returned.

"You are free to return with your companions," he said, on re-entering the hut; "I give you my word."

"Farewell until we meet again. We part friends."

"I have no hatred against you, but I sincerely hope we shall never meet again."

"It shall be as Providence wills," was the reply.

Five minutes later the outlaws were galloping away, and soon disappeared in the darkness.

"Who is this man?" murmured Oliver, sadly; "Is he one of those enemies who pursue me everywhere?"

At that moment his friends came up and his thoughts went into a different channel. Still he did not easily forget his interview with that extraordinary man, who seemed to know him, and by

whom he was really fascinated.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAMUEL AND JOSHUA

After leaving George Clinton, Samuel Dickson went at once to the residence of his brother Joshua.

The sun was still high in the heavens when he reached the settlement; his brother was in sight, galloping towards him.

"Come along," he cried, shaking hands; "I was so impatient to see you, I really could not wait any longer."

"I hope there is nothing wrong, brother," said Samuel.

"Nothing at all. Everything is going for the best."

"I am glad to hear it. I was rather uneasy."

"I am sorry to hear that. But why are you so late?"

"I had to go on a small journey. There was no hurry."

"You are wrong, Sam. But here you are, and all is well. But had you come sooner it would have been better."

"Well, here I am, so out with the news."

"I have to speak of important things, and I have to ask your advice, who are wisdom itself."

"Awfully wise," cried Samuel, laughing, "when in the end I only carry out all your insane ideas."

"True! But still you were generally right. The fact is, if you speak words of wisdom, and then act a little the other way, it is simply out of love for me. I know it, my brother. I am not

ungrateful, and love you dearly."

"I don't doubt your affection. But you alarm me."

"Why?" said Joshua, laughing.

"Whenever you talk like this, I smell a rat, in the shape of some awful scheme, some diabolical plot."

"I see you are not to be easily deceived," said Joshua; "but come in, let us eat, and then talk. The matter of which I wish to speak is of general interest."

"As you will; but still I am monstrously afraid."

"I know you are a great coward," cried Joshua.

At this moment they reached the house, alighted, and, giving the horses to the servants, entered the parlour, escorted by Dardar, who had come to meet them.

The two ladies received Samuel cordially.

"Here he is at last, Susan," said her husband.

"He has been anxious about you all day," cried Susan.

"Then he has some mad scheme. But we shall see presently. Good evening, Diana, my dear. You look well."

"A truce to compliments," cried Joshua; "to supper."

They now entered the dining room, where the whole household was collected, men, women, and children. Of course, enormous quantities of meat, bread, and vegetables adorned the board. The repast was truly Homeric.

After dinner the servants retired, and the ladies would have done the same, but Joshua detained them.

The ladies seated themselves with a rather uneasy glance. He

poured out a stiff glass for himself and brother and drank his off.

"Thank heaven!" he began, "We are now solidly established in our new dwelling, and it is time to speak of business."

"Hilloa! Talk business now? It is late. Why can we not put off our business arrangements until tomorrow?"

"You forget, my brother, I sent for you on purpose –"

"I remember – well, go on, I am at your orders."

"Harry, have you obeyed my orders?" asked Joshua.

"Yes, father," replied the young man.

"All right," continued the squatter, refilling his glass. "Your health, all of you. In an hour, I'm off."

"Off!" cried the ladies, in great alarm.

"Hem!" said Samuel; "If you are not satisfied here, I am."

"I don't want to drag you into my affairs," replied Joshua, coolly. "But I shall not be long away. It is only a journey."

"I thought," exclaimed Samuel, "he was as mad as ever; will you explain the object of this journey or exploration?"

"One which you will highly approve, my brother," he went on. "I desire to open up commercial relations."

"Very good idea. But what is your precise motive?"

"I have said enough. I think my object serious."

"Well, if you have no more to say, stop at home."

"Will you tell me why?" asked Joshua.

"Because your voyage is utterly useless. All the information you can desire to obtain I can give you in ten minutes."

"You!" cried Joshua, wildly.

"Certainly!" said Samuel, modestly; "I can, and will do so, if you will be good enough to listen to me."

"I shall only be too happy. Still I don't understand!"

"That is unnecessary. You must know that I have obtained my information from hunters and redskins."

"Hunters! Redskins!" cried Joshua.

"Don't you know they swarm about here? I never go out without meeting some of them. So I say stop at home."

"Explain yourself, brother," said Joshua, sulkily.

"Well, you think yourself very far from all white folk. You are very much mistaken. Learn, then, that though we are in the centre of the most warlike tribes of Indians, you have new forts not very far off, including a fur station."

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Joshua.

"And my friend and brother, are you aware what magnificent river runs at your own door? The Missouri!"

Joshua bowed his head on his chest and was silent, while Samuel rubbed his hands and smiled slyly.

"What do you think of the information?" he said at last.

"If you are certain of what you say, it is excellent."

"Then you give up the idea of your journey?"

"Certainly not. Admitting that all you tell me be true, it is of the highest importance for me to visit the fur station and all other settlements above and below us on the river, in order to become friendly, and prevent rivalry."

"What rivalry?" half screamed Samuel.

"Any that might arise. Of course they will soon know all about me and might interrupt my commercial speculations."

"A fool will have his own way," cried his brother.

"Abuse is not argument, my brother," said Joshua.

"I apologise; but you are determined to go. I see you are; then heaven protect all in your absence."

"Will you take no advice?" ventured Susan.

"I have made up my mind," he replied; "I never alter."

"But, father," cried Diana, "what are we to do during your absence? You leave us wholly undefended."

"Silence, daughter," said the squatter, smiling; "don't be so tragical. I do not leave you undefended, as you say. Your uncle will watch over you. Your brother Henry commands in my absence. You have a fort. What more is wanted?"

"How do you mean to travel?" asked Susan.

"In the boat I launched today, with Sam, Jack, and two servants. I do not take away many defenders."

"But you are not here to lead."

"That is enough," he cried; "I have decided. Besides, it would be absurd not to visit my new neighbourhood."

No more was said. The squatter was escorted by all to the riverside. He bade them all adieu, kissed his wife and daughter, shook hands with his brother, gave his son Henry some last directions, entered the boat, and was off in a very few minutes, whistling "Yankee Doodle," perhaps in reality to hide his strong emotion from his two sons.

CHAPTER XV.

NEW CHARACTERS

We now visit a beautiful gold-sanded strand on the right banks of the Missouri, about fifty miles from the new settlement in Moose Deer Valley, and about equidistant from the strong fort already established by the fur company.

This strand, which was only reached by a narrow defile between two perpendicular mountains, was exactly opposite an island of which it was impossible to make out the dimensions, which, however, were very considerable.

Lights shone like will-o'-the-wisps in a fog; the island, which was thickly wooded, communicated with the mainland by means of a dangerous ford, full of holes and whirlpools. It was too dangerous to be adventured in by any but those who knew it. The island, moreover, was guarded by two eminences overlooking the ford, and which commanded the approach against any enemy if well defended. On the other side the island was inaccessible.

This island was the refuge, the fortress of the terrible outlaws of the Missouri, with whom we have made acquaintance.

Originally it had been selected by the Government as an outpost, but the partisans had first taken it and made it impregnable.

As the outlaws rarely interfered with citizens of the United

States, generally very poor in those regions, the Government, well aware of its impotence to dislodge the pirates, pretended to look upon them as irregular troops doing service.

But the outlaws knew that if the authorities only had the chance they would be exterminated.

But that part of America was little peopled, and few except trappers and wanderers knew anything of its capacities. The outlaws, therefore, to a certain extent, were pretty certain of impunity for all their actions for the time.

A hundred horsemen were camped on the strand of which we have spoken; their horses were picketed near their fodder, around the campfires numerous groups were talking or sleeping, while on every hand walked sentinels.

In a hut composed of whittled boughs and mud, a man sat on a buffalo's head, consulting papers from a large pocketbook. Another man stood respectfully by him, awaiting his orders. The first man was Captain Tom Mitchell, the other was Camotte.

A sentinel kept guard in front of the cabin.

It was about four o'clock in the morning. The stars were beginning to pale in the sky, the sky was covered by fleecy white clouds. Day was at hand; a fog rose from the river, and covered the camp as with a funeral pall. It was cold.

"I say," cried Tom, "I am frozen. Are you asleep, Camotte?"

"No, my lord."

"Then shove some wood on the fire, it's nearly out."

Camotte threw on some dry wood, which flared up.

"Something like," said Mitchell; "and now let us talk, Camotte. By the way, I may as well ask you, are you very tired?"

"I am never too tired to serve you, Excellency," said the other.

"I knew you would say that," cried Mitchell; "true, I saved your life twice, but we have been quits long ago."

"And yet I want to ask a favour."

"Anything, except leave me," replied Tom Mitchell.

"Never; it is something else. It is simply this; don't, your lordship, give me such another mission. Whatever you may think, my master," cried Camotte, warmly, "it is not pleasant to play the part of a traitor and scoundrel."

"I think you did it very cleverly," laughed Tom; "there, you are an old fool. Whom else could I trust? Having settled that very important fact, any news on the island?"

"Evening Dew frets. You should send her home – all the more that it makes some people talk," he added.

"Who has dared?" said Tom Mitchell, frowning.

"Stewart. But don't worry; I settled him by blowing his brains out, and no one else has since made an observation."

"All right. What about the river?"

"Five men went down in a canoe yesterday. It was the squatter of the valley, his two sons, and black servants."

"Where on earth could he be going to?" mused Tom.

"Well, we can find out by stopping him on his return."

"I'll see about it. Anything else?"

"Hum! You have had Major Ardenwood's letter asking an

interview today? Oh, yes! There are some Frenchmen at the fort, at all events, one of them. Still I am aware that three strangers will accompany the major."

"Whom did you send out to inquire?"

"Tête de Plume. I could not send Versenca; in the first place, because he was drunk; secondly, because I don't like him."

Then, after a pause, Tom whispered to Camotte, who listened with deep and almost religious attention.

"And now," said Tom, "that you understand me, away."

Camotte went out. The worthy Mexican was the devoted friend, the alter ego, and moreover the lieutenant of Tom Mitchell, who wholly confided in him. Despite of events we have described before, Camotte was worthy of his trust.

The chief of the outlaws quietly made some alterations in his toilette, which was a little out of order from his long journey. He had just come off a distant expedition. The booty had been at once transferred to the island.

Having done this he drew the curtain that served as a door.

The camp no longer looked the same. The fire was out. The two eminences were guarded by sharpshooters. A detachment of twenty men guarded the entrance to the defile. The rest of the troop were ready to mount at a sign.

Tom Mitchell looked about him with an air of satisfaction. Camotte had executed all his orders faithfully.

At this moment the sun rose. It was like a theatrical scene. Light fell suddenly upon everything.

"Oh!" cried the captain as a bugle sounded in the distance from the defile, "I was just in time."

He stood erect in front of his hut, leaning on his cavalry sword, and waited with sublime tranquillity.

After some few words had passed, four strangers, one in the uniform of a major of the American army, came out from the defile, led by Camotte, who walked respectfully in front of them, and made their way in the direction of the captain.

"Good day, Captain Mitchell," said the major.

"You did me the honour to write," observed Mitchell.

"Well, I have some important business to talk about; but first allow me to present to you these two gentlemen. They are French, and consequently I cannot pronounce their names. Oh, I assure you they are worthy gentlemen."

And the fat major laughed heartily.

The captain bowed to the two Frenchmen without speaking. One was a man of about fifty, still young, and with apparently polished manners and rather haughty mien; the other, much younger, was bronzed by the sun, strong, and rather rough.

"This gentleman," continued the major, "is our own countryman, Mr. Stoneweld, of Boston city."

"I think you know me," observed the apoplectic speaker.

"Who does not know Master Stoneweld, of the house of Stoneweld, Errard, and Co., the richest shipowner in all Boston?"

The stout man smiled with an air of satisfaction.

"It seems you know one another," cried the major. "I am glad

of it, because everything will go smoothly."

"How so?" cried Tom Mitchell.

"My dear captain, these gentlemen want you; they came to me for that purpose. Certainly their business must indeed be of an important character," he added, "to induce them to make such an awful journey, lasting over a month."

"It must be serious business," said the captain.

"The two French gentlemen bring letters from the Home Secretary."

"Indeed!"

"And Master Stoneweld one from General Jackson," added the major, "So now I expect you will do the best you can."

"Have no fear."

"Of course not, though I know you are rather hot at times. As for myself, I am choked with fog and hoarseness," he added.

"I am at the orders of these gentlemen," replied the captain.

"I shall be happy to do all in my power for them."

"Spoken like a man," said the major in a fidgety way. "But this seems hardly the place for a serious conversation."

"I am sorry for it," replied Tom Mitchell coldly. "I was not told until the last minute, and you must take me in the rough."

"Why not go over to the island?" suggested the major. "I dare say we should be more at our ease – eh, captain?"

"I am sorry, major, but it would take too much time. Besides, I have already provided refreshments here, if you will accept."

"With the greatest of pleasure," cried the major, coughing

behind his hand; "and yet these gentlemen have important matters to discuss, very important matters," he added, complacently.

"What matter, major? Breakfast first, business afterwards."

"As you will," said the major, following him into the hut.

By the orders of Camotte, during this conversation a very copious breakfast had been prepared. It was almost wholly composed of venison; but flanking the solids were a number of long-necked bottles that at once showed their Bordeaux and Burgundian origin, to say nothing of some brands of Champagne so dear to Americans.

The major was so delighted that he said "Hum!" no less than three times, and then spoke to the outlaw chief.

"Let them say what they like," he cried, "you are a man."

"I am proud to hear it," cried Tom. "Let us be seated."

The Frenchmen had hitherto said nothing. The elder now spoke. As the captain invited them to commence breakfast, he said:

"Above all, sir, allow me to observe that before commencing business you offer us bread and salt."

"You are my guests, gentlemen," said the captain, gravely; "you are under the safeguard of my honour, that is enough."

"The major has indicated that we each wish to see you alone."

"Which means?" asked the outlaw.

"That I desire, as these conversations may probably be of very long duration, to see you quite alone," he added.

"Sit down and eat," replied the outlaw. "After the repast you and your companions will follow me to the island. Once more, are you not satisfied?"

"Of course," cried the major; "if not, I go bail for you."

"Thank you, major; and now eat, drink, and be merry."

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM MITCHELL AS REDRESSER OF WRONGS

The ice once broken, through the instrumentality of the Burgundy, Bordeaux, and Champagne, all went on swimmingly.

Major Ardenwood, who, perhaps, alone of all those present had nothing to conceal, and who was naturally a bon vivant, did all in his power to make himself the convivial leader of this improvised party, composed of so many various elements. He was warmly supported by the captain, who showed all the best qualities of a true amphitruon, and treated his guests with a generosity and courtesy which quite charmed them.

Of course not a word was said of the object for which they had met. In fact, the subject was carefully avoided.

The major was the first to rise.

"The best of friends," he said, "must part. I am wanted at the fort, and with your permission will retire."

"I thought," observed the captain of the outlaws, "your intention was to wait for these gentlemen here."

"No; on reflection," replied the major, laughing, "I should only be in their way. I will wait at the fort."

"I will escort them myself," said Tom Mitchell.

"That will be the better plan," continued the major. "Thanks

for your hospitality. The wines were excellent."

"I will send you a few baskets, major."

"Many thanks," cried the American, shaking hands, and then departing under the guidance of Camotte.

"We can now go to the island," said the captain.

"On foot, on horseback, or do we swim?" said the young Frenchman.

"You will see. Follow me, gentlemen," replied Tom.

They did so, and found a boat ready for their reception. On the invitation of the captain they all seated themselves.

"Now, gentlemen," said Tom Mitchell, with a smile, "you must pardon me, but I must blindfold you. Fear nothing," he added, as he saw them start. "It is the custom. No stranger has ever entered the island in any other way. Besides, you are not obliged; only if you refuse you must return."

"Do as you like," cried the elder Frenchman.

Some men who held pocket handkerchiefs now approached, and deftly bound their eyes. The boat then started. In a few minutes they felt the boat strike against another shore, and received a slight shock as it did so.

"Don't touch your bands," cried the captain; "wait a while."

They were then lifted up with every precaution by several men, who soon put them down, removing the bandages.

Looking round, they found themselves in a vast chamber, furnished with every regard to comfort and elegance.

The captain was alone, the men having left.

"Welcome, gentlemen," he said. "I hope the frank and cordial hospitality I shall offer you will make you excuse this precaution."

The strangers merely bowed.

"I need not remind you, gentlemen," continued Tom Mitchell, "that you are at home; but, in order not to detain you any longer than is absolutely necessary, let us to business. Will you follow me, sir, first?"

This was said to the younger Frenchman. As he spoke he opened a door and the two passed out together.

The two other strangers remained alone. The Frenchman, with a frown, began to walk up and down whistling; the American sat down.

As soon as Tom Mitchell had the other alone, he cried —

"Sir, tell me at once if I am mistaken."

"I see you have a good memory," replied the other, "and yet it is a very long time ago since we met."

"Then I am not mistaken?" cried Tom Mitchell.

"Monsieur Maillard, my name is Pierre Durand."

"Who saved the life of myself and father," said Tom, shaking him by the hand, "even though you knew —"

"I knew that your father an hour before had sat as president of the grim tribunal of the Abbaye," replied the young Frenchman. "I knew the intense hatred which was felt towards you; still, I drew you more dead than alive from the river."

"You did more — you hid us and helped us to escape."

"It was tit for tat; your father once saved my life."

"But you paid your debt with usury. When I parted from you at New York – I was sixteen then – I said, 'Whatever happens, my life, my fortune, my honour is at your disposal.' I am ready to fulfil my promise, so speak."

"I knew you would do all in your power," said Pierre Durand; "therefore I have come. How is your father?"

"He has become an Indian, and wholly broken with everything in the shape of civilisation," said Tom.

"Is he happy?" asked Durand.

"Yes. He was a man of conviction. His faults – his crimes if you like – during the Reign of Terror were caused by his extreme sincerity. In that time of awful and terrible commotion," continued Tom, "he acted wholly conscientiously."

"I believe it, and therefore do not presume to be his judge. I am but a weak and ordinary man," cried Durand; "when the time comes God will judge these Titans of the revolution according to their merits and convictions."

"Doubtless. I shall let him know of your coming; but why?"

"A question of life and death in connection with my best friend, a man I love as a brother," cried Durand.

"Say no more. An express shall start at once."

"Have you received any letters signed '*An old friend*'?"

"Many! I presume, then, that you are that friend; but why not avow yourself?"

"I could not."

"If all you tell me in those letters be true, it is an odious and infamous action," cried Tom Mitchell.

"I know it is, and I have counted on you and your father to see that justice be done," continued Durand.

"Count on me," said Tom. "I have seen your friend, and though he does not like me, he won my heart at once."

"He will change his mind."

"But what can my father do in the matter?"

"Everything. You must now understand, my friend, that if I have abandoned my ship in New York to the care of my mate, if I, who hate dry land, have started on a journey through the desert, it must be for powerful reasons."

"Doubtless. May I ask what they are?"

"Because, my friend, here in there is his most implacable, most ruthless foe," cried Durand.

"Here!" exclaimed Tom.

"Yes – here, in this island, in that room," replied Pierre Durand, pointing to the one they had left.

"Are you sure of his identity?" asked Mitchell.

"I have watched him for five years, followed in his track, known every movement he has made," said Durand.

"And he does not know you?" cried Tom.

"He knows me very well. He came over in my ship; we are the best of friends; he tried to buy me over."

"This is incredible," observed the outlaw.

"Yet true. I am his confidante, his devoted servant; I enter into

all his views, and he counts on me as a slave."

Both young men burst out laughing.

"Then you have come from New York together?"

"Not at all. We met at the fort two days ago, and as I am no longer disguised," said Pierre Durand, "despite all his cunning, he knew me not."

"Well, the matter is settled," said Tom Mitchell, in a whisper; "we have our man here; he shall never leave."

"My friend," said Pierre Durand, gravely, "that is not the game we have to play. He is as slippery as an eel."

"I don't think, if I made up my mind," said the outlaw chief, with a sinister smile, "he would ever escape me."

"Well, there is a time for everything. In the first place, learn his projects, so that we may unmask him. This will be all the more easy," said the sea captain, "in that we know who he is, while he is ignorant of our designs."

"There is one thing worth mentioning," said the outlaw; "I, too, know him well. He will be rather surprised presently."

"Be careful. One word might put him on his guard."

"Is not my whole life passed," continued the outlaw, sadly, "in outdoing others in cunning and diplomacy?"

"True. I leave, then, everything to you."

"And now learn, my friend, that you are free as air, and absolute master of my domains," he added, laughing. Then he picked three flowers, and placing them in his buttonhole, said, "This will give you free passage everywhere you like. Now for

your two travelling companions. But follow me."

He opened a door opposite that by which they had entered, and, crossing several apartments, at last came to a room which overlooked a charming and elegant garden.

"Here you are at home," he said; "come, go, do just as you like. At the end of the garden you will find a door opening on the woods. We shall dine at six. Be back by that time, and you will find the table laid here. We can then explain all."

With these words the outlaw left his friend.

As soon as he had returned to his private room, Tom Mitchell, or Maillard, son of the terrible judge of the Reign of Terror, sat down before a table, wrote a few lines, sealed the letter carefully, and then struck a gong.

At once Camotte appeared and took the letter.

"Send this letter to my father by express," he said; "let him kill his horse, but let me have the answer."

"He shall be gone in five minutes."

"And now," continued Tom Mitchell, with a sarcastic smile, "send that fat American in here."

Camotte bowed and retired. Next moment the great American shipowner came in puffing and blowing.

"Sit down, sir," said Tom Mitchell.

The fat man obeyed with a grunt.

"I think it rather hard that a man like me – "

"Pardon me," said the captain, coldly; "allow me to remark, before you go any further, that I have no need of you, and did

not send for you. You it is who, in the company of several other gentlemen, have come to me. All of you have, I dare say, serious reasons for taking this extraordinary step. I have in no way solicited the honour. All I can do is to listen to each in his turn. I have seen one and settled with him; if you have anything to say to me, speak."

This speech, pronounced in a clear, bold tone, not unmixed with sarcasm, at once, as if by enchantment, calmed the irritation of the fat man. At all events, it compelled him to dissimulate it. After, therefore, mopping his head and face several times with a pocket handkerchief, and coughing once or twice behind his hand, he spoke —

"I was angry, sir," he said, "and own it freely."

"Be pleased, sir, to come at once to business," continued Tom Mitchell; "another person waits."

"You are, I believe, well acquainted with me?"

"I have known you a long time," remarked Tom.

"Sir, I have a nephew; he is the son of my wife's brother," began the other, "a very near relative."

"Well, sir?"

"This nephew, though a charming youth," cried Stoneweld, "is mad, utterly, hopelessly mad, sir."

"Really, sir," said the captain, "and have you come all this way to tell me this piece of news?"

"Pardon me, sir. When I say that he is mad, I believe I exaggerate. I should rather say that his intense folly has taken the

form of monomania. This charming young man, as I have the honour to tell you, is in love, sir."

"A very natural matter at his age."

"But, sir," cried the shipowner, "he is in love with a young person in no way suited to his station."

"Perhaps he does not think so."

"Of course, sir, it is not his opinion. But it is mine. I am a serious man; I feel a great interest in him. Now that his father is dead I am his legal guardian – though he repudiates me. Now, sir, would you believe it," cried the fat man, "I had arranged with his aunt, my wife, the most delicious marriage for him with a young girl – I may as well be frank, a niece of my own?"

"And he wouldn't have her," said Tom.

"No, sir, he actually would not have her. Do you understand such folly on his part?" cried the other.

"Well, it is strange. But what have I to do with it?"

"I will explain if you will allow me."

"I really should feel much obliged," urged Tom.

"After refusing contemptuously this eligible alliance, which united every condition of age and fortune and position, what did the fool do? Excuse me if in my anger I speak thus of a nephew I love. One fine morning, without saying a word to anybody, he left his business to a partner, and started off, sir – what for?"

"Well, how can I say?" asked Tom.

"In pursuit of this wretched girl without family or fortune, whose parents had emigrated to the Indian frontier."

"Oh, oh!" said the captain, who began to feel interested, and who listened with a gloomy frown.

"Yes, sir," said the fat man, too wrapped up in his narrative to notice the other's looks, "so that my nephew must be somewhere here about this neighbourhood, looking after his beauty, neglecting his affairs and fortune. For a girl he will certainly never marry."

"How do you know, sir?"

"At all events I will do everything in my power to prevent it," cried the irate citizen of Boston.

"How will you set about it?"

"Sir, I have been told that you were the only man in these parts capable of arresting a fugitive."

"You do me too much honour."

"I have a number of unclosed accounts, needless to explain, with his father. Arrest the young man, sir!" cried the Bostonian; "Arrest him and place him safely in my hands, and the sum of one thousand guineas is yours."

As he spoke, the worthy shipowner pulled out an enormous pocketbook from his coat and opened it.

"Excuse me, sir," said the captain, "do not let us be in quite such a hurry. You have not quite finished."

"How so?" cried the American.

"You have forgotten," said the captain with simple frankness, "to tell me the name of your foolish nephew."

"George Clinton, sir, a very fine lad, though I say it."

"I know him," retorted the captain, coldly.

"You know him!" exclaimed the shipowner, "Then the affair is settled. You will have him arrested."

"Perhaps," said Tom Mitchell; "I will reflect on the affair, which is not so easy as you may suppose."

"To you, the chief of the outlaws?"

"George Clinton is not alone. He has many and powerful friends on the frontier."

"But I have plenty of money."

"I tell you, I will reflect. You will now return to the fort under escort. In two days you shall have my answer."

"But allow me to pay you a deposit," cried the other.

"Keep your money for the present," said Tom, and striking a gong, Camotte appeared as if by magic.

"But – " blustered the rich merchant.

"Not another word, sir. Wait patiently for my reply. I am your most obedient servant."

And led away by Camotte, the rich shipowner of Boston went out spluttering and perspiring as before.

"Now," said the captain to himself, with a sarcastic smile, "let us see what the other fellow is made of."

He went to the door, and, entering the cavern, bowed to the Frenchman, who was still walking up and down.

"Will you be good enough to come this way, Monsieur Hebrard," he said, with an engaging smile.

The Frenchman looked at him with astonishment, but on a

repetition of the invitation went in.

The captain chuckled to himself at this evidence of the other's utter surprise and bewilderment.

It was as if he had scored one.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DIPLOMATIC CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO RASCALS

The two men looked at one another for some minutes in silence, just as two clever duelists might have done before venturing on the attack. But though each tried to read the other, their faces were like marble.

At a mute invitation from the outlaw, the stranger took a seat, and at once commenced the conversation.

"Sir," he said, "it is a matter of surprise, that you, a perfect stranger, should address me by a name – "

"Which is or has once been yours, monsieur," answered the outlaw chief, with freezing politeness.

"That is quite possible. I do not deny it. When one travels in foreign parts on important business, incognito – "

"Is adopted, I am aware, which only deceives fools and dupes," said the outlaw, speaking slowly.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the other.

"I recollect a certain Count de Mas d'Azyr, an excellent gentleman of Languedoc, who had this mania."

The stranger shivered all over, and a lightning flash darted from beneath his dark and heavy eyebrows.

"Well," continued the outlaw, with imperturbable sang-froid,

"his noble manners so thoroughly denounced him, despite the plebeian names he chose to assume, that he was compelled at the end of a few minutes to give up this absurd acting."

"Really, sir," cried the stranger, "I do not see the meaning or relevance of your allusions."

"I permit myself no allusions," said the outlaw, with the utmost suavity. "Very far from it. What matters it to me, I ask, whether you call yourself Hebrard, Count de Mas d'Azyr, Philippe de Salnam, Jean Lerou, or take any other alias?"

"Sir!" cried the other.

"Allow me, I pray, to conclude. In you I only recognise a person who is very warmly recommended to me, who has need of my services, and at whose disposition I therefore place myself at once – ready to serve him if possible," he continued; "at all events we can talk, and I should be glad to know in what way I can be of use."

"Sir," said the stranger, smiling, "you are agreeable and witty. I find that people make mistakes in their idea of you."

"I am obliged by your high consideration," continued the outlaw; "still this does not explain to me – "

"Who I am," cried the other, with feigned candour; "well, sir, considering you have mentioned so many names – "

"You allow, then, that I was right."

"Certainly; you were quite right," answered the other, quickly; "I therefore sincerely beg your pardon."

"It is not at all necessary."

"There is, however, one thing that I must confess puzzles me very much," continued the envoy.

"May I, without offence, ask what that is?"

"No offence. I should certainly be only too glad to have an explanation with you on the subject."

"If it depends upon me," the other said.

"It depends absolutely on you. I always thought I had a good memory. I believe myself to be a very good physiognomist, but really I have no recollection of you."

The outlaw burst into a roar of laughter.

"Which only proves," he added, when he recovered himself, "that I am much more clever at incognito than you."

"Which means – "

"That not only have we met, monsieur, but that we have carried on a long connection," said Tom.

"Many years ago?"

"Not at all, sir. I speak of very recent times, though I will allow that our acquaintance commenced long ago."

"You astonish me," said the Frenchman.

"The matter is very easily explained. We have found ourselves connected at different times, under four different names: I have told you yours, I will now tell mine. Do you remember Louis Querehard? Do you recollect François Magnaud, Paul Sambrun, and Pedro Lopez?"

"Perfectly," cried the other.

"Well, sir, those four individuals you now see present under

the name of Tom Mitchell, your very humble servant; though," he added, with exquisite politeness, yet with a tint of irony, "I have several others available on occasion."

"Well, sir," cried the stranger, "you have indeed taken me in. I was a fool not to recognise you."

"Sir!" cried the outlaw.

"Let us call things by their names. It is by far the best plan. I am indeed not to be forgiven for being taken in like any novice. I deserve to be dismissed from the service of the Government which employs me, and which believes me to be worthy of credit, as possessing a certain amount of wit and diplomatic ability. Well, it is useless to discuss the matter any longer. Give me your hand, sir," he cried; "you are my master. We bear no malice."

"I only wanted to prove – " said the outlaw.

"That I was a fool – and I must say you have done so to my entire satisfaction," he added, in a tone of complete good humour. "But however unpleasant the shock is to my self-love, I am delighted at what has happened."

"How so?" asked the outlaw, in the same tone.

"Because the ice is broken between us, and we can come to an understanding; the more readily," he added, "that the matters I have to speak of are the same as before."

"If that be so," said the outlaw, "we can easily come to terms."

"Is it not so? Now here is the affair in two words. The revolution is over in France. Beneath the hand of the mighty man of genius whose talent and patriotism have raised him to power,

Government has recovered its strength, society begins to breathe, the nation is once more rising to its proper position amidst the people; New France has entire faith in the man whose every step has hitherto been marked by victory, which has definitively declared on his side."

"I presume," said the outlaw, quietly, "that you are speaking of the General Bonaparte."

"Of no other. This great, this extraordinary man has, with his mighty hand, put down the Jacobins and the mob, driving them back to their original nothingness. He has chained forever the awful hydra of revolution. You have, then, heard of him?"

"Most certainly," said the son of Maillard, coldly.

"I am glad to hear it. This great man, who is as mighty a politician as he is a successful general, has followed, while slightly modifying it, the line traced by the national convention of execrable memory with regard to the Spanish colonies."

"Sir," said the son of the regicide, "you are hard upon fallen men, upon vanquished enemies, who, if they were guilty of faults – of crimes if you will – did very great and glorious things, giving the first signal for social regeneration over the world."

"It is useless, sir," said the envoy, "to discuss that matter. My convictions are very strong."

"Well, sir, if that be so," replied the outlaw, "let us return to the General Bonaparte, and pray explain to me his new plans with regard to the Spanish possessions in America."

"They are no new plans," observed the envoy; "only the old

ones modified to a certain extent."

"Modified in what way?"

"There are two capital points. In the first place he wishes a cordial and frank alliance with the President of the United States, who cordially approves the policy of the French Government, which will, in the end, be to the advantage of America. Then he has given extensive powers to numerous sure and accredited agents, who, though, are not openly known because of the temporary Franco-Spanish alliance. Large sums of money have been provided by means of which to overthrow that species of Chinese wall with which Spain has surrounded its frontiers, which none ever cross and return."

"Sir," said the outlaw, with a smile, "I have crossed them many a time and oft, and yet here I am."

"It is precisely because of that fact that I am here."

"Ah! Ah!" said the outlaw, with a laugh; "After all, despite your denials, you had seen through my incognito."

"Well, it is useless to deny it. I have long known you to be a man of heart and action. I also know that by means of your vast connections no one can more readily help us to revolutionise the colonies. Besides, you are a Frenchman."

"I am of no country," replied the other.

"What, then, do you call yourself?"

"An outlaw," answered the chief, "and king of this island," drily; "an outlaw, and nothing more."

"Well, be it so, sir. Still you are exactly the man I want. I

have need, for the execution of my plans, for the carrying out of my projects, of a man who is bound by no locality, by no social consideration. In fact, an outlaw."

The other bowed ironically.

"Now are you disposed to be the man?"

"First," said Tom Mitchell, "let me know what you want of me. I will then give a decisive answer."

"Well, then," replied the envoy, "let us put diplomacy on one side, and speak frankly and openly."

The outlaw leaned back and assumed something like the attitude of a tiger about to spring.

"Sir," he said, with a most singular smile, "I was about to make the very same proposition."

"Very good," replied Monsieur Hebrard; "that shows that we are beginning to understand one another."

The captain bowed, without speaking.

"The Spanish colonies," continued M. Hebrard, "are already beginning to feel the germs of revolutionary fermentation. Some devoted and enterprising men, yourself among others, have gone into the cities and towns of Mexico."

"All this I know; a truce to flattery."

"They have seen the zealous patriots, who are, however, but ill prepared as yet for the revolution we ardently desire."

"Ill prepared indeed," cried Tom Mitchell.

"But overtopping all others is a man who has immense influence with the Indian races. You know him."

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Tom; "You mean Dolores, the priest."

"I mean no other. He is the only man upon whom we can count. We must enter into serious relations with him."

"For what purpose?" asked the outlaw.

"In order that when the hour comes he may be ready to raise the standard of revolt," cried the other, "and ready to draw the population after him against Spanish despotism."

"Very good, sir. But it is a long way to Dolores, where lives the curé Hidalgo. The road is one of the most dangerous I know. I doubt if any agent, however clever, can reach him. Will you allow me to give you sincere advice?"

"Speak; I am deeply interested."

"My own opinion is that it would be much better to despatch a light vessel, schooner or brig, into the Gulf of Mexico. This vessel could cruise along the coast, and, when opportunity offered, land a confidential agent."

"You are quite right, sir," said the envoy, "I must say this means has been tried with success."

"Well, what then?"

"The secret was betrayed by a traitor; in consequence, the Spanish authorities are always on their guard."

"Hence you conclude –"

"That on reflection, and having experience as a guide, the difficult road you describe is the best."

"Hum!" said the outlaw, and relapsed into silence.

The real meaning, the interesting point, of this conversation,

so long, had not been touched upon. The captain knew it well, and kept himself in reserve. M. Hebrard was for some time afraid to enter upon a frank and true explanation.

There was a deep silence; at last the captain determined to fire the train, if he were blown up.

"Then you think I must go by land," he said.

"There is no choice," responded Hebrard.

"The conditions?" remarked Tom.

"One hundred thousand francs, not in notes, but in golden ounces, stamped with the effigy of the King of Spain."

"That is tolerable, for a beginning."

"Then there will be as much more for the negotiations, or, as I see you hesitate, at first one hundred and fifty thousand."

"Why at first?" asked Tom.

"Because your mission will be divided into two distinct parts," replied the envoy, quietly.

"Let us thoroughly understand the first," continued the outlaw; "we will talk of the second presently."

"Another hundred thousand on your return with despatches," continued the diplomatist, warmly.

"Hum!" said Tom; "That makes – "

"Three hundred and fifty thousand francs (£14,000) for only the first part of your mission," said Hebrard.

"It is very liberal. Now for the second mission," said Tom Mitchell, watching the diplomatist with his wary eye.

He knew that the real thing was coming now; he was satisfied

of this from the other's uneasy manner.

"Hum!" said M. Hebrard, as if speaking to himself; "Three hundred and fifty thousand francs is a pretty sum."

"Well, for the first part of the mission which you have explained to me I don't say no. It is," he added, "a tough job, that I know. Still, nothing risk, nothing have. Now for the second part."

The diplomatist assumed an air of genial frankness that made the outlaw shudder. He was at once on his guard.

"The Spaniards, as I have said," observed M. Hebrard, jauntily, "are forever on the watch. No one, no matter what his position, is safe on the frontiers. To go in or out is simply impossible."

"Diable!" cried Tom; "What you say is not calculated to give me much confidence or hope."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Hebrard, "we are playing a frank and open game, I do not desire in any way to conceal the dangers that may await you. I am only speaking in a general kind of way, certain that whatever obstacles occur you will be right."

All this was verbiage; M. Hebrard was evidently only trying some method of putting his real thoughts into words.

The outlaw, who expected what was coming, smiled.

"Unfortunately," said the diplomatist, who did not know what to say, "the real danger is not on the other side."

The outlaw started up.

"You may well be surprised; the danger is here."

"What do you mean?" cried the outlaw.

"I will explain myself, if you will allow me. Of course," said M. Hebrard, "the Spaniards are no more fools than we are."

"I was always of that opinion."

"They have started a countermine!"

"A countermine!" cried Tom. "What do you mean?"

"You will soon see. Knowing something of our designs, they have covered the American frontiers with spies."

"It is certainly very clever," said the outlaw.

"Very clever," said the diplomatist, in a husky voice; "but then, clever as they are, we know all about it, every detail."

"You do not mean to say so?" cried Tom Mitchell.

"Yes. And more than that, we know the chief of the whole gang of spies," added Hebrard. "And much more than that, we know all his secrets, cunning as he is."

"That is something," said Tom; "but now what you want is to catch him."

"Yes," said Hebrard, "that is the very thing; you yourself must see the necessity of catching him before you start."

"I should think so; it is as plain as running water; but," added Tom Mitchell, "it is not very easy to snap up such a rascal in the desert, which simply is as full of such rogues and vagabonds as an anthill is full of ants."

"Don't be uneasy on that point," cried Hebrard; "I shall easily put you on his track."

"All right. Then all we have to do is to catch him?"

"Exactly so," said the other, with a sigh.

"And you will pay for this capture?"

"Very heavily, my excellent friend."

"Oh! Oh! Then you are very anxious to secure him?"

"Yes," continued the other, gloomily; "dead or alive; it matters not. I should say, for information's sake, dead rather than alive."

"I like plain speaking. He is very much in your way?"

"Very much more than I can explain."

"And how much will you pay for this mission?"

"Alive, twenty-five thousand; dead, fifty thousand francs."

"It appears to me you prefer him dead. But never mind, give me the information. His name and address."

"He is a Frenchman, who has taken the name of Oliver. In appearance he is a hunter, a trapper, anything that comes uppermost. For greater safety he has connected himself with an Indian tribe, and is to be found about the Missouri."

"It is a very long way from the Mexican frontiers," observed the outlaw, in a coldly sarcastic voice.

"True. But the fellow is cunning; his safety requires him to be extremely cautious. Do you accept?"

"I accept on one condition," replied the other. "It is fully understood that he is to be dead, mind."

"No matter, so that we have him."

"Well, then, we are agreed on four hundred thousand francs (£16,000)? I shall want half down."

"I have the money in gold in my valises. I will pay it to you

this evening," replied the envoy.

"And now that this is settled, you are in no hurry?"

"None whatever."

"Well, I know pretty well where to find the man you are in search of. I must say that, without suspecting the odious part he has been playing, I have on the several occasions we have met him felt the greatest repulsion."

"This is extraordinary."

"Well, you see, on the desert everybody knows everybody. But as I wish to make no mistake, to commit no error in so grave and important a matter, I should like you to be present at his arrest. Besides, it would be more regular."

"Hum!" cried the other, with a look of considerable annoyance; "The idea of further voyage in the desert – "

"Is not pleasant, I know," interrupted Tom; "but that is not necessary. You shall remain quietly here."

"Then I consent. When do you expect to catch him?"

"In less than a week, unless I am very unfortunate."

"Then I can wholly depend on you?" cried Hebrard.

"I swear to you on my honour that it will not be my fault if at the end of the time you are not face to face."

"I thank you in advance," said the envoy.

"There is nothing to be grateful for," replied the outlaw, with an odd expression and smile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRISONER

That same day, about nine o'clock in the evening, the outlaw was seated face to face with Captain Pierre Durand at a table covered with dishes, plates, and empty bottles, which testified to the appetite of the two men, and to the rude attack they had made upon everything in order to satisfy it.

The two men were now smoking excellent cigars, while sipping, like true amateurs, some mocha, served in real Japanese cups. Close at hand, in addition, were bottles containing every conceivable kind of liquors and spirits.

They had reached that precise period in the repast so prized by gourmets, when, the mind elevated and the brain excited by succulent food and generous libations, one feels a kind of happy state of being that is simply charming.

For one whole quarter of an hour neither of the two men had spoken or cared to speak.

It was the outlaw who first broke the charm.

"You are aware, my dear captain," he said, "that in half an hour I must leave you and be off."

"Excuse me," cried Pierre Durand, starting, "if I believe a single word of such a mad assertion."

"Yes, I am truly sorry to say, it is the exact fact. Doubtless you

know as well as I do, business before all."

"I have not the remotest idea of interfering with your affairs," cried the sea captain, glumly.

"Then what do you mean?"

"That you are not going to leave me in the lurch."

"Still, when I tell you I must go," said the outlaw.

"All I mean is this, that if you go I go," cried Pierre.

"What! A night journey like this?" asked Tom.

"Night journey, day journey, it is all the same to me. I am an old sailor," growled Pierre Durand; "and every kind of locomotion is equally indifferent to me. Besides, I have known you a very long time, haven't I? And I know what sort of trade you carry on," he added.

The outlaw kept his countenance.

"Of course, I shall not be surprised or scandalised at anything I see. All I know is that here I should be bored to death, having nothing to do. It would be a nice little change to join you in one of your filibustering expeditions."

All this was said in a joking kind of way that excluded all idea of giving offence.

"Well," said Tom Mitchell, smiling, "any way, you would find yourself utterly disappointed."

"How is that?"

"I am not going to plunder, but to restore. Of course I don't pretend it is my usual custom," said Tom.

"Very well," cried Pierre; "I think that will be much more

funny. I should like to join in the good work."

"But, my friend – " urged the outlaw.

"There is no but about it. I am a Breton, that is to say, as obstinate as several mules," continued Pierre Durand; "and I mean to come, unless, indeed, you tell me that my demand is in reality offensive and intrusive."

"By no means," cried Tom; "come then. Who can resist anyone so obstinate as you are, my friend?"

"You are a delightful fellow. I am ready."

"Not quite; there are conditions; at least, one."

"Pray let me know what it is."

"You must profit by the few minutes that remain to us to disguise yourself, so as to be unrecognisable."

"To what purpose, in a country where nobody knows me?" cried Pierre Durand; "Will you tell me a reason?"

"That is my secret. Will you consent? That is right. Now go there, and you will find all things necessary."

Pierre Durand was about to leave the room, but the outlaw indicated where everything was ready.

"There is another favour I must ask of you."

"Go ahead, nothing surprises me," said the captain, who, with magnificent sang-froid had commenced his work.

"In case chance should bring us face to face with people we know," he said, earnestly, "you will still keep up your incognito, even if you happen to see among these the face of the friend whom you have travelled so far to see."

The captain, who was blacking his beard with soot and fat, having already darkened his eyebrows, gave a start.

"Will he be there?" he asked.

"I do not say so. It is more than probable that he will not be there. Still, I wish to exercise every precaution."

"Hum, still it appears very hard."

"Still, do you consent? Yes or no."

"I repeat what you just said. I suppose I must," said Pierre; "and as I see you are in earnest, I promise, on my honour."

"Enough; then make haste."

After rendering his features and countenance utterly unrecognisable, the captain threw off his outer clothes, and assumed the costume of a planter of the frontier.

"What languages do you speak?" asked Tom.

"Nearly all civilised ones as easily as I do French," replied Durand; "but, above all, English and Spanish."

"Very good," continued Tom; "then during our excursion I shall always call you Don José Remero."

"Don José Remero be it."

"You must recollect that you are a captain in the Spanish navy, fled from home after a fatal duel."

"All right," grinned Pierre.

"Do not forget to take weapons. I can strongly recommend this tison. It is a perfect and choice rapier," said Tom; "have this long and pointed knife in your right boot. You may want it when you least expect. Do you ride?"

"Like a centaur," laughed the Frenchman.

"I am very glad to hear it; and now secure this carbine and this pair of pistols," continued Tom.

"Why, I shall look like an arsenal."

"My friend, it is the custom of the country," said Tom; "no one thinks of travelling in any other way."

"One does at Rome as Rome does. I'm your man," cried Pierre, laughing; "what do you think of me?"

"Unrecognisable. I should not know you anywhere. You are clever; even your accent is changed."

"That is always the first thing to be thought of," said Pierre Durand; "and now what is the nature of the restitution?"

"We are going," replied the outlaw, with a smile, "to restore a young girl to her friends and relatives."

"A young girl?" cried Durand.

"Yes – a most charming and interesting maiden, whom I captured the other day. I can no longer resist her tender sorrow."

"Bah!" said the young sailor, with a grin.

"I swear to you, upon my honour," cried the outlaw, warmly, "that she has been treated with the most profound respect and even tenderness."

"Spoken like an honest man," said the captain, warmly. "But may I ask with what object you took her away?"

"I had a motive, which I fear me exists no longer. I even fear," he said, gloomily, "I have entered upon a bad speculation. But it is useless to discuss the matter anymore. Soon there shall be no

mysteries for you. Be seated again."

"Why?" asked the captain, puzzled at all these mysteries.

"She comes, and it is rather important I should say a few words to her before we start on our journey."

"I am your humble servant to command."

Tom Mitchell struck a gong, and Camotte appeared.

"Have my orders been executed?" asked the outlaw.

"Yes, captain. The stranger is watched carefully, and yet without creating suspicion," replied the lieutenant.

"Where is he now?"

"In his own room."

"If tomorrow he asks after me," said Tom Mitchell, "you will give him the answer already agreed on."

"Yes, captain."

"What about the detachments?"

"Those have started within the hour, I shall start with the last as soon as the moon rises," replied Camotte.

"Remember," said Tom, thoughtfully, "that tomorrow morning at sunrise, if not before, you must be back."

"Be easy as to that, captain," said the other, significantly; "I shall not leave the island without a chief just now."

"Humph!" observed the captain, suspiciously, "Is there anything fresh in the air?"

"Nothing in appearance, much in reality."

"You can speak out here," said Tom Mitchell; "if you have anything to say, say it without hesitation."

"About an hour ago, when I was going my round," said the matter-of-fact and faithful Camotte, "I met that fellow Versenca at the water's edge; he was wet through, and had evidently been swimming. When he saw me he was utterly confounded, and then when I questioned him as to his conduct he gave me a lot of silly reasons a child of five would have seen through."

The captain reflected with a dark frown.

"Redouble your vigilance, my good Camotte," he said at last. "On the first suspicion arrest him until I come back."

"For greater safety, captain," replied Camotte, "I shall take him with me tonight, I can watch him."

"Mind he does not give you the slip. A traitor would be dangerous just now. He is as cunning as an opossum."

"I know it, but two can play at the same game."

"Good. I leave it to you. Have Black Athol and Goliath saddled for us, and Miss Lara for the prisoner, if safe."

"She is quite a lady's horse – an ambler. She will quite suit her rider," replied Camotte.

"Mind you," continued Tom, "let the three be harnessed for war – victuals, holsters, ammunition, and pistols."

"As a matter of course. When Black Athol and Goliath go out, I know you are bent on mischief. What absence?"

"Three days at most," replied the captain; "and during that time never leave the island."

"And you go alone?" asked Camotte, anxiously.

"With the gentleman, as I have already said."

"I think you should take Tête de Plume," said Camotte.

"Will you tell me why?" asked the captain, smiling.

"No one ever knows on an expedition what may happen," drily replied the lieutenant, "and two are better than one."

"But I have told you, we are two already."

"Very good," he continued, "but you would be three."

"I tell you what it is, Camotte," said the captain, laughing, "you do just as you like with me. Let him come."

"I thank you heartily," cried the delighted lieutenant.

"Above all, whatever happens, keep my absence a secret," said Tom Mitchell; "that is above all essential."

"Your orders shall be obeyed in all things."

"And now bring in the prisoner," continued Tom. "By the way, have you said anything to her?"

"Captain, you know I am no babbler," observed Camotte.

"Very true," said Tom, and then turning to Pierre, he added, laughing, "that fellow does not put too much confidence in me."

"His manner is strange. Perhaps he distrusts me."

"No; Camotte is a bulldog for fidelity and discretion; but, like bulldogs, he is both suspicious and jealous," replied Tom.

"I bear him no malice for his jealousy," said Pierre; "besides, I myself always like those kind of men."

"Yes, they are indeed very precious," continued Tom; "unfortunately, you have to give way to them a little."

"Well, when it is from pure devotion, nothing can be said."

At this moment the door opened, and a young girl entered the

room, effectually checking the conversation.

This young girl was Angela, or Evening Dew, whichever it may please the reader to call her.

She gave a graceful curtsy, and then remained with downcast eyes before the outlaw chief.

The two men rose from their seats and bowed respectfully.

"My sister is welcome," said the outlaw, smiling, and speaking in the Indian tongue; "be seated."

"Evening Dew is a slave, and presumes not to sit down in the presence of her master," responded the young girl, in a voice as melodious as the song of a bird, but the tone of which was firm and distinct. "I have said."

Evening Dew was a delicious child of seventeen at most, in whom the two races, white and red, of both which she was the issue, seemed to have vied which should produce the most wondrous chef d'oeuvre.

Her elegant and slight form, slightly bent forward with that serpentine undulation which belongs to American women, her long hair, black as the raven's wing, fell almost to her feet, and when loosened, might have served her as a cloak. Her complexion had the golden tint of the daughters of the sun; her great blue and dreamy eyes were fringed by long velvet lashes; her mouth, revealing her vermilion lips, and a row of dazzling white teeth, gave to her physiognomy that rare expression scarcely ever found except in some virgin of Titian.

The sailor was dazzled at the really marvellous beauty of the

young girl. He had no idea that the whole continent of America could have produced such a fairy.

The captain smiled at her reply.

"Evening Dew has no master here. She is with friends who will protect her," he said, heartily.

"Friends!" she cried, clasping her hands together, while the pearly tears went down her cheeks; "Is it possible?"

"I swear to you, young girl," he continued, "that what I say is true. I have sent for you to apologise for what has happened, to demand forgiveness for your cruel abduction."

"Oh, sir," she cried, in excellent French, "oh, sir, can I really believe my ears! Is it true?"

"You would insult me by disbelieving," he replied, in the same language; "tomorrow you will be with your friends."

"Thank you, sir, from my soul," she sobbed forth.

And before the captain could prevent her – before he suspected her intention, she was on her knees kissing his hand.

Tom Mitchell respectfully raised her from the ground and led her to the chair she had once refused.

"Then you are very unhappy here?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she cried, "I have indeed been very unhappy; how, in fact, could I be otherwise?"

"And yet," said the captain, with a frown, "I have given the most strict orders with regard to your treatment."

"I beg most earnestly to acknowledge, sir, that I have been treated in the most honourable fashion, that I have been

surrounded by the most delicate attentions. But oh, sir, I was a prisoner, alas! Far away from those I love, and whom my absence plunges, like myself, in utter despair."

"Pardon me, miss," said the chief, "my wrong towards you will soon be repaired, I promise you."

"Then you are good indeed!"

"Tomorrow," he added, with considerable emotion, "you shall be restored to the bosom of your family."

"Do that, sir," she cried, "and I will love you. Ever after you shall be as a brother to me."

"I will endeavour to merit the title, Miss Angela," he said, softly; "henceforth you will no longer curse me."

"Curse you who give me back to those I love! No, I will bless you from the bottom of my heart," she cried, earnestly, "and, believe me, God will amply reward you."

"I have a strong conviction that way myself," he said, smiling; "even heaven could scarcely be deaf to your prayer."

The girl coloured deeply at these words, which were uttered with such earnest conviction as caused her to bow her head.

The captain simply smiled softly.

"Are you tolerably strong, miss?" he asked.

"Why do you ask me this question?" she said.

"Because," he answered, "we have a very long journey to go before we find your friends."

"What matters about fatigue, sir? I am already strong. The very idea has restored my vigour."

"We shall have to undertake a long night journey," he continued, "through the prairies, by very rough ways."

She clapped her pretty hands together joyously; a charming smile lightened up her physiognomy, and then she cried out in a delighted and proud accent —

"I have Indian blood in my veins, sir," she cried; "I am the daughter of a brave Canadian hunter. Fear nothing for me. I am not a woman of the towns, who, I am told, can neither walk nor run."

"They are very much like it," growled Pierre.

"Try me, put me to any proof, and you will see of what I am capable to get back to my friends."

"Come, I see, at all events, that you are as brave and noble a woman as you are beautiful. Come, it is time."

"Do we go directly?" she cried.

"Yes," was his smiling answer.

"One moment," she said; "give me time to thank God for having touched your heart. Let me pray."

"Do as you wish," he replied, respectfully.

The young girl folded her arms across her breast, raised her looks heavenward with an inspired air for some minutes. One could see by her thoughtful brow, from the compression of her coral lips, that she was praying. Her face was radiant, her eyes were full of tears. She seemed transfigured.

The two men, despite their rude aspect and rough natures, stood respectfully beside her, utterly cowed, overcome, crushed

under the weight of her purity and innocence. They stood before her hat in hand.

When her short and ardent prayer was over, the girl turned to them with an ineffable smile.

"Now, gentlemen," she said, bowing to the two men who she saw were henceforth her slaves, "I am quite ready."

The outlaw and his companion bowed and followed behind as she led the way outside.

Camotte was there, as was also the valorous Tête de Plume, holding the horses.

Tom Mitchell led Miss Angela to the mare Lara, which he had ordered to be saddled, and held the stirrup respectfully.

"Mount," he said, just as if he had been speaking to a princess in her own right.

Then, as soon as the outlaw had given some last whispered directions to Camotte, they started, Tom Mitchell riding at the head of the little band.

By the time the ford was passed over in safety the moon had risen in the sky above the trees.

The four travellers were now safe on terra firma.

"Now, Miss Angela," said Tom Mitchell, gallantly, "place yourself between this gentleman and myself. Good. And now, Tête de Plume, my boy, take the rearguard, and, whatever you do, look out."

The four cavaliers dashed off at a hand gallop, and soon disappeared in the windings of the defile.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH TOM MITCHELL DISCOVERS THAT HONESTY IS A GOOD SPECULATION

We now direct our steps to one of the most savage and abrupt sites in all the desert, before the rising of the sun.

Five men are crossing a narrow gorge in the mountains, the tops of which are rocky and bare or covered with snow. Just now they are rendered almost invisible by the dense fog which the sun's rays cannot dissipate.

These five travellers came from the interior of the mornes, as the hilly plains are called, and were bound for the plains, which they began to make out a short distance before them, traversed, or rather cut in two, by the extensive stream of the Missouri, the sandy waters of which were half concealed by high grass, willow, and the cottonwood trees that lined its shores.

The five wayfarers of whom we have spoken walked painfully over the flints that paved the gorge, the dried-up bed of a torrent, which itself had suddenly disappeared during one of the cataclysms so common in that region.

Having reached the extremity of the gorge, they stopped, looked around, and gave a sigh of satisfaction.

Their task had been a rude one. For far more than three hours they had been stumbling in the midst of a whirlpool, nothing else, of flint stones, which, at every step they took, slid under their feet like mountain shingle.

Four of these men were whites, wearing the costume of hunters of the prairies; the fifth was an Indian.

They were George Clinton, Oliver, Bright-eye, Keen-hand, and Numank-Charake, the chief.

Now, then, let us ask how it came about that these five men should be there at that early hour in a place so far from their home – a hundred miles, in fact, from the regions they were in the habit of frequenting, and why were George Clinton and Keen-hand members of this singular and perhaps fortuitous group.

Of course we shall as soon as possible satisfy the legitimate curiosity of our friend the reader.

"Oh!" said Keen-hand, "It is my opinion, friends and companions, that the wisest thing to be done is to stop here."

"Why stop here?" cried Bright-eye, in far from a pleasant tone of voice; "Explain yourself."

"For a hundred reasons, every one of which is better than the other," resumed Keen-hand.

"I should like to know the first," said the Canadian.

"Well, it is a very excellent one, I think. You and I and the chief are used to these diabolical roads, which is far from being the case with our companions, which you ought to have observed without telling a very long time ago."

Both Oliver and Clinton tried to protest.

"No! No!" cried Bright-eye, in his frankest manner. "I am a brute. So say no more about it, as I proclaim it myself. Let us camp at once."

"Here is an excellent place," cried Keen-hand.

The hunters had halted under a grove of gigantic gumtrees. A fire was lighted, and each one, resting himself, prepared for the morning meal.

"Well, to tell the truth," said Oliver, gaily, "I will now confess that I needed repose; I was simply done up."

"I could scarcely put one foot before the other," observed George Clinton, who was stretched out on the grass.

"There!" cried Keen-hand; "Was I not right?"

"Well, considering that I have owned I was a brute," growled Bright-eye, "are you not satisfied?"

"Perfectly!" said the guide.

Numank-Charake had in the meantime undertaken the office of cook, an office he filled effectively.

A few minutes later all were eagerly devouring slices cut from a quarter of venison which had been broiled upon the hot embers.

Then the gourds were opened and passed joyously from hand to hand.

These brave young men had walked all night through impracticable paths which only hunters could overcome. They were literally famished.

But now they entered into the spirit of the thing rarely. Soon

everything had disappeared. All was eaten.

When the last mouthful had been washed down, and the very last drop of brandy absorbed, each man in his turn gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Now, then," remarked Bright-eye, looking obliquely at his companions, "I think we may talk."

"Well, I am of opinion," said Keen-hand, gaily, "that after a hearty meal, two things are agreeable – a pipe and talk."

This declaration, the justice and opportuneness of which everybody at once recognised, was like a signal; instantly, pipes in red clay, with cherry tree tubes, were drawn from their belts, stuffed, lighted, and soon a cloud of blue smoke surrounded the head of every guest like a glory.

"Now, then, Bright-eye," said Oliver, gaily, between two puffs, "fire away as soon as you like."

"Messieurs, my friends," replied Bright-eye, "my heart is very sad. Despite all I can do, I feel a kind of presentiment that this man, in whom we have so trusted, is deceiving us."

Numank-Charake lifted up his head.

"I know the paleface chief," he said, in his guttural tones, shaking his head in a way to give more emphasis to his words; "he is a man whose tongue is not forked. His word is as gold – and my brother, Bright-eye, is wrong."

"In the name of heaven, is it you who speak in that way, chief?" asked the astonished hunter; "You, of all men in the world, so deeply interested."

"Numank-Charake is a chief in his nation," quickly interrupted the redskin, his words, which swelled his bosom, coming directly from his heart; "the man who despises his enemies is not a brave warrior, but exposes himself to the reproach of only vanquishing cowards."

"Well spoken, chief," said Keen-hand.

"The Grey Bear, the paleface chief, is ferocious, cruel, and a thief, but he is brave and truthful."

Oliver and Clinton stared.

"What he has said he will do, he will do. What he has offered he will give. Did we go openly to him? No! We hunted him like a wild beast Wounded, dying, we wished to kill him. He escaped; thanks not to cunning, but to audacity. He is a great chief."

The whites exchanged glances.

"Nothing would have been more easy for him than to laugh at our menaces and to conceal himself from us. Instead of that, he has sent us a collar – letter – in which he invites us to an interview, for the purpose of ending the troubles which divide us."

"This may be a trick," said Oliver.

"No! It is neither the act of a false nor of a double-faced man. No! It is the act of a brave and loyal warrior. That is my opinion. Whatever may happen during the next few hours, I am convinced that if we have confidence in him I shall be found right. I have said."

The chief relighted his pipe, which had gone out during his speech, and from that moment he appeared to take no further

part in the conversation. Still he listened to what the others said.

"As far as I am concerned," observed Oliver, "I think the chief has spoken well. I agree with him on every point. As far as I can judge, this pirate or this outlaw, whichever you choose to call him, is not a man like other men. There is something in him which is not at all ordinary. In one word, he may, it is true, be a brigand, but, certainly, his is a very lofty nature. Until further events, I, for one, shall believe in his word."

"All this is very possible," observed Bright-eye, shaking his head doubtingly, "but no one can deny that he is the captain of a monstrous set of brigands."

"What does that prove?" said Oliver.

"Nothing that I know of. Still I am decidedly of opinion that his word is not to be trusted."

"Then allow me to observe," said George Clinton, drily, "why are we here?"

"Why, because one always lives in hope, despite our better reason. Still we ought to be prudent."

"Though I am not quite of the opinion of Bright-eye," said Charbonneau, "I think we should be wise not to rush headlong into a possible trap which the bandits may be preparing for us. He is right as to the wisdom of prudence."

"I, too, am an advocate for prudence," said George Clinton; "nothing can be more wise than to take all proper precautions. That I fully agree with. But do not act in such a way as to cause our loyalty to be suspected, or our confidence in the man's word."

"That can be easily arranged, my friends," said Charbonneau, with a cunning smile "let me alone, and, believe me, all will go well."

"My worthy friend, act just as you think proper. You, perhaps, more than anyone, have experience of the desert, and nobody objects to your taking every precaution."

"The best precaution," said the Indian chief, again speaking, "when you deal with a loyal enemy is to have every faith in his word; to have no suspicion of any kind in your mind."

"Very good, chief. It is very likely after all that you are right. I will not discuss the matter with you, though I repeat I am very much surprised to hear you speak thus. I only ask of you one thing – that is, to remain neutral in this affair until the actual moment of action has come."

"Numank-Charake loves Bright-eye; he is his brother. He will do whatever the hunter wishes; still regretting that he is constrained to act against his wishes," he answered.

"I take all the blame on myself," said Bright-eye; "and shall be the first to own my error, if indeed I am found to be in error. A man can say no more, even if he were speaking to his father."

The Indian said no more, but bowed his head in token of acquiescence. But he smiled with such a keen and subtle irony that the hunter was so deeply moved as to blush.

"I fear nothing for myself," he cried.

"Eh, what!" exclaimed Charbonneau, stretching out his arm towards the river, "What is going on?"

Every eye was fixed upon the spot indicated by the hunter's sudden exclamation.

"It is a canoe," said George Clinton.

"Manned by two men," observed Charbonneau.

"And those two men," said the chief, after one glance from his eagle eye, "are two palefaces. He knows them well. One is the old hunter called Sharpear, the other the son of my nation – Leave-no-trail."

"My father and my grandfather!" cried Bright-eye, in utter surprise. "Surely, chief, you must be mistaken. Why should they come here?"

"Very likely," observed Oliver, gently, "the same motive leads them here that has led us."

Meanwhile the canoe, impelled by vigorous arms, approached with extreme rapidity, and soon was at no very great distance from the camp of the hunters. Then it turned rapidly towards the shore, and its bow was soon stuck in the sand.

Two men landed.

Numank-Charake had been right. These two men were indeed the father and grandfather of the young hunter. They were coming to the encampment.

The five adventurers all leaped up, and eagerly rushed to meet the two old men.

After the first compliments had passed and welcomes had been exchanged with effusion between the newcomers and their friends, the Canadians seated themselves by the fire, and, upon

the invitation given, ate some mouthfuls of fresh-cooked venison and drank some brandy.

"We have been to see our relative, Lagrenay, the squatter of the Wind River," said the old man. "It appears he had received a very pressing message from Tom Mitchell, the outlaw."

"Yes," said Bright-eye, "we were there when it was delivered. We know all about it. But, as far as I am concerned, I am afraid —"

"Of what are you afraid, my son?" asked François Berger, in a rather imperious tone of voice.

"That all this pretended facility and frankness on the part of the pirate chief hides a snare."

The two old hunters exchanged a smile.

"Child, you are very much mistaken," said the grandfather. "Tom Mitchell means exactly what he says. He has no intention, no motive for laying any unworthy trap."

"I am certain of it," added the son.

Bright-eye had nothing to say to so positive an assertion. He silently bowed his head.

"We have done all in our power to come here quickly, knowing we should meet you," went on François Berger; "we are only too happy to be in time."

"In time to do what?" asked Oliver.

"We will explain," said the elder of the two men; "when Tom Mitchell comes we shall receive him."

"But that is our business?" cried Bright-eye.

"I know the message was addressed to you," said his father; "I am well aware of it that it is our business, and, in fact, it is more proper it should be so. At all events we have decided that it is to be so, so that you will keep out of sight until the affair is finished."

"But," said Bright-eye, with considerable hesitation, "supposing there was treachery?"

"My son," sententiously observed the old man, "prudence is wise, but suspicion in certain cases is an insult. Think of that. Believe me when I say that your father and I know better what we are about than you do."

"We shall certainly obey you," said Oliver, in the name of all. "We shall remain at a distance during the interview, and only interfere when called upon."

"I thank you cordially," said the old man; "everything will go rightly, I promise you."

And he waved his hand as if to dismiss them.

The five young men rose, bowed respectfully to the two old men, and watched them as they walked slowly down to the banks of the river.

About two gunshots distance from the camp, or thereabouts, was a rather thick wood, composed of oaks and gumtrees. The hunters entered the wood, and soon afterwards disappeared under the forest.

Remaining alone, the old hunters lifted their Indian calumets and began to smoke, without exchanging one single word.

This went on for about three-quarters of an hour – incessant smoking. Suddenly, François Berger let fall his pipe, fell flat on his face, put his ear to the ground, and listened.

"They come," he said, rising.

"I have heard them coming for some time," quietly replied the old grandfather. "How many?"

"Not more than four."

"Just as I expected. He has acted in perfect good faith," said the old man.

"Then you are quite determined?"

"Yes. The Indians are not in want of it, and I should not like to see the Yankees or English profit by it."

"You are the master. You are the one to whom it belongs to a certain extent," said the son.

"Yes; it is today my property. Besides, it should be kept up for the support of a great cause. Tom Mitchell is a very different man from what he appears," added the old man, gravely.

"That, of course, I know."

"Besides, I have another very strong motive for acting as I do, and that is the establishment, on the very spot I allude to, of the Yankee squatter."

"Yes. And, between you and me, father, these Yankees have very sharp noses. They will find it out before long."

"Exactly so, my son. For my part, I prefer that Frenchmen should derive the advantage."

At this moment a distant gunshot was heard.

"Here they come," said François Berger.

He then rose, placed his hand over his mouth like a funnel, and twice imitated, with marvellous dexterity and perfection, the cry of the water hawk.

A similar cry came in response, and almost immediately afterwards four cavaliers, well mounted, appeared galloping through the high grass and trees, and coming directly towards them.

The Canadians held their rifles in their hands, while the newcomers showed no apparent arms. They had left their pistols in the holsters, their sabres were in their scabbards, their rifles by their sides.

On coming within a short distance of the two old men the strangers exchanged a few words in a low tone of voice, two of them slackened their pace, while the others rushed forward with the rapidity of the gazelle.

In another instant Angela, for it was herself, was in the arms of the friends, answering by cries of joy and tears of happiness the sweet caresses of her relatives and friends.

Tom Mitchell and his companions stood apart discreetly, and then, when they saw that the first transports were over or becoming calmer, approached.

"Welcome," said the old man, "welcome, gentlemen," holding out his two hands.

"Have I kept my promise?" asked Tom Mitchell.

"Nobly; I solemnly declare it, and I thank you," cried Berger,

with deep emotion.

"You have worthily made up for the act you had done. Let us forget the past," said the old man; "what can we do for you?"

"Nothing," he said, quietly.

"You exact no ransom whatever?"

"Why should I exaggerate, old hunter? I was drawn into committing a bad action by a man whose name I will not mention. Though a pirate, I am not so bad as I am painted. I have therefore sought to condone the evil."

"Admirably spoken," said François Berger, again embracing his daughter. "Go, darling, to your brother yonder."

"Allow me first to thank Captain Mitchell," she said, "for his extreme kindness during my captivity."

"You bear me no malice?"

"None whatever," she said, "but eternal gratitude. You deserve it and you have it."

Then with a gesture of adieu and a sweet smile on her adorable lips she ran off in the direction of the forest.

The men waited until she was out of sight.

"I will now take my leave," said the outlaw.

"One moment," replied the old man; "the recompense which you refuse I must force upon you."

He pulled forth a large folded parchment.

"This is the ransom of my daughter," he said: "it is a regular deed of gift of the Valley of the Deer."

"What!" cried the outlaw, with singular emotion.

"Yes, and here on the map is a red mark, indicating the spot where what you know of is concealed."

"Accept without scruple, captain," said François Berger; "it is ours and ours alone to give."

"Since you wish it, gentlemen. I should show but ill grace to refuse, the more that I value your gift highly."

"I only ask one thing in return," said the old man.

"I shall be ready to promise anything."

"You will use what I have given you only with an honourable –" he said, with some hesitation.

"It shall be so, I promise you."

"And so we part friends; captain, your hand."

"Friends, yes," said the pirate; "and I hope the day may come when you may try my friendship."

"Who knows? The day may come sooner than we expect."

"I shall be ready to shed the very last drop of my blood to defend or avenge you or yours."

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE CHASE

We know that Joshua Dickson had taken his departure from the valley, leaving it in charge to Harry.

Harry was a fine young man, strong and intelligent, in whom his father had every confidence.

He was the complete juvenile type of the American squatter and pioneer, up to Indian devilries, riding like a centaur, and able to put a ball in the eye of a panther at a hundred yards. His great passion was life in the open air, and the pleasures of the chase in the forest or field.

One fine morning Harry, soon after the rising of the sun, galloped off into the forest. He was bent on a journey to see a fine cutting that was going to create meadows, and make room for sawmills on the banks of the great Missouri.

He had nearly reached the spot, when he was startled by a whistle of a peculiar kind, at no great distance.

At the same moment a horseman came in sight – a man of fifty, tall, thin and gaunt, with parchment skin.

The horse was as bony as his master.

The man was dressed after the fashion of the ordinary American farmer, and apparently carried no arms.

"Eh, eh," cried he, "you are out early. Were you looking for

me?"

"No, M. Lagrenay; I was not even thinking of you."

"That is not polite. Why did you stop when I whistled?"

"Because I thought it the whistle of a serpent," he retorted.

"But no nonsense, I was looking for you."

"I was certain of it."

"Yes, I wanted to see you. I made your acquaintance I know not how. You talk to me of things which do not please me, because they suggest evil thoughts. I have come to say that henceforth we are strangers. Never speak to me again."

"I suppose you will give me a reason for this odd decision."

"Think what you please. I have said my say."

"Then I assume that you reject my offers."

"Think and assume what you like," cried the young man, angrily; "only keep out of my path."

"Then you have no passion for gold?" sighed the other.

"You take me for a ninny, old squatter. Gold does not grow in the fields like mushrooms. Besides, you would have found it long ago if real."

"I tell you the map indicating the exact spot," cried the old man, "was stolen from me by the outlaws."

"You want to persuade me that you have known of this vast treasure for years, and yet require a stranger to help you."

"I knew nothing of your having camped on the spot, and only offer you a share in consequence."

"Go to the devil with your offers."

"Yes, you have my secret, and can use it yourself."

"Old man," cried the young giant, with rage in his eye, "beware how you try my patience too much."

"Well, well, let us end this conversation. You will not listen to me. Well and good. Only, before we part, remember this, when it is too late, my friend," he added, with a sinister laugh, "you will repent. That is all I say."

And turning round, he rode off.

"He is a pretty rascal," said the young man, as he rode off; "I believe he has some villainy in hand."

At this moment a strong hollow grunting was heard, followed by another at no great distance.

"There are jaguars about," said the American, in a low tone, stroking his horse's ears to keep him quiet.

At that moment there was a fearful, a horrible cry, that rent the air, a desperate shriek for assistance.

"The old squatter, and he is without arms," he cried; "the tigers have doubtless attacked him."

And he set spurs to his horse, which, neighing and smarting with pain, dashed in the desired direction.

In the centre of a clearing crossed by a narrow stream the squatter knelt behind his horse, haggard with terror.

Close to him, on the branch of a gigantic gumtree, was a mighty jaguar, licking his tongue before leaping.

"Save me," shrieked the agonised squatter.

"I will try," said Harry, dismounting, letting his horse loose,

and then going close up to the trembling wretch.

The tiger had not moved. He was watching his victim with a feline glance.

"A noble beast," said the young man, with a smile; "I hope not to spoil his beautiful skin."

Suddenly a further grunting was heard in the thicket. The jaguar, without turning his head, responded in the same tone.

"By heavens! There are two of them. It seems almost a pity to part so loving a couple," he said.

At the same moment the tiger leaped. As he did so he turned a somersault. He was dead, shot in the eye.

"One," said the young man, drawing out his bowie knife.

At the same moment the second jaguar burst out, and with one bound seized on the flanks of the horse.

Harry flew at her, knife in hand. The two rolled for a moment on the ground. Then the man stood erect.

"That job's over," said the young man; "what a couple of noble beasts! Get up. Heavens! He's fainted."

Then he took him in his arms, and carried him to the stream, where he bathed his face until he recovered.

But he was then so ill, and his horse so lean, that it seemed impossible he should ever reach home.

In this strait Harry acted with his usual generosity. He took the man up behind him, and carried him home.

He then turned to go without a word.

"Young man," cried the squatter, "wait one moment. You have

been my friend. Now take my advice, keep good watch. I dare say no more, but be ever on your guard."

Harry moved pensively away, but soon forgot the hint.

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN TOM MITCHELL, THE AVENGER

The marriage of Evening Dew with Numank-Charake was to be celebrated with unusual splendour. Invitations had been sent in all directions, and, two days before the ceremony was to take place, numerous deputations from all the tribes were collected around, and were received with the splendid hospitality essential in such a case.

At least five hundred strange warriors had come.

Some hours later a new troop appeared on the verge of the plain; it was very numerous, three hundred men at least, in the picturesque costume of Mexican rancheros, all armed to the teeth, and admirably mounted.

Four cavaliers rode in front; these were Tom Mitchell, Pierre Durand Camotte, and Tête de Plume. It was the full force of the outlaws. On nearing the village two other men were seen; these were Clinton and Charbonneau.

Nothing was omitted to give *éclat* to such a reception. The most renowned of the sachems, with the three Canadians, Bright-eye, and Oliver, advanced to meet them, and give them a most cordial and sincere welcome.

Captain Pierre Durand, who had given up his disguise, kept a

little in the background.

Having exchanged compliments, Tom ordered his men to camp outside, and entered the village with the others.

As soon as all were collected in the hut of the Canadians, Tom Mitchell closed the door carefully.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a low and solemn tone, "I owe you no explanation for coming, but for coming in such force."

"You owe no explanation. You are welcome."

"Listen. Not a moment is to be lost. Spies are on all hands. You are surrounded by treachery and traitors. You are all to be made the victims of an execrable plot concocted by two wretches, Lagrenay and Tubash-Shah."

All were stupefied. While the other spoke, Pierre Durand slipped into Bright-eye's own room to rest.

"Yes. Tubash-Shah hates Numank; but that is not all. He loves your gentle daughter, Evening Dew."

"Horrible!" cried the old man.

"The capture of Miss Angela was a thing arranged between Lagrenay and Tubash-Shah, who thought to get her from me."

"Thanks to you, the plot is exploded."

"He still hopes to kill his rival, steal his wife, become possessor of the treasure you know of," cried Tom Mitchell, "and become chief of the tribe. With these schemes in their heads, Lagrenay and Tubash-Shah are allies."

"It is a horrible plot. How did you discover it?"

"No matter; my spies have served me well. I knew the plan of

the conspirators, and hence have come in such force. I shall be able to thwart them. Do you now attend to the immediate safety of the chiefs of this nation and people."

"I will take measures at once."

"Above all, be cautious. You have to deal with desperate and cunning rascals," urged Tom Mitchell.

The three Canadians, grandfather, father, and son, went out, leaving behind only George Clinton and his friend.

"Now, Mr. Clinton," said the outlaw, "though we met under unpleasant circumstances, we are friends."

"I see no reason why we should not be," he replied.

"I am happy to hear it," continued Tom Mitchell; "but before we go any farther, allow me to say a word to this young Frenchman. In that room you will find a friend."

"A friend!" cried Oliver; "Impossible! You know I have only recently reached this country."

"Take my advice," said the outlaw, with a smile.

Oliver shrugged his shoulders, as if yielding to a foolish whim, and went in to find himself face to face with Durand.

"Now," said the outlaw, "I have not told all; I have left out certain matters which personally concern yourself. One moment, and you shall judge for yourself. Excuse me if I have to touch upon a very tender topic – that of love."

"Captain!" cried George.

"Pardon me. You love a charming girl, whom you have followed into the desert with as much devotion as men show in

the search of gold. To this I have only to add that the girl is as beautiful and as good as an angel."

George bowed his head to hide his confusion.

"Her father is against you, I know. But the important fact is that a terrible calamity threatens her and you."

"Pray explain yourself," George cried.

"Do you think the redskins are blind? You forget them in your calculation of future happiness."

"Explain yourself," continued the young man.

"I cannot at present. You are young in the desert, but you have clever and devoted friends. Above all, you have Bright-eye, honest, devoted, intelligent. Tell him all I have said, and to work. You have not a moment to lose to save her."

At this moment the three Canadians came in at one door, Oliver and Captain Durand at the other. Before anyone else could speak, Oliver rushed forward.

"Captain," he said to the outlaw, "I can never thank you enough. I know all. Command me in every way."

"I shall remind you of your promise."

"And my wretched persecutor – you will bring him to me?"

"Yes; and place in your hands papers to confound him," cried the outlaw; "papers which prove your rank."

The conversation now became general. The two Canadians had been at work, and warned all the sachems.

But everything had been done without exciting suspicion. All went on just as usual in the village.

The preparations for the marriage continued.

The Canadians entertained their friends at a great banquet that night, at which Numank was present, grave and proud, seated beside Angela, who was charming, though blushing with downcast eyes, and never speaking a word.

The formal ceremony of betrothal had taken place in the morning, so that this was rather a friendly meeting than anything else.

There was, however, a magnificent exchange of presents.

Next day, just before the final ceremony, Tom Mitchell went off with a hundred of his most resolute men.

Camotte remained in command of the others.

According to invariable Indian custom, the man who takes a wife takes her seemingly by force; he snatches her up, puts her behind him, darts off, and two days later comes back, slays a mare that has never foaled, and all is over.

Numank, of course, would do the same.

At night the hut was surrounded by a party of Indians, and Angela carried off, after a feeble resistance.

Then some shots were fired, and away sped Numank with his wife surrounded by a powerful Indian escort.

This escort was almost wholly composed of strangers with Tubash.

The abductors had scarcely departed when Bright-eye came out of the hut and whistled. He was at once surrounded by warriors.

"On," he said, in a menacing voice; "there is no time to lose."

And they darted away like a whirlwind, riding for some hours in the direction taken by the bridal party.

Suddenly they were startled by flashes of light, followed by the report of guns. A terrible combat was going on.

With a tremendous war cry the troop led by Bright-eye dashed in the direction of the fight. It was time.

Numank-Charake, holding his wife on one arm, was fighting, surrounded by the few warriors faithful to him.

Ten only of these could stand, and must have succumbed in five minutes but for the unlooked-for succour.

The carnage was fearful. All fought desperately in silence. At last every one of the treacherous escort was dead.

Tubash Shah escaped in the confusion.

Numank-Charake was more like a corpse than a live man, and had to be carried on a litter.

They reached the village next day, from which all the rival tribes had departed, leaving behind a bundle of arrows dipped in blood. It was a formal declaration of war.

We turn elsewhere for a time.

It was night at the hut of the squatter Lagrenay. Everybody slept except himself. Seated by the dying fire in a cane chair, his head in his two hands, his elbows on the table, the squatter appeared at least to be reading.

His huge and savage dog lay at his feet, listening for the faintest sound from without.

Every now and then the old man looked at a clock, and then appeared to read again until a sharp whistle was heard.

The dog and man leaped up, but suddenly Lagrenay bade the animal be quiet, and went himself to open the door. He started back as two men entered, strangers.

"I am Joshua Dickson," said the first, "and this is my brother Samuel. You sent for my son; we have come in his place."

The old man professed to be glad to see his neighbours, and bade them be seated. After some time wasted in circumlocution, he began to speak of real business.

"You have established yourselves in the Valley of the Moose Deer," he said, "a magnificent settlement."

"Well, what then?"

"That valley belongs to one of the most powerful tribes on the whole of the Missouri," continued Lagrenay.

"No matter. Virgin soil belongs to the first comer."

"Perhaps. But that is not the question. This tribe have other lands of which they take no account," went on the squatter, "and will probably never claim, but they have special reasons for keeping the Valley of the Deer sacred."

"Explain yourself," cried both.

"In that valley is buried the treasure of the nation."

"What treasure? Old shooter of muskrats!" cried Joshua; "There is no treasure like mother earth."

"I mean a real treasure – gold, ingots, diamonds," said the old man, "to the extent of many millions."

"So much the better," replied Joshua; "it is mine."

"Take care! The struggle will be terrible. Your adversaries are many and brave; they have allied themselves with the outlaws of the desert, and, moreover, have taken as their chief a fellow countryman, who dearly covets your possessions."

"May I ask the name of my countryman?" inquired Samuel, in a bantering tone of voice.

"His name is George Clinton," said Lagrenay.

"George Clinton!" exclaimed Joshua, amazed.

"You lie, miserable wretch!" said Samuel Dickson, rising; "George Clinton is an honourable man, not a – "

"I have spoken the truth. Do as you please."

Then the door was burst open, and two men entered pushing forward a third with blows of musket butts.

"Miserable wretch!" said one, seizing him by the throat, "I am George Clinton, and you lie in your teeth."

Rock attempted to fly at the assailants, but Charbonneau brained him with the butt end of his gun.

Lagrenay rose rifle in hand, but the two Americans disarmed him, and forced him to reseal himself.

The prisoner brought in was Tubash-Shah. Behind the three men appeared the dogs Nadeje and Drack.

"Gentlemen, we arrive in time. Thank heaven, we have brought with us this wretch, who now will tell the truth."

And he looked at the Indian with a glance that made him shudder to the marrow of his bones.

The two Americans were exceedingly surprised, while Lagrenay thought in vain of some new subterfuge.

Roused by the noise made on the entrance of the three men, the wife of Lagrenay had risen in haste, and, without waiting to dress, had rushed into the room. She entered without being seen, and tremblingly ensconced herself behind her husband.

Inside there was silence, but without the sound of many men.

None spoke for some time; everyone's breathing seemed oppressed. Lagrenay, his teeth chattering, at last spoke.

"Will you explain this outrage?" he began.

"Silence!" cried George Clinton, in a terrible voice; "Speak only when called upon for your defence. All I hope is that when you have heard of what you are accused you may be able to give a satisfactory reply to the charge."

"Accused – defend myself!" cried the old man.

"Yes, before Judge Lynch, who will decide between us," said Clinton, coldly. "Listen, here come your judges."

As he spoke several men entered. Lagrenay felt himself lost. He was in the hands of implacable foes.

Tubash-Shah, erect against the wall, appeared utterly indifferent. But his every thought was intent on escape.

The sudden appearance of George Clinton had very much surprised Joshua Dickson. All his rage was revived, and he was prepared to treat him with severity and hatred. The idea of treason still rankled in his mind.

Two men had now seized upon the squatter, and, despite the

cries of his wife, were trying to carry him out.

At that moment Louis and François Berger entered.

"My cousins!" cried Lagrenay, "They would murder me!"

"Save my old man!" said the wife, pitifully.

"My friends and brothers," said Louis Berger, raising his hand, "this man is my relative. Give him to me. Justice shall be done."

The squatter was released, and hid himself behind his two Canadian cousins, trembling, nearly dead.

"Sirs," said Louis to the Americans, "you are the new squatters established in the Moose Deer Valley?"

"We are," replied Joshua, rather doggedly.

"Then I have business with you. In the first place, by what right have you squatted in that place?"

"Really, except that you have force on your side, I should not answer so singular a question. Because I found it."

"I beg to inform you that it is private property. You are by no means the first occupier."

"And who may he be?" asked Joshua, furiously.

"Myself. It was given me by the chiefs of the Huron tribe. A deed, perfectly legal, exists."

"Can a man find no free land on earth?" he cried, "On the face of the earth? You claim it, then?"

At this moment, when all were busy, Tubash saw his opportunity, and ran. Two or three pursued, but the rest remained.

"Then," said Joshua, presently, "there is some truth in the

story of the gold treasure in the valley?"

"Yes, and I have recently ceded all my rights to Tom Mitchell, chief of the outlaws."

"Then all I have to do is to go?" urged Joshua.

"I think the matter might be arranged," observed Louis. "Here is a young man who loves your child. George Clinton, is it not so?"

"It is useless my persuading Joshua Dickson."

"By heavens!" cried Samuel, "But you shall. Here is a noble, young, rich, brave –"

"But," cried Joshua, "what has that to do with it?"

"Sole owner of the Valley of the Deer," continued Louis Berger, drily; "he bought it this morning."

"But –" still hesitated Joshua.

"To arms!" cried Tom Mitchell, rushing in, "To arms! Pardieu! You have fallen into the trap."

"What is the matter?" cried the brothers.

"While you are wasting your time here, your plantation is attacked by Indians," he responded, "who are burning and destroying all. Soon there will be only ruins and ashes."

This terrible revelation fell like a thunderbolt upon all present in that room.

Tom Mitchell – his dress torn, his face covered by powder and blood, holding a smoking gun – summoned them.

George Clinton, without waiting a minute, darted away, followed by Charbonneau and his dogs.

Above all, he would save her he loved from the fearful peril she was in of falling into the hands of redskins.

"What is to be done?" cried Joshua.

"Never despair," said the outlaw. "Your sons and servants are fighting like lions. We must join them."

"Come along," cried Samuel.

"Oh! Oh!" said Joshua, brandishing his rifle, "The rascally redskins shall pay for this."

"Come, in the name of God!" cried the outlaw; "I have with me a party ready for any amount of redskins."

At these words everybody mounted, and dashed through the darkness like a legion of phantoms.

Four persons only remained in the silent and deserted hut – the two old Canadians, Lagrenay, and his wife.

The old squatter had, during these exciting scenes, recovered his equanimity. He believed himself saved.

As soon as they were alone, he and his wife began to place refreshments on the table for their guests.

The two Canadians remained standing, leaning on their rifles, and not noticing even the preparations.

"My dear relations," said Lagrenay, in an insinuating voice, "will you honour me by accepting refreshments?"

"What does the man say?" asked François Berger.

"You have a long journey to go," continued Lagrenay, "you must be extremely tired and want rest."

"What matter?" said the old man.

"Will you not empty a cup of whisky?" began the woman.

"Silence!" cried the hunter, striking the butt of his rifle on the ground, "And listen."

The old man shuddered.

"Lagrenay," he went on, in a hollow voice, "I dragged you from the hands of Judge Lynch, because I did not wish to see my cousin hanged; you have dishonoured not only the name you bear, but the family to which you belong; that family, poor as it has always been, has known how to preserve its honour intact. That honour you have soiled, from the base love of gold. Prepare to die."

"To die!" he murmured.

"My cousins, my dear cousins, you will not have the heart to kill my poor old man," said his wife, clasping her hands and weeping; "thirty years we have lived together. What shall I do when he is gone? Who will support my miserable existence? Have mercy, in the name of the Lord. If you kill him, I shall die."

"You shall not die," said François Berger; "my cousin will take care of you for life."

"I," she said, with a gesture of horror, "accept the protection of the murderers of my husband, eat the bread of assassins! I should choke myself at the first mouthful. Have mercy, then, and shoot us together."

Louis Berger turned away his head. Even the inflexible old judge of the reign of terror was moved.

Then he made a sign to his son, and both cocked their rifles.

"Stop!" said Lagrenay, in a firm and solemn voice; "I know your inflexible will too well to ask my life of you. You have decided on my death. Good. But I will not die at your hands. You say the honour of the family requires that justice should be done. Well, it shall be done. Still I could not die like a dog. Give me ten minutes to pray. You will not refuse this?"

"Heaven forbid!" said the old man, "And may heaven have mercy on you for all your sins."

"Thanks, cousins and friends," cried the squatter, "and now, wife, on your knees. Let us beg forgiveness of our sins."

The two old men went out, tears in their eyes, and almost inclined to be merciful. Stern will prevailed.

Five minutes later, a double shot was heard. They rushed in. Both lay dead upon the floor.

Justice was done.

The two hunters kneeled down beside the bodies, and said a silent prayer over them.

Then, in the room itself, they dug a grave, and, after some little time, interred the husband and wife.

Then, dragging away by main force the wounded dog, they collected a lot of brushwood and other fuel.

This they piled against the house and then fired. In a few minutes the whole was in flames.

The dog got away, and plunged into the burning pile.

When all was over and nought remained but cinders and ashes, the two men wiped away a tear and retired.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DESPERATE STRUGGLE

Tom Mitchell had told the truth. The plantation of Joshua Dickson had been attacked by a numerous party.

This is how it had come about.

Tubash-Shah and the squatter, Lagrenay, excited by a common hatred, had come to an understanding.

The old wretch, whose whole thoughts were bent on the vast treasure concealed in the valley, had promised the Indian, not only his share of the gold, but the possession of a beautiful white girl, at least as beautiful as Evening Dew.

He further suggested that as Numank-Charake would be sure to join Clinton, he could kill him too.

He would then have the two most beautiful wives on the prairie.

The Indian was easily seduced by this radiant project, which the old squatter fluttered before his eyes.

An alliance defensive and offensive was struck up.

It was Tubash-Shah who suggested the treacherous visit of the redskins on the occasion of the great marriage.

In order to facilitate the attack on the settlement, old Lagrenay sent a secret message to the squatters, who fell into the trap prepared for them. Tubash-Shah was outside, waiting to take

them, when he himself was made prisoner.

This nearly spoiled all. But, after only half an hour's detention, Tubash escaped.

He joined his expectant companions, and the plantation was at once attacked on all sides by Indians.

But the Americans were on the watch, and received the redskins in a way that rather surprised them.

Tom Mitchell, warned by his spies, had given them sufficient hints, while himself preparing.

One hundred and fifty outlaws, under the orders of Tête de Plume, had been secretly sent into the fort by George Clinton.

He had then, with Charbonneau, gone and concealed himself near Lagrenay's hut.

Camotte had been sent to the village of the Huron Bisons to Numank-Charake, and Bright-eye, to ask for the assistance of all the warriors of the tribe who could be spared.

On the other hand, Tom Mitchell, at the head of his most daring companions, had placed himself in a position to be at hand at anytime. But if the defence had been well arranged, the attack was most fierce and desperate; the redskins fought like demons; brave, well armed, and counting on the vast superiority of their numbers, the Indians rushed to the charge against the intrenchments with a ferocity quite unusual.

These intrenchments had been hastily thrown up, and could not long resist such an attack.

Tubash-Shah, at the head of a picked band of warriors, did

wonders. He was a host in himself.

The struggle became at one time so desperate that Tom Mitchell himself began to despair; then it was that he dashed off to the hut of Lagrenay, and called to arms all who were collected together in deliberation.

Then he started again at the head of the reinforcement, like a storm cloud on the wing.

Again the combat seemed desperate.

The war cry of the American Indians and the hurrahs of the whites were mixed with the fusillade.

Then a rush of horse was heard, an awful war whoop, and three hundred warriors, led by Numank-Charake, Bright-eye, and Camotte, appeared on the scene.

Tom Mitchell gave a cry of joy.

He divided his terrible cavaliers into three detachments, one commanded by Numank and Bright-eye, gave half his outlaws to Oliver, and took the rest under his own immediate orders.

Then at a given signal, the three troops rushed, with horrible yells and cries, upon the astonished assailants.

Though taken aback, the brave redskins fronted both ways, and made a most terrible defence.

Samuel Dickson and his brother meantime contrived to enter the settlement, amid joyous acclamations.

It was time; the palisades and intrenchments were giving way, and the Indians were rushing in.

The combat became now gigantic in its proportions. The

redskins, led by Tubash-Shah, fought with desperate valour.

He kept the *élite* of his men together, and worked his way towards the interior of the settlement.

Presently he drew forth his human thighbone whistle and darted for the house. He had seen Diana.

The young girl, seeing the demon covered by blood and powder, brandishing his hatchet, and forcing, with a hideous cry, his horse towards the women, gave a desperate shriek of agonised terror.

"Ah, ah!" cried Tubash-Shah, in triumph; "The paleface girl. At last she is mine."

He urged forward his horse, which reared with abject terror, and threw his master heavily.

Dardar, the faithful dog, always in attendance on Diana, had seized the warhorse by the nostrils.

He then let him go, and caught the Indian himself by the throat.

"Good dog," shouted George Clinton, as he ran up with Charbonneau, Drack, and Nadeje.

The battle was over. The few Indians who were left threw down their arms in despair.

"My daughter, oh, my daughter!" cried Joshua, who came rushing from the inside of the house.

"She is here, sir," said Clinton.

"And her abductor?" he continued.

"Is dead," he answered, pointing to the corpse, which the dog

was worrying as he would have done a rat.

"My son, I thank you," said Joshua; "what do I not owe to you? Take her."

Two days after M. Hebrard returned to the fort a wiser man. Oliver proved his rank, name, and right to fortune, to the satisfaction of everybody.

"Tell my relatives," he said, "that as long as they leave me alone, I shall be quiet. Go, and let us never meet again."

A week later, after the marriage of George and Diana, Tom Mitchell, Bright-eye, Oliver, and Captain Durand, started on the dangerous expedition undertaken by the outlaw, and of which, probably, we shall give some account at a future time.

[For further adventures of Bright-eye, see the "Prairie Flower," and the "Indian Scout," same publishers.]