ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE PRAIRIE CHIEF

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Ballantyne R.

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Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
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Chapter One.
The Alarm

Whitewing was a Red Indian of the North American prairies. Though not a chief of the highest standing, he was a very great man in the estimation of his tribe, for, besides being possessed of qualities which are highly esteemed among all savages—such as courage, strength, agility, and the like—he was a deep thinker, and held speculative views in regard to the Great Manitou (God), as well as the ordinary affairs of life, which perplexed even the oldest men of his tribe, and induced the younger men to look on him as a profound mystery.

Indeed the feelings of the latter towards Whitewing amounted almost to veneration, for while, on the one hand, he was noted as one of the most fearless among the braves, and a daring assailant of that king of the northern wilderness, the grizzly bear, he was, on the other hand, modest and retiring —never boasted of his prowess, disbelieved in the principle of revenge, which to most savages is not only a pleasure but a duty, and refused to decorate his sleeves or leggings with the scalp-locks of his enemies. Indeed he had been known to allow more than one enemy to escape from his hand in time of war when he might easily have killed him. Altogether, Whitewing was a monstrous puzzle to his fellows, and much beloved by many of them.

The only ornament which he allowed himself was the white wing of a ptarmigan. Hence his name. This symbol of purity was bound to his forehead by a band of red cloth wrought with the quills of the porcupine. It had been made for him by a dark-eyed girl whose name was an Indian word signifying “light heart.” But let it not be supposed that Lightheart’s head was like her heart. On the contrary, she had a good sound brain, and, although much given to laughter, jest, and raillery among her female friends, would listen with unflagging patience, and profound solemnity, to her lover’s soliloquies in reference to things past, present, and to come.

One of the peculiarities of Whitewing was that he did not treat women as mere slaves or inferior creatures. His own mother, a wrinkled, brown old thing resembling a piece of singed shoe-leather, he loved with a tenderness not usual in North American Indians, some tribes of whom have a tendency to forsake their aged ones, and leave them to perish rather than be burdened with them. Whitewing also thought that his betrothed was fit to hold intellectual converse with him, in which idea he was not far wrong.

At the time we introduce him to the reader he was on a visit to the Indian camp of Lightheart’s tribe in Clearvale, for the purpose of claiming his bride. His own tribe, of which the celebrated old warrior Bald Eagle was chief, dwelt in a valley at a considerable distance from the camp referred to.

There were two other visitors at the Indian camp at that time. One was a Wesleyan missionary who had penetrated to that remote region with a longing desire to carry the glad tidings of salvation in Jesus to the red men of the prairie. The other was a nondescript little white trapper, who may be aptly described as a mass of contradictions. He was small in stature, but amazingly strong; ugly, one-eyed, scarred in the face, and misshapen; yet wonderfully attractive, because of a sweet smile, a hearty manner, and a kindly disposition. With the courage of the lion, Little Tim, as he was styled, combined the agility of the monkey and the laziness of the sloth. Strange to say, Tim and Whitewing were bosom friends, although they differed in opinion on most things.

"The white man speaks again about Manitou to-day," said the Indian, referring to the missionary's intention to preach, as he and Little Tim concluded their midday meal in the wigwam that had been allotted to them.

"It's little I cares for that," replied Tim curtly, as he lighted the pipe with which he always wound up every meal.

Of course both men spoke in the Indian language, but that being probably unknown to the reader, we will try to convey in English as nearly as possible the slightly poetical tone of the one and the rough Backwoods' style of the other.

"It seems strange to me," returned the Indian, "that my white brother thinks and cares so little about his Manitou. He thinks much of his gun, and his traps, and his skins, and his powder, and his friend, but cares not for Manitou, who gave him all these—all that he possesses."

"Look 'ee here, Whitewing," returned the trapper, in his matter-of-fact way, "there's nothing strange about it. I see you, and I see my gun and these other things, and can handle 'em; but I don't know nothin' about Manitou, and I don't see him, so what's the good o' thinkin' about him?"

Instead of answering, the red man looked silently and wistfully up into the blue sky, which could be seen through the raised curtain of the wigwam. Then, pointing to the landscape before them, he said in subdued but earnest tones, "I see him in the clouds—in the sun, and moon, and stars; in the prairies and in the mountains; I hear him in the singing waters and in the winds that scatter the leaves, and I feel him here."

Whitewing laid his hand on his breast, and looked in his friend's face.

"But," he continued sadly, "I do not understand him, he whispers so softly that, though I hear, I cannot comprehend. I wonder why this is so."

"Ay, that's just it, Whitewing," said the trapper. "We can't make it out nohow, an' so I just leaves all that sort o' thing to the parsons, and give my mind to the things that I understand."

"When Little Tim was a very small boy," said the Indian, after a few minutes' meditation, "did he understand how to trap the beaver and the martin, and how to point the rifle so as to carry death to the grizzly bear?"

"Of course not," returned the trapper; "seems to me that that's a foolish question."

"But," continued the Indian, "you came to know it at last?"

"I should just think I did," returned the trapper, a look of self-satisfied pride crossing his scarred visage as he thought of the celebrity as a hunter to which he had attained. "It took me a goodish while, of course, to circumvent it all, but in time I got to be—well, you know what, an' I'm not fond o' blowin' my own trumpet."

"Yes; you came to it at last," repeated Whitewing, "by giving your mind to things that at first you *did not understand*."

"Come, come, my friend," said Little Tim, with a laugh; "I'm no match for you in argiment, but, as I said before, I don't understand Manitou, an' I don't see, or feel, or hear him, so it's of no use tryin'."

"What my friend knows not, another may tell him," said Whitewing. "The white man says he knows Manitou, and brings a message from him. Three times I have listened to his words. They seem the words of truth. I go again to-day to hear his message."

The Indian stood up as he spoke, and the trapper also rose.

"Well, well," he said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "I'll go too, though I'm afeared it won't be o' much use."

The sermon which the man of God preached that day to the Indians was neither long nor profound, but it was delivered with the intense earnestness of one who thoroughly believes every word he utters, and feels that life and death may be trembling in the balance with those who listen. It is not our purpose to give this sermon in detail, but merely to show its influence on Whitewing, and how it affected the stirring incidents which followed.

Already the good man had preached three times the simple gospel of Jesus to these Indians, and with so much success that some were ready to believe, but others doubted, just as in the days of old. For the benefit of the former, he had this day chosen the text, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.” Whitewing had been much troubled in spirit. His mind, if very inquiring, was also very sceptical. It was not that he would not—but that he could not—receive anything unless *convinced*. With a strong thirst after truth, he went to hear that day, but, strange to say, he could not fix his attention. Only one sentence seemed to fasten firmly on his memory: “It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” The text itself also made a profound impression on him.

The preacher had just concluded, and was about to raise his voice in prayer, when a shout was heard in the distance. It came from a man who was seen running over the prairie towards the camp, with the desperate haste of one who runs for his life.

All was at once commotion. The men sprang up, and, while some went out to meet the runner, others seized their weapons. In a few seconds a young man with bloodshot eyes, labouring chest, and streaming brow burst into their midst, with the news that a band of Blackfoot warriors, many hundred strong, was on its way to attack the camp of Bald Eagle; that he was one of that old chief’s braves, and was hasting to give his tribe timely warning, but that he had run so far and so fast as to be quite unable to go another step, and had turned aside to borrow a horse, or beg them to send on a fresh messenger.

“*I* will go,” said Whitewing, on hearing this; “and my horse is ready.”

He wasted no more time with words, but ran towards the hollow where his steed had been hobbled, that is, the two front legs tied together so as to admit of moderate freedom without the risk of desertion.

He was closely followed by his friend Little Tim, who, knowing well the red man’s staid and self-possessed character, was somewhat surprised to see by his flashing eyes and quick breathing that he was unusually excited.

“Whitewing is anxious,” he said, as they ran together.

“The woman whom I love better than life is in Bald Eagle’s camp,” was the brief reply.

“Oho!” thought Little Tim, but he spoke no word, for he knew his friend to be extremely reticent in regard to matters of the heart. For some time he had suspected him of what he styled a weakness in that organ. “Now,” thought he, “I know it.”

“Little Tim will go with me?” asked the Indian, as they turned into the hollow where the horses had been left.

“Ay, Whitewing,” answered the trapper, with a touch of enthusiasm; “Little Tim will stick to you through thick and thin, as long as—”

An exclamation from the Indian at that moment stopped him, for it was discovered that the horses were not there. The place was so open that concealment was not possible. The steeds of both men had somehow got rid of their hobbles and galloped away.

A feeling of despair came over the Indian at this discovery. It was quickly followed by a stern resolve. He was famed as being the fleetest and most enduring brave of his tribe. He would *run* home.

Without saying a word to his friend, he tightened his belt, and started off like a hound loosed from the leash. Little Tim ran a few hundred yards after him at top speed, but suddenly pulled up.

“Pooh! It’s useless,” he exclaimed. “I might as well run after a streak o’ greased lightnin’. Well, well, women have much to answer for! Who’d iver have thowt to see Whitewing shook off his balance like that? It strikes me I’ll sarve him best by lookin’ after the nags.”

While the trapper soliloquised thus he ran back to the camp to get one of the Indian horses, wherewith to go off in search of his own and that of his friend. He found the Indians busy making preparations to ride to the rescue of their Bald Eagle allies; but quick though these sons of the prairie were, they proved too slow for Little Tim, who leaped on the first horse he could lay hold of, and galloped away.

Meanwhile Whitewing ran with the fleet, untiring step of a trained runner whose heart is in his work; but the way was long, and as evening advanced even his superior powers began to fail a little. Still he held on, greatly overtaxing his strength. Nothing could have been more injudicious in a prolonged race. He began to suspect that it was unwise, when he came to a stretch of broken ground, which in the distance was traversed by a range of low hills. As he reached these he reduced the pace a little, but while he was clambering up the face of a rather precipitous cliff, the thought of the Blackfoot band and of the much-loved one came into his mind; prudence went to the winds, and in a moment he was on the summit of the cliff, panting vehemently—so much so, indeed, that he felt it absolutely necessary to sit down for a few moments to rest.

While resting thus, with his back against a rock, in the attitude of one utterly worn out, part of the missionary's text flashed into his mind: "the race that is set before us."

"Surely," he murmured, looking up, "this race is set before me. The object is good. It is my duty as well as my desire."

The thought gave an impulse to his feelings; the impulse sent his young blood careering, and, springing up, he continued to run as if the race had only just begun. But ere long the pace again began to tell, producing a sinking of the heart, which tended to increase the evil. Hour after hour had passed without his making any perceptible abatement in the pace, and the night was now closing in. This however mattered not, for the full moon was sailing in a clear sky, ready to relieve guard with the sun. Again the thought recurred that he acted unwisely in thus pressing on beyond his powers, and once more he stopped and sat down.

This time the text could not be said to flash into his mind, for while running, it had never left him. He now deliberately set himself to consider it, and the word "patience" arrested his attention.

"Let us run with patience," he thought. "I have not been patient. But the white man did not mean this kind of race at all; he said it was the whole race of life. Well, if so, *this* is part of that race, and it *is* set before me. Patience! patience! I will try."

With childlike simplicity the red man rose and began to run slowly. For some time he kept it up, but as his mind reverted to the object of his race his patience began to ooze out. He could calculate pretty well the rate at which the Blackfoot foes would probably travel, and knowing the exact distance, perceived that it would be impossible for him to reach the camp before them, unless he ran all the way at full speed. The very thought of this induced him to put on a spurt, which broke him down altogether. Stumbling over a piece of rough ground, he fell with such violence that for a moment or two he lay stunned. Soon, however, he was on his legs again, and tried to resume his headlong career, but felt that the attempt was useless. With a deep irrepressible groan, he sank upon the turf.

It was in this hour of his extremity that the latter part of the preacher's text came to his mind: "looking unto Jesus."

Poor Whitewing looked upwards, as if he half expected to see the Saviour with the bodily eye, and a mist seemed to be creeping over him. He was roused from this semi-conscious state by the clattering of horses' hoofs.

The Blackfoot band at once occurred to his mind. Starting up, he hid behind a piece of rock. The sounds drew nearer, and presently he saw horsemen passing him at a considerable distance. How many he could not make out. There seemed to be very few. The thought that it might be his friend the trapper occurred, but if he were to shout, and it should turn out to be foes, not only would his own fate but that of his tribe be sealed. The case was desperate; still, anything was better than remaining helplessly where he was. He uttered a sharp cry.

It was responded to at once in the voice of Little Tim, and next moment the faithful trapper galloped towards Whitewing leading his horse by the bridle.

"Well, now, this is good luck," cried the trapper, as he rode up.

"No," replied the Indian gravely, "it is not *luck*."

"Well, as to that, I don't much care what you call it—but get up. Why, what's wrong wi' you?"

"The run has been very long, and I pressed forward impatiently, trusting too much to my own strength. Let my friend help me to mount."

"Well, now I come to think of it," said the trapper, as he sprang to the ground, "you have come a tremendous way—a most awful long way—in an uncommon short time. A fellow don't think o' that when he's mounted, ye see. There now," he added, resuming his own seat in the saddle, "off we go. But there's no need to overdrive the cattle; we'll be there in good time, I warrant ye, for the nags are both good and fresh."

Little Tim spoke the simple truth, for his own horse which he had discovered along with that of his friend some time after parting from him, was a splendid animal, much more powerful and active than the ordinary Indian horses. The steed of Whitewing was a half-wild creature of Spanish descent, from the plains of Mexico.

Nothing more was spoken after this. The two horsemen rode steadily on side by side, proceeding with long but not too rapid strides over the ground: now descending into the hollows, or ascending the gentle undulations of the plains; anon turning out and in to avoid the rocks and ruts and rugged places; or sweeping to right or left to keep clear of clumps of stunted wood and thickets, but never for a moment drawing rein until the goal was reached, which happened very shortly before the break of day.

The riding was absolute rest to Whitewing, who recovered strength rapidly as they advanced.

"There is neither sight nor sound of the foe here," murmured the Indian.

"No, all safe!" replied the trapper in a tone of satisfaction, as they cantered to the summit of one of the prairie waves, and beheld the wigwams of Bald Eagle shining peacefully in the moonlight on the plain below.

Chapter Two.
The Surprise and Combat

How frequently that "slip 'twixt the cup and the lip" is observed in the affairs of this life! Little Tim, the trapper, had barely pronounced the words "All safe," when an appalling yell rent the air, and a cloud of dark forms was seen to rush over the open space that lay between the wigwams of the old chief Bald Eagle and a thicket that grew on its westward side.

The Blackfoot band had taken the slumbering Indians completely by surprise, and Whitewing had the mortification of finding that he had arrived just a few minutes too late to warn his friends. Although Bald Eagle was thus caught unprepared, he was not slow to meet the enemy. Before the latter had reached the village, all the fighting men were up, and armed with bows, scalping-knives, and tomahawks. They had even time to rush towards the foe, and thus prevent the fight from commencing in the midst of the village.

The world is all too familiar with the scenes that ensued. It is not our purpose to describe them. We detest war, regarding it in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred as unnecessary. Sufficient to say here that the overwhelming numbers of the Blackfoot Indians were too much for their enemies. They soon began to overpower and drive them back towards the wigwams, where the poor women and children were huddled together in terror.

Before this point had arrived, however, Whitewing and Little Tim were galloping to the rescue. The former knew at a glance that resistance on the part of his friends would be hopeless. He did not therefore gallop straight down to the field of battle to join them, but, turning sharply aside with his friend, swept along one of the bottoms or hollows between the undulations of the plain, where their motions could not be seen as they sped along. Whitewing looked anxiously at Little Tim, who, observing the look, said:—

"I'm with 'ee, Whitewing, niver fear."

"Does my brother know that we ride to death?" asked the Indian in an earnest tone.

"Yer brother don't know nothin' o' the sort," replied the trapper, "and, considerin' your natur', I'd have expected ye to think that Manitou might have some hand in the matter."

"The white man speaks wisely," returned the chief, accepting the reproof with a humbled look. "We go in His strength."

And once again the latter part of the preacher's text seemed to shoot through the Indian's brain like a flash of light—"looking unto Jesus."

Whitewing was one of those men who are swift to conceive and prompt in action. Tim knew that he had a plan of some sort in his head, and, having perfect faith in his capacity, forbore to advise him, or even to speak. He merely drew his hunting-knife, and urged his steed to its utmost speed, for every moment of time was precious. The said hunting-knife was one of which Little Tim was peculiarly fond. It had been presented to him by a Mexican general for conspicuous gallantry in saving the life of one of his officers in circumstances of extreme danger. It was unusually long and heavy, and, being double-edged, bore some resemblance to the short, sword of the ancient Romans.

"It'll do some execution before I go down," thought Tim, as he regarded the bright blade with an earnest look.

But Tim was wrong. The blade was not destined to be tarnished that day.

In a very few minutes the two horsemen galloped to the thicket which had concealed the enemy. Entering this they dashed through it as fast as possible until they reached the other side, whence they could see the combatants on the plain beyond. All along they had heard the shouts and yells of battle.

For one moment Whitewing drew up to breathe his gallant steed, but the animal was roused by that time, and it was difficult to restrain him. His companion's horse was also nearly unmanageable.

"My brother's voice is strong. Let him use it well," said the chief abruptly.

"Ay, ay," replied the little trapper, with an intelligent chuckle; "go ahead, my boy. I'll give it out fit to bu'st the bellows."

Instantly Whitewing shot from the wood, like the panther rushing on his prey, uttering at the same time the tremendous war-cry of his tribe. Little Tim followed suit with a roar that was all but miraculous in its tone and character, and may be described as a compound of the steam-whistle and the buffalo bull, only with something about it intensely human. It rose high above the din of battle. The combatants heard and paused. The two horsemen were seen careering towards them with furious gesticulations. Red Indians seldom face certain death. The Blackfoot men knew that an attack by only two men would be sheer insanity; the natural conclusion was that they were the leaders of a band just about to emerge from the thicket. They were thus taken in rear. A panic seized them, which was intensified when Little Tim repeated his roar and flourished the instrument of death, which he styled his "little carving-knife." The Blackfeet turned and fled right and left, scattering over the plains individually and in small groups, as being the best way of baffling pursuit.

With that sudden access of courage which usually results from the exhibition of fear in a foe, Bald Eagle's men yelled and gave chase. Bald Eagle himself, however, had the wisdom to call them back.

At a council of war, hastily summoned on the spot, he said—

"My braves, you are a parcel of fools."

Clearing his throat after this plain statement, either for the purpose of collecting his thoughts or giving his young warriors time to weigh and appreciate the compliment, he continued—

"You chase the enemy as thoughtlessly as the north wind chases the leaves in autumn. My wise chief Whitewing, and his friend Leetil Tim—whose heart is big, and whose voice is bigger, and whose scalping-knife is biggest of all—have come to our rescue *alone*. Whitewing tells me there is no one at their backs. If our foes discover their mistake, they will turn again, and the contempt which they ought to pour on themselves because of their own cowardice they will heap on *our* heads, and overwhelm us by their numbers—for who can withstand numbers? They will scatter us like small dust before the hurricane. Waugh!"

The old man paused for breath, for the recent fight had taken a good deal out of him, and the assembled warriors exclaimed "Waugh!" by which they meant to express entire approval of his sentiments. "Now it is my counsel," he continued, "that as we have been saved by Whitewing, we should all shut our mouths, and hear what Whitewing has got to say."

Bald Eagle sat down amid murmurs of applause, and Whitewing arose.

There was something unusually gentle in the tone and aspect of the young chief on this occasion.

"Our father, the ancient one who has just spoken words of wisdom," he said, stretching forth his right hand, "has told you the truth, yet not quite the truth. He is right when he says that Leetil Tim and I have come to your rescue, but he is wrong when he says we come alone. It is true that there are no men at our backs to help us, but is not Manitou behind us—in front—around? It was Manitou who sent us here, and it was He who gave us the victory."

Whitewing paused, and there were some exclamations of approval, but they were not so numerous or so decided as he could have wished, for red men are equally unwilling with white men to attribute their successes directly to their Creator.

"And now," he continued, "as Bald Eagle has said, if our foes find out their mistake, they will, without doubt, return. We must therefore take up our goods, our wives, and our little ones, and hasten to meet our brothers of Clearvale, who are even now on their way to help us. Our band is too small to fight the Blackfeet, but united with our friends, and with Manitou on our side for our cause is just, we shall be more than a match, for them. I counsel, then, that we raise the camp without delay."

The signs of approval were much more decided at the close of this brief address, and the old chief again rose up.

"My braves," he said, "have listened to the words of wisdom. Let each warrior go to his wigwam and get ready. We quit the camp when the sun stands there."

He printed to a spot in the sky where the sun would be shining about an hour after daybreak, which was already brightening the eastern sky.

As he spoke the dusky warriors seemed to melt from the scene as if by magic, and ere long the whole camp was busy packing up goods, catching horses, fastening on dogs little packages suited to their size and strength, and otherways making preparation for immediate departure.

"Follow me," said Whitewing to Little Tim, as he turned like the rest to obey the orders of the old chief.

"Ay, it's time to be lookin' after her," said Tim, with something like a wink of one eye, but the Indian was too much occupied with his own thoughts to observe the act or appreciate the allusion. He strode swiftly through the camp.

"Well, well," soliloquised the trapper as he followed, "I niver did expect to see Whitewing in this state o' mind. He's or'narily sitch a cool, unexcitable man. Ah! women, you've much to answer for!"

Having thus apostrophised the sex, he hurried on in silence, leaving his horse to the care of a youth, who also took charge of Whitewing's steed.

Close to the outskirts of the camp stood a wigwam somewhat apart from the rest. It belonged to Whitewing. Only two women were in it at the time the young Indian chief approached. One was a good-looking young girl, whose most striking feature was her large, earnest-looking, dark eyes. The other was a wrinkled old woman, who might have been any age between fifty and a hundred, for a life of exposure and hardship, coupled with a somewhat delicate constitution, had dried her up to such an extent that, when asleep, she might easily have passed for an Egyptian mummy. One redeeming point in the poor old thing was the fact that all the deep wrinkles in her weather-worn and wigwam-smoked visage ran in the lines of kindliness. Her loving character was clearly stamped upon her mahogany countenance, so that he who ran might easily read.

With the characteristic reserve of the red man, Whitewing merely gave the two women a slight look of recognition, which was returned with equal quietness by the young woman, but with a marked rippling of the wrinkles on the part of the old. There still remained a touch of anxiety caused by the recent fight on both countenances. It was dispelled, however, by a few words from Whitewing, who directed the younger woman to prepare for instant flight. She acted with prompt, unquestioning obedience, and at the same time the Indian went to work to pack up his goods with all speech. Of course Tim lent efficient aid to tie up the packs and prepare them for slinging on horse and dog.

"I say, Whitewing," whispered Tim, touching the chief with his elbow, and glancing at the young woman with approval—for Tim, who was an affectionate fellow and anxious about his friend's welfare, rejoiced to observe that the girl was obedient and prompt as well as pretty—"I say, is that her?"

Whitewing looked with a puzzled expression at his friend.

"Is that *her—the* girl, you know?" said Little Tim, with a series of looks and nods which were intended to convey worlds of deep meaning.

"She is my sister—Brighteyes," replied the Indian quietly, as he continued his work.

"Whew!" whistled the trapper. "Well, well," he murmured in an undertone, "you're on the wrong scent this time altogether, Tim. Ye think yerself a mighty deal cliverer than ye are. Niver mind, the one that he says he loves more nor life'll turn up soon enough, no doubt. But I'm real sorry for the old 'un," he added in an undertone, casting a glance of pity on the poor creature, who bent over the little fire in the middle of the tent, and gazed silently yet inquiringly at what was going on. "She'll niver be able to stand a flight like this. The mere joltin' o' the nags 'ud shake her old bones a'most out of her skin. There are some Redskins now, that would leave her to starve, but Whitewing'll niver do that. I know him better. Now then"—aloud—"have ye anything more for me to do?"

"Let my brother help Brighteyes to bring up and pack the horses."

"Jist so. Come along, Brighteyes."

With the quiet promptitude of one who has been born and trained to obey, the Indian girl followed the trapper out of the wigwam.

Being left alone with the old woman, some of the young chief's reserve wore off, though he did not descend to familiarity.

"Mother," he said, sitting down beside her and speaking loud, for the old creature was rather deaf, "we must fly. The Blackfeet are too strong for us. Are you ready?"

"I am always ready to do the bidding of my son," replied this pattern mother. "But sickness has made me old before my time. I have not strength to ride far. Manitou thinks it time for me to die. It is better for Whitewing to leave me and give his care to the young ones."

"The young ones can take care of themselves," replied the chief somewhat sternly. "We know not what Manitou thinks. It is our business to live as long as we can. If you cannot ride, mother, I will carry you. Often you have carried me when I could not ride."

It is difficult to guess why Whitewing dropped his poetical language, and spoke in this matter-of-fact and sharp manner. Great thoughts had been swelling in his bosom for some time past, and perchance he was affected by the suggestion that the cruel practice of deserting the aged was not altogether unknown in his tribe. It may be that the supposition of his being capable of such cruelty nettled him. At all events, he said nothing more except to tell his mother to be ready to start at once.

The old woman herself, who seemed to be relieved that her proposition was not favourably received, began to obey her son's directions by throwing a gay-coloured handkerchief over her head, and tying it under her chin. She then fastened her moccasins more securely on her feet, wrapped a woollen kerchief round her shoulders, and drew a large green blanket around her, strapping it to her person by means of a broad strip of deerskin. Having made these simple preparations for whatever journey lay before her, she warmed her withered old hands over the embers of the wood fire, and awaited her son's pleasure.

Meanwhile that son went outside to see the preparations for flight carried into effect.

"We're all ready," said Little Tim, whom he met not far from the wigwam. "Horses and dogs down in the hollow; Brighteyes an' a lot o' youngsters lookin' after them. All you want now is to get hold o' her, and be off; an' the sooner the better, for Blackfoot warriors don't take long to get over scares an' find out mistakes. But I'm most troubled about the old woman. She'll niver be able to stand it."

To this Whitewing paid little attention. In truth, his mind seemed to be taken up with other thoughts, and his friend was not much surprised, having come, as we have seen, to the conclusion that the Indian was under a temporary spell for which woman was answerable.

"Is my horse at hand?" asked Whitewing.

"Ay, down by the creek, all ready."

"And my brother's horse?"

"Ready too, at the same place; but we'll want another good 'un—for *her*, you know," said Tim suggestively.

"Let the horses be brought to my wigwam," returned Whitewing, either not understanding or disregarding the last remark.

The trapper was slightly puzzled, but, coming to the wise conclusion that his friend knew his own affairs best, and had, no doubt, made all needful preparations, he went off quietly to fetch the horses, while the Indian returned to the wigwam. In a few minutes Little Tim stood before the door, holding the bridles of the two horses.

Immediately afterwards a little Indian boy ran up with a third and somewhat superior horse, and halted beside him.

"Ha! that's it at last. The horse for *her*," said the trapper to himself with some satisfaction; "I knowed that Whitewing would have everything straight—even though he *is* in a raither stumped condition just now."

As he spoke, Brighteyes ran towards the wigwam, and looked in at the door. Next moment she went to the steed which Little Tim had, in his own mind, set aside for "*her*," and vaulted into the saddle as a young deer might have done, had it taken to riding.

Of course Tim was greatly puzzled, and forced to admit a second time that he had over-estimated his own cleverness, and was again off the scent. Before his mind had a chance of being cleared up, the skin curtain of the wigwam was raised, and Whitewing stepped out with a bundle in his arms. He gave it to Little Tim to hold while he mounted his somewhat restive horse, and then the trapper became aware—from certain squeaky sounds, and a pair of eyes that glittered among the folds of the bundle that he held the old woman in his arms!

"I say, Whitewing," he said remonstratively, as he handed up the bundle, which the Indian received tenderly in his left arm, "most of the camp has started. In quarter of an hour or so there'll be none left. Don't 'ee think it's about time to look after *her*?"

Whitewing looked at the trapper with a perplexed expression—a look which did not quite depart after his friend had mounted, and was riding through the half-deserted camp beside him.

"Now, Whitewing," said the trapper, with some decision of tone and manner, "I'm quite as able as you are to carry that old critter. If you'll make her over to me, you'll be better able to look after *her*, you know. Eh?"

"My brother speaks strangely to-day," replied the chief. "His words are hidden from his Indian friend. What does he mean by '*her*'?"

"Well, well, now, ye are slow," answered Tim; "I wouldn't ha' believed that anything short o' scalpin' could ha' took away yer wits like that. Why, of course I mean the woman ye said was dearer to 'ee than life."

"That woman is here," replied the chief gravely, casting a brief glance down at the wrinkled old visage that nestled upon his breast—"my mother."

"Whew!" whistled the trapper, opening his eyes very wide indeed. For the third time that day he was constrained to admit that he had been thrown completely off the scent, and that, in regard to cleverness, he was no better than a "squawkin' babby."

But Little Tim said never a word. Whatever his thoughts might have been after that, he kept them to himself, and, imitating his Indian brother, maintained profound silence as he galloped between him and Brighteyes over the rolling prairie.

Chapter Three.
The Massacre and the Chase

The sun was setting when Whitewing and his friend rode into Clearvale. The entrance to the valley was narrow, and for a short distance the road, or Indian track, wound among groups of trees and bushes which effectually concealed the village from their sight.

At this point in the ride Little Tim began to recover from the surprise at his own stupidity which had for so long a period of time reduced him to silence. Riding up alongside of Whitewing, who was a little in advance of the party, still bearing his mother in his arms, he accosted him thus—

"I say, Whitewing, the longer I know you, the more of a puzzle you are to me. I thowt I'd got about at the bottom o' all yer notions an' ways by this time, but I find that I'm mistaken."

As no question was asked, the red man deemed no reply needful, but the faintest symptom of a smile told the trapper that his remark was understood and appreciated.

"One thing that throws me off the scent," continued Little Tim, "is the way you Injins have got o' holdin' yer tongues, so that a feller can't make out what yer minds are after. Why don't you speak? why ain't you more commoonicative?"

"The children of the prairie think that wisdom lies in silence," answered Whitewing gravely. "They leave it to their women and white brothers to chatter out all their minds."

"Humph! The children o' the prairie ain't complimentary to their white brothers," returned the trapper. "Mayhap yer right. Some of us do talk a leetle too much. It's a way we've got o' lettin' off the steam. I'm afeard I'd bust sometimes if I didn't let my feelin's off through my mouth. But your silent ways are apt to lead fellers off on wrong tracks when there's no need to. Didn't I think, now, that you was after a young woman as ye meant to take for a squaw—and after all it turned out to be your mother!"

"My white brother sometimes makes mistakes," quietly remarked the Indian.

"True; but your white brother wouldn't have made the mistake if ye had told him who it was you were after when ye set off like a mad grizzly wi' its pups in danger. Didn't I go tearin' after you neck and crop as if I was a boy o' sixteen, in the belief that I was helpin' ye in a love affair?"

"It *was* a love affair," said the Indian quietly.

"True, but not the sort o' thing that I thowt it was."

"Would you have refused to help me if you had known better?" demanded Whitewing somewhat sharply.

"Nay, I won't say that," returned Tim, "for I hold that a woman's a woman, be she old or young, pretty or ugly, an' I'd scorn the man as would refuse to help her in trouble; besides, as the wrinkled old critter *is* your mother, I've got a sneakin' sort o' fondness for her; but if I'd only known, a deal o' what they call romance would ha' bin took out o' the little spree."

"Then it is well that my brother did not know."

To this the trapper merely replied, "Humph!"

After a few minutes he resumed in a more confidential tone—

"But I say, Whitewing, has it niver entered into your head to take to yourself a wife? A man's always the better of havin' a female companion to consult with an' talk over things, you know, as well as to make his moccasins and leggin's."

"Does Little Tim act on his own opinions?" asked the Indian quickly.

"Ha! that's a fair slap in the face," said Tim, with a laugh, "but there may be reasons for that, you see. Gals ain't always as willin' as they should be; sometimes they don't know a good man when they see him. Besides, I ain't too old yet, though p'raps some of 'em thinks me raither short for a

husband. Come now, don't keep yer old comrade in the dark. Haven't ye got a notion o' some young woman in partikler?"

"Yes," replied the Indian gravely.

"Jist so; I thowt as much," returned the trapper, with a tone and look of satisfaction. "What may her name be?"

"Lightheart."

"Ay? Lightheart. A good name—specially if she takes after it, as I've no doubt she do. An' what tribe does—"

The trapper stopped abruptly, for at that moment the cavalcade swept out of the thicket into the open valley, and the two friends suddenly beheld the Indian camp, which they had so recently left, reduced to a smoking ruin.

It is impossible to describe the consternation of the Indians, who had ridden so far and so fast to join their friends. And how shall we speak of the state of poor Whitewing's feelings? No sound escaped his compressed lips, but a terrible light seemed to gleam from his dark eyes, as, clasping his mother convulsively to his breast with his left arm, he grasped his tomahawk, and urged his horse to its utmost speed. Little Tim was at his side in a moment, with the long dagger flashing in his right hand, while Bald Eagle and his dusky warriors pressed close behind.

The women and children were necessarily left in the rear; but Whitewing's sister, Brighteyes, being better mounted than these, kept up with the men of war.

The scene that presented itself when they reached the camp was indeed terrible. Many of the wigwams were burned, some of them still burning, and those that had escaped the fire had been torn down and scattered about, while the trodden ground and pools of blood told of the dreadful massacre that had so recently taken place. It was evident that the camp had been surprised, and probably all the men slain, while a very brief examination sufficed to show that such of the women and children as were spared had been carried off into slavery. In every direction outside the camp were found the scalped bodies of the slain, left as they had fallen in unavailing defence of home.

The examination of the camp was made in hot haste and profound silence, because instant action had to be taken for the rescue of those who had been carried away, and Indians are at all times careful to restrain and hide their feelings. Only the compressed lip, the heaving bosom, the expanding nostrils, and the scowling eyes told of the fires that raged within.

In this emergency Bald Eagle, who was getting old and rather feeble, tacitly gave up the command of the braves to Whitewing. It need scarcely be said that the young chief acted with vigour. He with the trapper having traced the trail of the Blackfoot war-party—evidently a different band from that which had attacked Bald Eagle's camp—and ascertained the direction they had taken, divided his force into two bands, in command of which he placed two of the best chiefs of his tribe. Bald Eagle himself agreed to remain with a small force to protect the women and children. Having made his dispositions and given his orders, Whitewing mounted his horse; and galloped a short distance on the enemy's trail; followed by his faithful friend. Reining up suddenly, he said—

"What does my brother counsel?"

"Well, Whitewing, since ye ask, I would advise you to follow yer own devices. You've got a good head on your shoulders, and know what's best."

"Manitou knows what is best," said the Indian solemnly. "He directs all. But His ways are very dark. Whitewing cannot understand them."

"Still, we must act, you know," suggested the trapper.

"Yes, we must act; and I ask counsel of my brother, because it may be that Manitou shall cause wisdom and light to flow from the lips of the white man."

"Well, I don't know as to that, Whitewing, but my advice, whatever it's worth, is, that we should try to fall on the reptiles in front and rear at the same time, and that you and I should go out in advance to scout."

"Good," said the Indian; "my plan is so arranged."

Without another word he gave the rein to his impatient horse, and was about to set off at full speed, when he was arrested by the trapper exclaiming, "Hold on? here's some one coming after us."

A rider was seen galloping from the direction of the burned camp. It turned out to be Brighteyes.

"What brings my sister?" demanded Whitewing.

The girl with downcast look modestly requested leave to accompany them.

Her brother sternly refused. "It is not woman's part to fight," he said.

"True, but woman sometimes helps the fighter," replied the girl, not venturing to raise her eyes.

"Go," returned Whitewing. "Time may not be foolishly wasted. The old ones and the children need thy care."

Without a word Brighteyes turned her horse's head towards the camp, and was about to ride humbly away when Little Tim interfered.

"Hold on, girl! I say, Whitewing, she's not so far wrong. Many a time has woman rendered good service in warfare. She's well mounted, and might ride back with a message or something o' that sort. You'd better let her come."

"She may come," said Whitewing, and next moment he was bounding over the prairie at the full speed of his fiery steed, closely followed by Little Tim and Brighteyes.

That same night, at a late hour, a band of savage warriors entered a thicket on the slopes of one of those hills on the western prairies which form what are sometimes termed the spurs of the Rocky Mountains, though there was little sign of the great mountain range itself, which was still distant several days' march from the spot. A group of wearied women and children, some riding, some on foot, accompanied the band. It was that which had so recently destroyed the Indian village. They had pushed on with their prisoners and booty as far and as fast as their jaded horses could go, in order to avoid pursuit—though, having slain all the fighting men, there was little chance of that, except in the case of friends coming to the rescue, which they thought improbable. Still, with the wisdom of savage warriors, they took every precaution to guard against surprise. No fire was lighted in the camp, and sentries were placed all round it to guard them during the few hours they meant to devote to much-needed repose.

While these Blackfeet were eating their supper, Whitewing and Little Tim came upon them. Fortunately the sharp and practised eyes and intellects of our two friends were on the alert. So small a matter as a slight wavering in the Blackfoot mind as to the best place for encamping produced an effect on the trail sufficient to be instantly observed.

"H'm! they've took it into their heads here," said Little Tim, "that it might be advisable to camp an' feed."

Whitewing did not speak at once, but his reining up at the moment his friend broke silence showed that he too had observed the signs.

"It's always the way," remarked the trapper with a quiet chuckle as he peered earnestly at the ground which the moon enabled him to see distinctly, "if a band o' men only mention campin' when they're on the march they're sure to waver a bit an' spoil the straight, go-ahead run o' the trail."

"One turned aside to examine yonder bluff," said the Indian, pointing to a trail which he saw clearly, although it was undistinguishable to ordinary vision.

"Ay, an' the bluff didn't suit," returned Tim, "for here he rejoins his friends, an' they go off agin at the run. No more waverin'. They'd fixed their eyes a good bit ahead, an' made up their minds."

"They are in the thicket yonder," said the Indian, pointing to the place referred to.

"Jist what I was goin' to remark," observed the trapper. "Now, Whitewing, it behoves us to be cautious. Ay, I see your mind an' mine always jumps togither."

This latter remark had reference to the fact that the Indian had leaped off his horse and handed the reins to Brighteyes. Placing his horse also in charge of the Indian girl, Tim said, as the two set off—

"We have to do the rest on fut, an' the last part on our knees."

By this the trapper meant that he and his friend would have to creep up to the enemy's camp on hands and knees, but Whitewing, whose mind had been recently so much exercised on religious matters, at once thought of what he had been taught about the importance of prayer, and again the words, "looking unto Jesus," rushed with greater power than ever upon his memory, so that, despite his anxiety as to the fate of his affianced bride and the perilous nature of the enterprise in hand, he kept puzzling his inquiring brain with such difficulties as the absolute dependence of man on the will and leading of God, coupled with the fact of his being required to go into vigorous, decisive, and apparently independent action, trusting entirely to his own resources.

"Mystery," thought the red man, as he and his friend walked swiftly along, taking advantage of the shelter afforded by every glade, thicket, or eminence; "all is mystery!"

But Whitewing was wrong, as many men in all ages have been on first bending their minds to the consideration of spiritual things. All is *not* mystery. In the dealings of God with man, much, very much, is mysterious, and by us in this life apparently insoluble; but many things—especially those things that are of vital importance to the soul—are as clear as the sun at noonday. However, our red man was at this time only beginning to run the spiritual race, and, like many others, he was puzzled.

But no sign did he show of what was going on within, as he glided along, bending his keen eyes intently on the Blackfoot trail.

At last they came to the immediate neighbourhood of the spot where it was rightly conjectured the enemy lay concealed. Here, as Tim had foretold, they went upon their knees, and advanced with the utmost caution. Coming to a grassy eminence they lay flat down and worked their way slowly and painfully to the top.

Well was it for them that a few clouds shrouded the moon at that time, for one of the Blackfoot sentinels had been stationed on that grassy eminence, and if Whitewing and the trapper had been less expert in the arts of savage war, they must certainly have been discovered. As it was, they were able to draw off in time and reach another part of the mound where a thick bush effectually concealed them from view.

From this point, when the clouds cleared away, the camp could be clearly seen in the vale below. Even the forms of the women and children were distinguishable, but not their faces.

"It won't be easy to get at them by surprise," whispered the trapper. "Their position is strong, and they keep a bright lookout; besides, the moon won't be down for some hours yet—not much before daybreak."

"Whitewing will take the prey from under their very noses," returned the Indian.

"That won't be easy, but I've no doubt you'll try, an' sure, Little Tim's the man to back ye, anyhow."

At that moment a slight rustling noise was heard. Looking through the bush, they saw the Blackfoot sentinel approaching. Instantly they sank down into the grass, where they lay so flat and still that it seemed as if they had vanished entirely from the scene.

When the sentinel was almost abreast of them, a sound arose from the camp which caused him to stop and listen. It was the sound of song. The missionary—the only *man* the Blackfoot Indians had not slain—having finished supper, had gathered some of the women and children round him, and, after an earnest prayer, had begun a hymn of praise. At first the Blackfoot chief was on the point of ordering them to cease, but as the sweet notes arose he seemed to be spell-bound, and remained a silent and motionless listener. The sentinel on the mound also became like a dark statue. He had never heard such tones before.

After listening a few minutes in wonder, he walked slowly to the end of the mound nearest to the singers.

"Now's our chance, Whitewing," said the trapper, rising from his lair.

The Indian made no reply, but descended the slope as carefully as he had ascended it, followed by his friend. In a short time they were back at the spot where the horses had been left in charge of Brighteyes.

Whitewing took his sister aside, and for a few minutes they conversed in low tones.

"I have arranged it all with Brighteyes," said the Indian, returning to the trapper.

"Didn't I tell 'ee," said Tim, with a low laugh, "that women was good at helpin' men in time o' war? Depend upon it that the sex must have a finger in every pie; and, moreover, the pie's not worth much that they haven't got a finger in."

To these remarks the young chief vouchsafed no answer, but gravely went about making preparations to carry out his plans.

While tying the three horses to three separate trees, so as to be ready for instant flight, he favoured his friend with a few explanations.

"It is not possible," he said, "to take more than three just now, for the horses cannot carry more. But these three Brighteyes will rescue from the camp, and we will carry them off. Then we will return with our braves and have all the rest—if Manitou allows."

The trapper looked at his friend in surprise. He had never before heard him make use of such an expression as the last. Nevertheless, he made no remark, but while the three were gliding silently over the prairie again towards the Blackfoot camp he kept murmuring to himself: "You're a great puzzle, Whitewing, an' I can't make ye out nohow. Yet I make no doubt yer right. Whativer ye do comes right somehow; but yer a great puzzle—about the greatest puzzle that's comed across my tracks since I was a squallin' little babby-boy!"

Chapter Four.
Circumventing the Blackfeet

On reaching the neighbourhood of the Blackfoot camp, Whitewing, and his companions crept to the top of the eminence which overlooked it, taking care, however, to keep as far away as possible from the sentinel who still watched there.

Brighteyes proved herself to be quite as expert as her male companions in advancing like a snake through the long grass, though encumbered with a blanket wrapped round her shoulders. The use of this blanket soon became apparent. As the three lay prone on their faces looking down at the camp, from which the sound of voices still arose in subdued murmurs, the young chief said to his sister—

"Let the signal be a few notes of the song Brighteyes learned from the white preacher. Go."

Without a word of reply, the girl began to move gently forward, maintaining her recumbent position as she went, and gradually, as it were, melted away.

The moon was still shining brightly, touching every object with pale but effective lights, and covering hillocks and plains with correspondingly dark shadows. In a few minutes Brighteyes had crept past the young sentinel, and lay within sight—almost within ear shot of the camp.

Much to her satisfaction she observed that the Indians had not bound their captives. Even the missionary's hands were free. Evidently they thought, and were perhaps justified in thinking, that escape was impossible, for the horses of the party were all gathered together and hobbled, besides being under a strong guard; and what chance could women and children have, out on the plains on foot, against mounted men, expert to follow the faintest trail? As for the white man, he was a man of peace and unarmed, as well as ignorant of warriors' ways. The captives were therefore not only unbound, but left free to move about the camp at will, while some of their captors slept, some fed, and others kept watch.

The missionary had just finished singing a hymn, and was about to begin to read a portion of God's Word when one of the women left the group, and wandered accidentally close to the spot where Brighteyes lay. It was Lightheart.

"Sister," whispered Brighteyes.

The girl stopped abruptly, and bent forward to listen, with intense anxiety depicted on every feature of her pretty brown face.

"Sister," repeated Brighteyes, "sink in the grass and wait."

Lightheart was too well trained in Indian ways to speak or hesitate. At once, but slowly, she sank down and disappeared. Another moment, and Brighteyes was at her side.

"Sister," she said, "Manitou has sent help. Listen. We must be wise and quick."

From this point she went on to explain in as few words as possible that three fleet horses were ready close at hand to carry off three of those who had been taken captive, and that she, Lightheart, must be one of the three.

"But I cannot, will not, escape," said Lightheart, "while the others and, the white preacher go into slavery."

To this Brighteyes replied that arrangements had been made to rescue the whole party, and that she and two others were merely to be, as it were, the firstfruits of the enterprise. Still Lightheart objected; but when her companion added that the plan had been arranged by her affianced husband, she acquiesced at once with Indian-like humility.

"I had intended," said Brighteyes, "to enter the Blackfoot camp as if I were one of the captives, and thus make known our plans; but that is not now necessary. Lightheart will carry the news; she is wise, and knows how to act. Whitewing and Leetil Tim are hid on yonder hillock like snakes in

the grass. I will return to then, and let Lightheart, when she comes, be careful to avoid the sentinel there—"

She stopped short, for at the moment a step was heard near them. It was that of a savage warrior, whose sharp eye had observed Lightheart quit the camp, and who had begun to wonder why she did not return.

In another instant Brighteyes flung her blanket round her, whispered to her friend, "Lie close," sprang up, and, brushing swiftly past the warrior with a light laugh—as though amused at having been discovered—ran into camp, joined the group round the missionary, and sat down. Although much surprised, the captives were too wise to express their feelings. Even the missionary knew enough of Indian tactics to prevent him from committing himself. He calmly continued the reading in which he had been engaged, and the Blackfoot warrior returned to his place, congratulating himself, perhaps, on having interrupted the little plan of one intending runaway.

Meanwhile Lightheart, easily understanding her friend's motives, crept in a serpentine fashion to the hillock, where she soon found Whitewing—to the intense but unexpressed joy of that valiant red man.

"Will Leetil Tim go back with Lightheart to the horses and wait, while his brother remains here?" said the young chief.

"No, Little Tim *won't*," growled the trapper, in a tone of decision that surprised his red friend. "Brighteyes is in the Blackfoot camp," he continued, in growling explanation.

"True," returned the Indian, "but Brighteyes will escape; and even if she fails to do so now, she will be rescued with the others at last."

"She will be rescued with *us*, just *now*," returned Little Tim in a tone so emphatic that his friend looked at him with an expression of surprise that was unusually strong for a redskin warrior. Suddenly a gleam of intelligence broke from his black eyes, and with the soft exclamation, "Wah!" he sank flat on the grass again, and remained perfectly still.

Brighteyes found that it was not all plain sailing when she had mingled with her friends in the camp. In the first place, the missionary refused absolutely to quit the captives. He would remain with them, he said, and await God's will and leading. In the second place, no third person had been mentioned by her brother, whose chief anxiety had been for his bride and the white man, and it did not seem to Brighteyes creditable to quit the camp after all her risk and trouble without some trophy of her prowess. In this dilemma she put to herself the question, "Whom would Lightheart wish me to rescue?"

Now, there were two girls among the captives, one of whom was a bosom friend of Lightheart; the other was a younger sister. To these Brighteyes went, and straightway ordered them to prepare for flight. They were of course quite ready to obey. All the preparation needed was to discard the blankets which Indian women are accustomed to wear as convenient cloaks by day. Thus unhampered, the two girls wandered about the camp, as several of the others had occasionally been doing. Separating from each other, they got into the outskirts in different directions. Meanwhile a hymn had been raised, which facilitated their plans by attracting the attention of the savage warriors. High above the rest, in one prolonged note, the voice of Brighteyes rang out like a silver flute.

"There's the signal," said Little Tim, as the sweet note fell on his listening ear.

Rising as he spoke, the trapper glided in a stooping posture down the side of the hillock, and round the base of it, until he got immediately behind the youthful sentinel. Then lying down, and creeping towards him with the utmost caution, he succeeded in getting so near that he could almost touch him. With one cat-like bound, Little Tim was on the Indian's back, and had him in his arms, while his broad horny hand covered his mouth, and his powerful forefinger and thumb grasped him viciously by the nose.

It was a somewhat curious struggle that ensued. The savage was much bigger than the trapper, but the trapper was much stronger than the savage. Hence the latter made fearful and violent efforts

to shake the former off; while the former made not less fearful, though seemingly not quite so violent, efforts to hold on. The red man tried to bite, but Tim's hand was too broad and hard to be bitten. He tried to shake his nose free, but unfortunately his nose was large, and Tim's grip of it was perfect. The savage managed to get just enough of breath through his mouth to prevent absolute suffocation, but nothing more. He had dropped his tomahawk at the first onset, and tried to draw his knife, but Tim's arms were so tight round him that he could not get his hand to his back, where the knife reposed in his belt. In desperation he stooped forward, and tried to throw his enemy over his head; but Tim's legs were wound round him, and no limpet ever embraced a rock with greater tenacity than did Little Tim embrace that Blackfoot brave. Half choking and wholly maddened, the savage suddenly turned heels over head, and fell on Tim with a force that ought to have burst him. But Tim didn't burst! He was much too tough for that. He did not even complain!

Rising again, a sudden thought seemed to strike the Indian, for he began to run towards the camp with his foe on his back. But Tim was prepared for that. He untwined one leg, lowered it, and with an adroit twist tripped up the savage, causing him to fall on his face with tremendous violence. Before he could recover, Tim, still covering the mouth and holding tight to the nose, got a knee on the small of the savage's back and squeezed it smaller. At the same time he slid his left hand up to the savage's windpipe, and compressed it. With a violent heave, the Blackfoot sprang up. With a still more violent heave, the trapper flung him down, bumped his head against a convenient stone, and brought the combat to a sudden close. Without a moment's loss of time, Tim gagged and bound his adversary. Then he rose up with a deep inspiration, and wiped his forehead, as he contemplated him.

"All this comes o' your desire not to shed human blood, Whitewing," he muttered. "Well, p'raps you're right—what would ha' bin the use o' killin' the poor critturs. But it was a tough job!"—saying which, he lifted the Indian on his broad shoulders, and carried him away.

While this fight was thus silently going on, hidden from view of the camp by the hillock, Whitewing crept forward to meet Brighteyes and the two girls, and these, with Lightheart, were eagerly awaiting the trapper. "My brother is strong," said Whitewing, allowing the faintest possible smile to play for a moment on his usually grave face.

"Your brother is tough," returned Little Tim, rubbing the back of his head with a rueful look; "an' he's bin bumped about an' tumbled on to that extent that it's a miracle a whole bone is left in his carcass. But lend a hand, lad; we've got no time to waste."

Taking the young Blackfoot between them, and followed by the silent girls, they soon reached the thicket where the horses had been left. Here they bound their captive securely to a tree, and gave him a drink of water with a knife pointed at his heart to keep him quiet, after which they re-gagged him. Then Whitewing led Lightheart through the thicket towards his horse, and took her up behind him. Little Tim took charge of Brighteyes. The young sister and the bosom friend mounted the third horse, and thus paired, they all galloped away.

But the work that our young chief had cut out for himself that night was only half accomplished. On reaching the rendezvous which he had appointed, he found the braves of his tribe impatiently awaiting him.

"My father sees that we have been successful," he said to Bald Eagle, who had been unable to resist the desire to ride out to the rendezvous with the fighting men. "The great Manitou has given us the victory thus far, as the white preacher said he would."

"My son is right. Whitewing will be a great warrior when Bald Eagle is in the grave. Go and conquer; I will return to camp with the women."

Thus relieved of his charge, Whitewing, who, however, had little desire to achieve the fame prophesied for him, proceeded to fulfil the prophecy to some extent. He divided his force into four bands, with which he galloped off towards the Blackfoot camp. On nearing it, he so arranged that they should attack the camp simultaneously at four opposite points. Little Tim commanded one of the bands, and he resolved in his own mind that his band should be the last to fall on the foe.

"Bloodshed *may* be avoided," he muttered to himself; "an' I hope it will, as Whitewing is so anxious about it. Anyhow, I'll do my best to please him."

Accordingly, on reaching his allotted position, Tim halted his men, and bided his time.

The moon still shone over prairie and hill, and not a breath of air stirred blade or leaf. All in nature was peace, save in the hearts of savage man. The Blackfoot camp was buried in slumber. Only the sentinels were on the alert. Suddenly one of these—like the war-horse, who is said to scent the battle from afar—pricked his ears, distended his nostrils, and listened. A low, muffled, thunderous sort of pattering on the plain in front. It might be a herd of buffaloes. The sentinel stood transfixed. The humps of buffaloes are large, but they do not usually attain to the size of men! The sentinel clapped his hand to his mouth, and gave vent to a yell which sent the blood spirting through the veins of all, and froze the very marrow in the bones of some! Prompt was the reply and turn-out of the Blackfoot warriors. Well used to war's alarms, there was no quaking in their bosoms. They were well named "braves."

But the noise in the camp prevented them from hearing or observing the approach of the enemy on the other side till almost too late. A whoop apprised the chief of the danger. He divided his forces, and lost some of his self-confidence.

"Here comes number three," muttered Little Tim, as he observed the third band emerge from a hollow on the left.

The Blackfoot chief observed it too, divided his forces again, and lost more of his self-confidence.

None of the three bands had as yet reached the camp, but they all came thundering down on it at the same time, and at the same whirlwind pace.

"Now for number four," muttered Little Tim. "Come boys, an' at 'em!" he cried, unconsciously paraphrasing the Duke of Wellington's Waterloo speech.

At the some time he gave utterance to what he styled a Rocky Mountain trapper's roar, and dashed forward in advance of his men, who, in trying to imitate the roar, intensified and rather complicated their own yell.

It was the last touch to the Blackfoot chief, who, losing the small remnant of his self-confidence, literally "sloped" into the long grass, and vanished, leaving his men to still further divide themselves, which they did effectually by scattering right and left like small-shot from a blunderbuss.

Great was the terror of the poor captives while this brief but decisive action lasted, for although they knew that the assailants were their friends, they could not be certain of the issue of the combat. Naturally, they crowded round their only male friend, the missionary.

"Do not fear," he said, in attempting to calm them; "the good Manitou has sent deliverance. We will trust in Him."

The dispersion of their foes and the arrival of friends almost immediately followed these words. But the friends who arrived were few in number at first, for Whitewing had given strict orders as to the treatment of the enemy. In compliance therewith, his men chased them about the prairie in a state of gasping terror; but no weapon was used, and not a man was killed, though they were scattered beyond the possibility of reunion for at least some days to come.

Before that eventful night was over the victors were far from the scene of victory on their way home.

"It's not a bad style o' fightin'," remarked Little Tim to his friend as they rode away; "lots o' fun and fuss without much damage. Pity we can't do all our fightin' in that fashion."

"Waugh!" exclaimed Whitewing; but as he never explained what he meant by "waugh," we must leave it to conjecture. It is probable, however, that he meant assent, for he turned aside in passing to set free the Blackfoot who had been bound to a tree. That red man, having expected death, went off with a lively feeling of surprise, and at top speed, his pace being slightly accelerated by a shot—wide of the mark and at long range—from Little Tim.

Three weeks after these events a number of Indians were baptised by our missionary. Among them were the young chief Whitewing and Lightheart, and these two were immediately afterwards united in marriage. Next day the trapper, with much awkwardness and hesitation, requested the missionary to unite him and Brighteyes. The request was complied with, and thenceforward the white man and the red became more inseparable than ever. They hunted and dwelt together—to the ineffable joy of Whitewing's wrinkled old mother, whose youth seemed absolutely to revive under the influence of the high-pressure affection brought to bear on a colony of brown and whitey-brown grand-children by whom she was at last surrounded.

The doubts and difficulties of Whitewing were finally cleared away. He not only accepted fully the Gospel for himself, but became anxious to commend it to others as the only real and perfect guide in life and comfort in death. In the prosecution of his plans, he imitated the example of his "white father," roaming the prairie and the mountains far and wide with his friend the trapper, and even venturing to visit some of the lodges of his old foes the Blackfoot Indians, in his desire to run earnestly, yet with patience, the race that had been set before him—"looking unto Jesus."

Full twenty years rolled by, during which no record, was kept of the sayings or doings of those whose fortunes we have followed thus far. At the end of that period, however, striking incidents in their career brought the most prominent among them again to the front—as the following chapters will show.

Chapter Five.
The Mountain Fortress

In one of those numerous narrow ravines of the Rocky Mountains which open out into the rolling prairies of the Saskatchewan there stood some years ago a log hut, or block-house, such as the roving hunters of the Far West sometimes erected as temporary homes during the inclement winter of those regions.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.